

Sŏn Master T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl's Legacy: A Reflection on the Political Background of the Korean Sudden/Gradual Debate

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(Sŏ Myŏngwŏn)

To reform contemporary Korean Buddhism T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl proclaimed a return to the Buddha Śākyamuni's teaching, promoted the sudden/sudden doctrine of awakening to the Middle Path through practice of Keyword Meditation (*kanhwasŏn*), and adamantly condemned Pojo Chinul's (1158-1210) sudden/gradual approach, thus giving rise to the ongoing Korean sudden/gradual debate. Despite Sŏngch'ŏl's reputation as a world renouncer who steered clear of politics, this essay examines the socio-political underpinnings of his reformation and defines six points of structural resonance between it and the way of the authoritarian state under which it was carried out. Those six points form a constellation suggesting that the famous master's hermeneutics of Buddhism, i.e. his overall interpretation of the tradition in the second half of the twentieth century, reflect the national as well as the geo-strategic tensions resulting from the division of the Korean peninsula and the Cold War until 1988. Therefore, at the dawn of the 25th anniversary of the ROK's democratization, when envisaging the future of the Korean peninsula, Korean Buddhism and the worldwide propagation of Keyword Meditation, it is imperative to keep in mind the socio-political context that shaped Sŏngch'ŏl's approach and continues to inform his legacy.

Keywords: Korea, Buddhism, sudden/gradual debate, dictatorship, democratization, Sŏngch'ŏl (1912-1993)

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A Critical Reflection on Sŏn Master T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl's Legacy

This year [2012], Korean Buddhism celebrates the hundredth anniversary of T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl's 退翁性徹 birth. Next year, it will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his demise.¹ As the meditation master of Haein-sa 海印寺 from 1967 until 1993, and the 6th and 7th supreme patriarch of Chogyejong 曹溪宗² between 1981 and 1993,³ Sŏngch'ŏl is one of the, if not the most representative figures of modern Korean Buddhism.⁴ Furthermore, having been a great reformer of the Buddhist tradition, he is reckoned to be one of the twelve most prominent personalities of the Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) during the fifty years that followed its foundation in 1948 (Kim Hyŏnho, 1). At the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of South Korea's democracy, these facts induce us to make a critical reflection on the impact of Sŏngch'ŏl's legacy on contemporary Korean Buddhism.

Sŏngch'ŏl's life and works represent an ambitious attempt to overhaul Korean Buddhism after its global decay during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) and Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). The foundation of this overhaul may be summarized in the following five main principles, which constitute an organic whole: firstly, the proclamation of a return to the Buddha Śākyamuni's teaching (*Puch'ŏnim pŏptaero salja*):⁵ secondly, the definition of the doctrine of

1. *Yŏlban* 涅槃, i.e. *nibbāna*, 2012 also corresponds to the hundredth anniversary of Master Kyŏnghŏ Sŏng'u's 鏡虛惺牛 (1846-1912) *yŏlban*. Kyŏnghŏ played a major role in the revival of Korean Sŏn toward the end of the Chosŏn dynasty.

2. It is by far the largest and most powerful Korean Buddhist monastic order.

3. *Yuktae ch'iltae chongjŏng* 六代七代宗正. Sŏngch'ŏl was reelected in 1991.

4. See Yun 2010.

5. "Let's live according to the Buddha's Dharma" was the motto of the Pongam-sa Kyŏlsa 鳳巖寺結社, which took place between 1947 and 1949, under the guidance of a number of monks, including Sŏngch'ŏl. A *kyŏlsa* is a community or society dedicated to a common goal in religious practice (DDB). The spirit of that community has exerted a considerable influence on the destiny of contemporary Korean Buddhism. Because of its fundamentalist tendencies, that influence is sometimes perceived as extremely controversial (Cho Sŏngt'aek 2011, 43). For instance, Sŏngch'ŏl wanted Korean monks to use bowls and robes that were exact replicas of the ones used by *bhikkhus* in early Buddhism. Such a willingness to go back to ancient practices is one of the reasons why I believe that Sŏngch'ŏl's motto incontrovertibly meant "let's live as the Buddha Śākyamuni did," and not simply "let's live like a Buddha" or "let's live as the Buddhas do," etc. In the *Paegil pŏmmun* 百日法門 (cf. note 9), he displays a considerable interest in the historical Buddha whose life and teaching he uses as the foundation of his reformation. In the same work, he also frequently quoted the Pāli canon, especially the Vinaya. All this, added to the fact that he also studied Sanskrit, clearly proves that his academic interest reached much farther west than Dunhuang.

the Middle Path (*chungdo sasang* 中道思想) as the core of that teaching;⁶ thirdly, the definition of Buddhism as the religion of awakening (*kkaedarŭm ŭi chonggyo*) to that core (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987a, 14-27); fourthly, the advocacy of the practice of Kanhwa Sŏn 看話禪修行 (Keyword Meditation) as the best way to achieve full awakening; and lastly, a relentless insistence that a sudden/sudden approach of awakening and practice (*tono tonsu* 頓悟頓修) solely is authentic. It is this last principle that has sparked, as the cornerstone of Sŏngch'ŏl's teaching, the Korean sudden/gradual debate (*Han'guk ton-chŏm nonjaeng* 韓國頓漸論爭).

The contemporary Korean sudden/gradual debate started during the summer retreat of 1967,⁷ when Sŏngch'ŏl, who had just been appointed as the meditation master (*pangjang* 方丈) of Haein-sa, began to openly criticize the sudden/gradual approach of awakening and practice (*tono chŏmsu* 頓悟漸修) advocated by Chinul 知訥 (1158-1210)⁸ and his followers since the middle of the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392).⁹ From that time onward until his death, through Dharma talks and writings, Sŏngch'ŏl developed this criticism into a full-fledged attack against Chinul, making it the basis of his attempt to reform Korean Buddhism.

Sŏngch'ŏl's position consists of asserting that the orthodox transmission of the Meditative school (Sŏnjong 禪宗), through the lineage of the Chinese Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163) and the Korean T'aego Pou 太古普愚 (1301-1382), is not compatible with the gradualism of the Scholastic school (Kyojong 教宗) favored by Chinul; according to him, Chinul was inspired by "masters of intellectual knowledge and conceptual interpretation" (*chihae chongsa* 知解宗師)¹⁰ such as the Chinese Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (668-760),¹¹ and his successor Guifeng Zongmi 圭峯宗密¹² (780-841). In brief, according to Sŏngch'ŏl, any

6. This principle is expounded throughout the two volumes of the *Paegil pŏmmun*. The postface by Wŏnt'aek, who edited the whole manuscript of the work, is especially worth reading (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987b, 369-373). See also Kim Kyŏngjip 2006.

7. *Haangŏ* 夏安居.

8. Also known under his sobriquet Moguja 牧牛子 and his posthumous title Puril Pojo Kuksa 佛日普照國師. The *Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi* 法集別行錄節要並入私記 is Chinul's *magnum opus* and the best source through which to learn his thought (Buswell 1983, 262-374; Kim Taljin 1987, 219-338; Pojo sasang yŏn'guwŏn 1989, 103-164).

9. Sŏngch'ŏl's Dharma talk at that time was titled the *Paegil pŏmmun* (Hundred Day Teaching), because he preached two or three hours daily during approximately a hundred days; it amounts to a broad introduction to Buddhism and was published in 1988, in two volumes comprising over seven hundred pages. The criticism of Chinul is located in the last pages of the second volume (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987b, 315-367).

10. In Sŏngch'ŏl's thought, it is an extremely pejorative term.

11. Alt. 670-762.

12. Fifth patriarch of both the Heze Chan school 荷澤禪宗 and the Huayan school 華嚴宗.

awakening that falls short of definitely transforming one into a living Buddha (*ohu subhaeng purhaeng* 悟後修行佛行; see Söngch'öl 1987c, 18), and thus requires further gradual practice (*chömsu* 漸修), is not a “realization awakening” (*chüngo* 證悟), but a mere “understanding awakening” (*haeo* 解悟).

Notwithstanding a number of ongoing discussions, as maintained by Ingyöng 印鏡 since the 1981 publication of the *Sönmun chöngno* 禪門正路, Söngch'öl's *magnum opus*,¹³ composed to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the sudden/sudden approach and the unorthodoxy of the sudden/gradual one, the former viewpoint would tacitly prevail within the Chogye order (Ingyöng, 33). Considering that the Chogye order strongly identifies itself with the Sön school, and fiercely strives for the worldwide propagation of Korean Keyword Meditation (Sö 2011, 75ff), Ingyöng's conclusion points to the far-reaching impact of Söngch'öl's understanding of awakening and practice on mainstream South Korean Buddhism.

Although a significant amount of literature has been published on the Korean sudden/gradual debate (Kang 1992; Park Sungbae 1983, 2009), the bulk of it tends to treat the debate as a doctrinal matter chiefly regarding Sön Buddhism, as an internal affair unconcerned with what happens in the world outside of the Sön *saṅgha* and the restricted circle of academics specialized in its study.¹⁴ This essay does not introduce that literature; rather, in order to understand why the Korean sudden/gradual debate has risen in South Korea in the second half of the twentieth century to the point of reaching a degree of exacerbation unheard of elsewhere before (Chöng, 84), it examines that debate from the perspective of its relation to the polity, especially the political dimension of that polity, which has been mostly overlooked by academics until now.¹⁵ In this context, polity means “the organized nation called South Korea, together with its society, administration and government.”¹⁶ To many, such an approach may sound quite surprising. Indeed, it is generally taken for granted that Söngch'öl, as an exemplary mountain monk (*sansüŋ* 山僧), did not have much significant contact with the South Korean polity in general, and even less with its politics. However, it is precisely the goal of the research underlying this article to demonstrate that, despite such claims, no matter how awakened he may have otherwise been, he,

13. According to Wönt'aek's postface of the *Paegil pömmun ha* 下, the *Ponji p'unggwang* 本地風光 may equally be considered as Söngch'öl's *magnum opus* (Söngch'öl 1987b, 372). See also Kim Yönguk, 155-6.

14. Many of the chapters contained in *T'oeong Söngch'öl üi kkaedarüm kwa subhaeng* are a remarkable exception to this rule (Cho Söng't'aek ed. 2006).

15. A hint at that dimension of the question can be found in Sö 2007, 43-5.

16. Definition found in the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners English Dictionary*. Harper Collins, 2004.

like all other human beings, never managed to completely escape the influence of the polity of which he was a part. By doing so, this research intends to shed new light on the significance of the Korean sudden/gradual debate and on the impact of Sŏngch'ŏl's legacy on contemporary Buddhism, especially on the Chogyŏ order's ongoing campaign for the worldwide propagation of Keyword Meditation.

Besides firsthand contact with Sŏngch'ŏl and Chinul's thought through the corresponding primary sources and secondary sources related to the Korean sudden/gradual debate, this essay is also based on several interviews with monks and people who have known him directly. In order to make sense of the data thus far accumulated, the second section of this essay raises the question of Sŏngch'ŏl's relation to the polity and puts forward the hypothesis that he has tried, as he renounced the world, to steer clear of politics. The third section argues that, from its inception until Aśoka, Buddhism has always been linked to the polity. The fourth section demonstrates how the history of the sudden/gradual debate in China and Korea has always been closely related to sociopolitical developments. Following the results of the third and fourth sections, the fifth describes six points of structural resonance between "Sŏngch'ŏl's Way" and the "Way of the State" under which it was advocated. The essay concludes that even though Sŏngch'ŏl lived as one who renounced the world, the spirit of his reform was significantly shaped by that of the world conquerors under whose rule it took place.

T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl and the South Korean Polity

How did Sŏngch'ŏl relate to the South Korean polity? To answer this question, let us begin with an examination of the most readily available data, which seems to support the conclusion that he had barely any relation to the polity or even none at all.

Sŏngch'ŏl was nicknamed "the Tiger of Mount Kaya," following the appellation of the massif in the midst of which is located the remote Paengnyŏn Hermitage 白蓮庵 where he spent most of his life from 1967 onward without much access to phone, radio and television. Judging from this fact, one could easily imagine Sŏngch'ŏl as a misanthropic and ferocious being living in the wild, unaware of what was happening down on Earth. Indeed, some of his behavior may be deemed eccentric: the use of the same toothpick for seventeen years, or the wearing of the same old patchwork garb throughout his life; the refusal to celebrate the Buddha's birthday, or to perform maintenance or upkeep on the wooden structures of his high mountain hermitage¹⁷

17. There were no colorful Buddhist paintings (*tanch'ŏng* 丹青) at the hermitage during the time of

to the point that one building collapsed shortly before his demise (Sō 2009, 225).

But besides these intriguing anecdotes and many other similar ones that have contributed to the making of his legend before and after his death,¹⁸ Sōngch'öl is also well known for having established high barriers between himself and the world. After having left home to become a monk, he cut off all contact with his family. When his mother tried to visit him, he threw stones at her. When his wife attempted to do the same, without letting anybody know who she was, he asked other monks to take “that crazy woman” out of the monastery. When his daughter was introduced to him, without his permission, he shouted, “Naga (Get out)!” As soon as 1951, during the turmoil of the Korean war and while he was living as a refugee near Pusan, he began to demand that anyone desiring to meet with him do at least three thousand prostrations in front of the Buddha.¹⁹ While he was living at P'agye Monastery's 把溪寺 Sōngjōn-am 聖殿庵, between 1955 and 1963, he ordered one of his disciples²⁰ to surround the hermitage with a fence of barbed wire.²¹ When President Pak Chōnghŭi (1917-1979) visited Haein-sa in 1978, Sōngch'öl did not deign to encounter him, sending one of his disciples down the mountain instead. At the time of the Oct. 27 (1980) crackdown on Buddhism,²² he remained silent, despite being urged by younger monks to make a declaration. When he was appointed Supreme Patriarch of the Chogye order on January 10, 1981, he accepted the nomination but did not go to Seoul to attend the installation ceremony (Chinwöl, 219), instead making the henceforth famous declaration: “*San ūn san iyo, mul*

Sōngch'öl.

18. For more such anecdotes, see Wōnt'aek 2001a, b.

19. He was then living in a hut that he had built and named Ch'ōnje-gul 闍提屈, i.e. the cave of the *icchantika*, near Anjōng Monastery 安靜寺, in South Kyōnsang Province.

20. Dorim Pōpchōn 道林法傳, who was appointed 11th Supreme Patriarch of the Chogye Order on the April 4, 2002.

21. During that period, Sōngch'öl is believed to have practiced *changjuwa purwa* 長坐不臥, i.e. sitting without ever lying down.

22. *Sibich'il pōmnan* 十二法難. Starting at two o'clock in the morning of that day, some thirty thousand police officers and soldiers raided the Chogye Order's headquarters and all the major temples and monasteries of the country, arresting forty six people, including Song Wōnju 宋月珠, the head administrator, and seizing a considerable amount of important documents. Chōn Tuhwan's administration justified the raid by saying that it was done to purify Buddhism, because the tradition had proven time and again that it was incapable of reforming itself, and as a part of a larger purification movement of South Korean society. Sōngch'öl himself narrowly escaped arrest, because Wōnt'aek told the two young soldiers who raided Paengnyōn-am that he was taking “a morning walk in the mountain.” (Wōnt'aek 2001b, 136-138)

im mul iro soida.”²³ When he was appointed a member of the Kukchang Samu Wiwŏnhoe 局長事務委員會²⁴ during Chŏn Tuhwan's rule (1980-1988), he accepted the nomination but made it clear that he had no intention of attending the meetings (Chinwŏl, 219). When Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) made an official visit to Korea in 1984, Sŏngch'ŏl declined an invitation to meet him in Seoul. In 1987 at the peak of the democratization movement young monks asked him, the highest figure of Korean Buddhism, to make a declaration in favor of it. He answered, “Is the world going to change because I say something? What is more, there is nobody (no politician) to listen to what I would say; how can you tell me to say something to someone?” (Wŏnt'aek 2001b, 214) At the beginning of the next year, when a delegation of high ranking Buddhist figures, including national assemblymen, asked him again to say something he said:

These days people keep telling me to trade in democracy (*minjuju ūi changsa hara*). Stories on democratization and similar stuff, as they arrive here, all make this place noisy, very noisy. All of you assembly men, just try to think a little bit. A monastery is a place for practice (*suhaeng* 修行); national assemblymen do politics. When you go back to Seoul, do good politics, and tell people not to come here anymore to tell me to trade in democracy (Wŏnt'aek 2001b, 214).

Finally, Sŏngch'ŏl's *parinibbāna* poem (*yŏlbansong* 涅槃頌), in which he solemnly declares that he was an impostor, may be understood as his ultimate attempt at establishing an insurmountable barrier between him and the polity.

*Deceiving people all my life,
My sins outweigh Mount Sumeru.²⁵
Falling into hell alive, my grief divides into ten thousand pieces.
Spouting forth a red wheel,²⁶ it hangs on the blue mountain.²⁷*

23. “Mountains are mountains, and water is water.” It most likely meant that the appointment would not cause any major change to his life as an ascetic identifying himself with the mountains in the midst of which he was living.

24. This committee was an assembly of famous people, albeit lacking in influence; it should not be confused with the Ippŏp Wiwŏnhoe 立法委員會 which wielded, in comparison, a considerable amount of power.

25. The highest mountain and the center of the world in Buddhist cosmology.

26. The solar disk or the wheel of the Dharma.

27. *Saengp'yŏng kigwang namyŏgun* 生平欺狂男女群,
Mich'ŏn chŏeŏp kwasumi 彌天罪業過須彌,
Hwalbam abi hanmandan 活陷阿鼻恨萬端,
Iryun t'ohong kwoebyŏksan 一輪吐紅掛碧山.
Translation from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seongcheol>.

These examples would appear to corroborate that in conformity with the meaning of his nickname, the Tiger of Mount Kaya, Sŏngch'ŏl adamantly refused to be connected to the polity. Nevertheless, in order to get a more complete picture of him, let us now give a succinct account of data that points to a diametrically opposed aspect of the great master's personality.

Undoubtedly, reading and some direct, though limited, contacts with people put the Tiger of Mount Kaya in touch with the polity. Although Yi Yŏngju 李英住 (Sŏngch'ŏl's lay name) was not able to study beyond primary school, allegedly due to his poor health (Paengnyŏn, 24), he was an autodidact with a passion for reading that started at an early age. In his teens, he would barter bags of rice for books (Paengnyŏn, 25); and rumor has it that two vanloads of volumes were found at Paengnyŏn Hermitage after his death.²⁸ He also subscribed to Time weekly magazine during at least a part of his life.²⁹ Here are three examples of the result of those readings and encounters. Firstly, to take up the challenge of science to religion, he worked toward harmonizing Buddhism with Einstein's relativity theory. Secondly, to upgrade the standards of his writings, he strived to apply the historical-critical method, especially when he composed the annotated translation of the *Platform Sūtra's* Dunhuang 敦煌 version (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987c, 17-9). Thirdly, impressed by what he discovered about Christianity's social work and tradition of prayer for others, he helped in the organization of a Buddhist crusade of such prayer, based on the practice of prostrations in front of the Buddha; and he also secretly encouraged the provision of help to the poor living in a slum area of Pusan (Sŏ 2004, 50).³⁰ Beside these endeavors to adapt the Buddha's tradition to the modern world, let us also keep in mind that the Tiger of Mount Kaya spared no effort to reform Korean Buddhist monasticism (Kim Kwangsik 2006a, 252-4).³¹ These examples, in stark contrast with the ones given above, seem meaningful enough to allow us to conclude that the Tiger of Mount Kaya was well connected to the polity.

In order to reconcile these diametrically opposed conclusions – connection to or disconnection from the polity – it should be sufficient to acknowledge that all eminent personalities, like great religious founders for example, are characterized by strongly contrasting – if not conflicting – tendencies, which interact in a complex

28. More exactly two “*ponggoch'a*.”

29. How and where he learned the English needed to achieve the fluency required to read that weekly is not clear. But since he spent so much time in solitude, we can suppose that he made the best possible use of a self-teaching textbook.

30. The disclosure of Sŏngch'ŏl's “secret virtue” (*ŭmdŏk* 隱德) took place before his death when some lay people talked about it to a journalist.

31. The same book chapter is also found in Kim Kwangsik 2006b, 367-409.

way throughout their lives. A failure to do so will result in valuable, but amazingly contradictory interpretations of who T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl was. For instance, some see his grandeur and strength in the fact that he purposely disconnected himself from the polity just as Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617-686) would have done (Kim Sŏngch'ŏl 2011, 19).³² Others say that he created a system of meaning (*ŭimi ŭi ch'egye* 意味의 體系)³³ transcending the fragmented and meaningless polity in which contemporary human beings live (Yun 2006, 67-70). Still others, however, conclude that he spared no effort to be connected to it (Ch'oe Wŏnsŏp 2011, 25).³⁴ In order to draw such thought-provoking conclusions, authors often tend to focus on part of the information available, instead of attempting to make sense of all the data. But if one judges from the content of the two categories of instances given above, it seems that while Sŏngch'ŏl showed some concern for the religious and sociological dimensions of the polity, he did all he could to steer clear of its specifically political aspect.

In other words, Sŏngch'ŏl would have eagerly wanted to avoid either collaboration or confrontation with political authorities, even as he otherwise strived to keep in touch to a certain extent with the South Korean polity itself. One of his reasons for having done so was his firm desire to be faithful to the spirit of the Buddha and early Buddhism which, as he understood them,³⁵ avoided meddling in politics. Another was probably his acute awareness, and strong disapproval, of the pattern of collaboration (*ŏyongsŏng* 御用性) with political power developed by Korean Buddhism from the Japanese rule onward (Ch'oe Pyŏnghŏn 2011, 624).³⁶ But given Sŏngch'ŏl's position within the

32. There is much room to argue the pertinence of such an identification of Sŏngch'ŏl with the great Wŏnhyo; while the former left his wife and his daughter to live as a mountain monk, the latter declared that "one had to renounce the renouncing of secular life (*ch'ulgaril ch'ulga haeya banda* 出家를 出家해야 한다)," married princess Yosŏk 瑤石宮, who bore him a son, and spent his time writing as well as spreading the Dharma among ordinary people. Moreover, although Kim Sŏngch'ŏl thoroughly denies it, it seems hard to disconnect the spirit of harmony characterizing Wŏnhyo's *Simmun hwaajaeng-non* 十門和諍論 from the context of the three kingdoms' forced unification in which it was written.

33. In French, "un univers de sens."

34. See also Kim Chongin 2011, 7.

35. Although Sŏngch'ŏl never explicitly says that the Buddha Śākyamuni and early Buddhism did not get involved in politics, judging from his position he seems to have firmly believed that it was so. Was that belief influenced by the dominant Western perception of the historical Buddha and Buddhism as apolitical? If yes, Sŏngch'ŏl's belief would be a kind of "internalized orientalism." See note 5.

36. For a detailed description of a recent case of collaboration between Lee Myŏngbak's government and the head administrator (*ch'ongmu wŏnjang* 總務院長) of the Chogyŏ Order, see Myŏngjin 2011, 290-9.

Chogyé order, such a posture amounted to a delicate and infinite balancing act. Accordingly, the question that we now have to answer is, “Is it or is it not possible to extract oneself from the political dimension of the polity, while somehow remaining in touch with its other facets?” In order to answer this, let us briefly recall how the Buddha and early Buddhism, which Söngch’öl invoked to justify himself, as well as Aśokan Buddhism, dealt with this issue.

Buddha, Early and Aśokan Buddhism and the Polity

The dominant Western perception of the Buddha Śākyamuni (ca. 563-483 BCE) as a sage who consistently steered clear of politics is largely true. Nevertheless, he did not shy away from speaking about the Dharma with the heads of state ruling northeastern India during his life time (Cho Chunho 2010, 41-2).³⁷ By staying away from state affairs, the Buddha intended to protect the *saṅgha* from the interference of political authorities, thus preventing it from entering in conflict with them, for this would have distracted the *bhikkhus* from practice, which was their main goal. On the whole, that attitude gained him the respect of, as well as generous material support from, those rulers;³⁸ also, many of them became his followers (Cho Chunho 2010, 41-2). But there was a conspicuous exception to that rule of non-intervention in political affairs: when Vidudabha³⁹ mounted successive military expeditions in order to avenge an old humiliation suffered at the hands of the Śākyaas, the Buddha managed to restrain him no less than three times, only giving up at the sight of the fourth expedition, which ended in wiping out the Śākyaas’ homeland (Cho Chunho 2010, 42; Schumann, 242-43). The overall picture that emerges is of a paradoxical and sometimes extremely tense relation of the Buddha to politics, in which, even as he displayed a religious authority making him stand above the rulers of his time as a virtuoso of the other-worldly, he also maintained close ties with them.

In order to understand the relation of early Buddhism to the polity, instead of concentrating on the Buddha Śākyamuni, Tambiah focuses on the *Aganña*

37. Cho Chunho’s research is a study of the relations of political power to religion in India, especially to Buddhism; however, I quote it because it is chiefly focused, despite its broadness, on how the Buddha related to politics (Cho Chunho, 13).

38. According to Yun, because it needed such a material support, the Buddha and early Buddhism accepted a kind of “capitalism” as part and parcel of interdependent arising, but it was “capitalism” without any attachment (Yun Söngsik 2011, 1).

39. The son and successor of Pasenadi, the ruler of mighty Kosalā.

Suttanta,⁴⁰ which “gives the Buddhist version of the origins of the world, society, and kingship” (Tambiah, 9). The text provides in a nutshell a description of the nexus between Buddhism and state as “a totality that includes the relation between *bhikkhu* and king ..., between the Buddha and the Cakkavatti⁴¹ ... as the two wheels of the *dhmma*, between the *saṅgha* and the polity and society⁴² in which it is located, between these worldly and other-worldly pursuits” (Tambiah, 15-6). Tambiah underscores that within such a totality, the Buddha's authority is always placed above that of the ruler, even if the latter is an extraordinary king, governing according to the Buddha's *dhmma*. In other words, the *rajanacacca*, the royal power and domain, and the *buddhanacacca*, the Buddha's power and domain, remain clearly distinguishable.

With the realm of Emperor Aśoka Maurya (ca. 304–232 BCE),⁴³ the relations of Indian Buddhism to political power reached its apex, and this has remained ever since the paradigm of Buddhist-state relations in South East Asian countries (ibid. 54).⁴⁴ Even if Aśoka was a paradigmatic *cakkavatti*⁴⁵ embodying the Buddha's *dhmma* as he ruled, he did not hesitate to threaten to resort to force, and to match his words with his deeds whenever he deemed it necessary to maintain both the unity of the galactic polity he was at the head of (Tambiah, 64) and of Buddhism (Tambiah, 64; Magnin, 309-11). In stark contrast with this, it is well known that the Buddha did not wish anybody, neither secular nor religious, to head the *saṅgha* after his demise. In the *Maha-Parinibbana Suttanta*, instead of appointing a successor, he recommends to Ananda that “he take refuge in himself, that he be a lamp to himself, that he look not for a refuge outside himself.” Furthermore, he recommends that his disciples conduct the *saṅgha* in the Vajjian style,⁴⁶ which required that “they gather often and in concord, that they meet in concord, that they rise in concord, and carry their affairs in concord” (Tambiah, 159-60). The Buddha considered

40. “Aggañña” means “beginning or origin, but not in the sense of a first cause.”

41. Literally, a “wheel-turning world ruler,” i.e. “a raja of rajas” or a universal monarch.

42. Whereas Tambiah distinguishes the polity and society, this essay uses a definition of the polity which includes society.

43. Aśoka's reign lasted almost four decades (ca. 269-232 BCE), and he ruled over the largest empire of Indian history, except for the one administered by the British, in keeping with the Buddha's *dhmma*.

44. The *Aśokāvadāna*, i.e. *The Legend of King Aśoka*, has considerably contributed to the building and the perpetuation of that ideal paradigm (Strong, 1983).

45. See note 41.

46. It is “the style from the tribal or *gana* polity of Vaisali, dominated by the Licchavis, and known as the Vajji-*gana* (Tambiah 159, note 1).”

that such a communal way of proceeding was best adapted to an organization of monks living in separate collectivities, and who had to “rely on themselves alone through their adherence to the truth” (Tambiah, 160). These fundamental differences between the Buddha’s and Aśoka’s conception of government merely corroborate the *Aggañña Suttanta*’s teaching: no matter how successfully a cakkavatti’s rule embodies the Buddha’s *dhamma*, the resulting *cakkavatti* will never equate the *saṅgha*, the authority of which will always remain above its own. Accordingly, we have to confront the question: “How can the relation of the *cakkavatti* to the *saṅgha* during Aśoka’s rule be explained?”

The Buddha’s conception of an ideal rule to run the *saṅgha* may have functioned as long as he was alive, not unlike Aśoka’s “wheel-turning” statesmanship. Nevertheless, all too often after his demise, the *saṅgha* proved incapable to live up to it. Tambiah points out that “the very predilection of the pristine monks for living in separate collectivities led very early in their history to dissensions and schisms and fragmentation” (Tambiah). He concludes that “with no prescriptive rule or internal basis for authority and organization to hold the movement together as some kind of ‘church’, the *saṅgha*’s existence and integrity could only be guaranteed by some external authority, that is, by the polity in which it was embedded, and of which kingship was the articulating and ordinating principle” (Tambiah). Inwardly, the *saṅgha* found itself in a position of inherent instability. This led it on the one hand to depend upon the help of an outward political power to solve its inner conflicts, while still pretending that its authority remained above it. As there is no faultless *saṅgha*, there is no perfect *cakkavatti*. Thus the very nature of this paradoxical if not contradictory relation opened the door for the development of rich, but tense and complex, relations between the *saṅgha* and political circles, the genuine success of which could not but depend on the overall faithfulness of both sides to the Buddha’s *dhamma*.

Against this backdrop, which shows the close connections between Buddhism and the polity from the time of the Buddha to Aśoka, let us move toward Mahāyāna Buddhism, more specifically toward the Chinese and Korean meditative schools.

Chinese and Korean Meditation Masters and the Polity⁴⁷

While remarking that “the socio-political stakes of the sudden/gradual controversies were generally high” throughout the history of Buddhism, Faure gives the example of “the so-called council of Tibet,” at which “the partisans on both sides ended by killing each other in the name of emptiness” (Faure 1993, 38). Inspired by his comment, we shall proceed to survey how the meditation masters, to whose authority Sŏngch'ŏl kept referring, related to the polity they were embedded in. Let us start with the Sixth Patriarch Huineng 六祖慧能 (638-713).

As the fifth section of this article shall show, in order to demonstrate the superiority of the sudden/sudden approach, Sŏngch'ŏl attached considerable importance to the authority of the *Platform Sūtra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經) and its traditionally presumed author: the Sixth Patriarch. Indeed, both are closely linked to the history of the Chinese sudden/gradual debate. Moreover, as the writer of the only Chinese text attributed to the Buddha himself, and thus recognized as a *sūtra* (*jing* or *kyōng* 經), until now Huineng has been acknowledged and venerated as the key figure of the Chan school. However, almost nothing is known about him. The remarkably close resemblance between the *Heze Shenhui yulu* 荷澤神會語錄, discovered in Dunhuang, and the *Platform Sūtra* has made scholars conclude that Heze Shenhui probably is its de-facto author (Ingyōng, 28, 362). Consequently, it is not possible anymore to dissociate Shenhui from the authority of the *Platform Sūtra*. This leads us to take notice of how Shenhui related to the polity he belonged to.

Firstly, from 730 on, Shenhui obviously used his systematic attacks against Datong Shenxiu 大通神秀 (606-706), the leader of the so-called Northern school, to assert the supremacy of his own school, the Heze-zong 荷澤宗, in the politico-religious landscape of the Tang dynasty (618-907) (McRae 1987, 233-4). Secondly, “it is also apparent that (Shenhui's) sudden teaching attracted people who had some reason to hope for a ‘sudden change’ of the political situation” (Faure 1993, 38). “This point is corroborated by the list of Heze's supporters: most of them ambitious officials” (Faure 1993, 38). Thirdly, Shenhui's politico-religious activism led him to be sent into exile in 753, at the instigation of Lu Yi 盧奕, one of Songshan Puji's

47. Readers familiar with the history of the Chan school may go directly to the fifth section, which begins on p. 107.

嵩山普寂⁴⁸ (651-739) powerful lay followers (McRae, 235ff; Yi et al. 1995, 700-1). Finally, McRae underscores that “it is not even accurate to say that Heze [Shenhui] caused the disappearance of the Northern school, since it never existed as an institutional entity to begin with, or the superseding of the sudden teaching over the gradual teaching, since no one ever advocated the doctrinally backward position that he described and criticized” (McRae, 258). This means that Shenhui antagonized Shenxiu by purposely distorting the nature of his teaching in order to impose his own school.

Interestingly, under the Song (960-1279), after the chaos and the persecution of the Five Dynasties (907-960) and as the Tiantai 天台, Huayan 華嚴 and Linji 臨濟 schools were struggling and competing to redefine their identity, the latter falsely charged Shenhui of being a “master of intellectual knowledge and conceptual interpretation” (Ingyōng, 139-40).⁴⁹ In doing so, the Linji school was honing its three main mottos: separate transmission outside of the teaching (*kyooe pyōlchōn* 教外別傳); no establishment of words and letters (*pullip munja* 不立文字); and directly pointing to people’s minds (*chikchi insim* 直指人心). According to Buswell, with the invention of Kanhua Chan 看話禪, Chinese Buddhism achieved the final tuning of a meditation technique allowing a complete and sudden awakening experience in harmony with those three mottos (Buswell 1987, 321-56).

Kanhua Chan (Kr. Kanhwa Sŏn) is the meditation practice developed at the crossroads of the Northern (960-1127) and Southern Song dynasties (1127-1279) by Master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163). As a disciple of Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063-1125), Dahui belonged to the Yangqi branch 楊岐派 of the Linji school (twelfth-generation successor). For Dahui and his followers – world renunciators as well as lay people – Kanhua Chan was the only practical technique allowing one to achieve a sudden and complete awakening; “no other alternatives existed” (Bodiford, 99). Keyword Meditation was opposed to earlier and allegedly impractical forms of Chan: Literary Chan (Wenzi Chan 文字禪) exemplified by Yuanwu’s *Biyan-lu* 碧巖錄, which Dahui burnt, and the Silent Illumination Deviant Chan (Mozaoxie Chan 默照邪禪) of the Caodong school 曹洞宗, which he scathingly criticized as “passive quietism.”

It is important to mention that as Dahui attacked the Caodong school, he distorted the teaching of its masters. Whether he did so in good faith or not remains a matter of debate (Schlütter, 135). Some have suggested that the differences between Keyword Meditation and Mozaoxie Chan “cannot be

48. A disciple of Datong Shenxiu 大通神秀 (606-706), the head of the so-called Northern school.

49. See note 10.

understood in a purely soteriological framework" (Schlütter, 138). Indeed, beyond doctrinal matters directly related to each faction's conception of awakening and practice, the data available shows that the row was well rooted in the polity in which it took place. In the footsteps of Gimello's research on the imperial patronage of Buddhism during Northern Song (960-1127), Western scholarship has paid attention to and illuminated the larger secular and religious context of Dahui's spiritual achievements (Gimello 1987). The political shift from the Northern to the Southern Song (1127-1279) significantly weakened that patronage. As a result, the Linji lineage and its main rival, the Caodong school, had to compete fiercely for control over prestigious state-sponsored monasteries, as well as attract the support of the elite literati (*sadaebu* 士大夫) officials whose spiritual quest was exacerbated by the misfortune of the dynasty (Schlütter, 135-8). While sharing similar views, Levering has also analyzed Dahui's achievements in terms of the rhetoric of gender equality (Levering, 210-3). In sum, "Keyword Meditation must be understood not just as a particular technique for religious cultivation, but also as a tool for distinguishing one sectarian faction within the Chan school from its institutional rivals" (Bodiford, 97) in an effort to cater not only to clerics but also to lay-people of both sexes.

Pyŏn Hŭiuk tends to see in those scholarly conclusions a Western-style reductionism that misses Dahui's spiritual genius, even though they have been carefully and methodically reached (Pyŏn 2010, 309-10). Nonetheless, he concurs with them in so far that he emphasizes the political dimension of Dahui's activity and practically considers it the paradigm of Keyword Meditation in action. Indeed, Dahui was part of the Southern Song politico-military faction advocating an all out war against the Jin 金 (1126-1234). To be sure, after their conquest of the Northern Song, the latter had crossed the Yellow River and kept moving southward. The rival faction, urging peace negotiations with the barbarian invaders, feared Dahui's influence because he had a very large audience. General Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 was one of his ardent followers. Dahui nicknamed Zhang "Shen Bigong 神臂弓," thus comparing him to a bow shooting arrows capable of simultaneously piercing and tearing apart a thousand suits of armor. This nickname was a clear allusion to the sword of the *huatou* 話頭 (Kr. *hwadu*) with which one can instantaneously cut off a thousand doubts. In any event, eventually the rival faction gained control over Southern Song politics in 1141 and negotiated peace with the Jin. For good measure, it also jailed three generals of the pro-war faction, including Zhang, as well as all the officials belonging to it. In what became known later as the "Shen Bigong Event," Dahui publicly criticized the detention of the officials. The result was immediate: the authorities falsely accused him of collaborating with the Jin,

stripped him of his monastic robes and certificates, and sent him into a decade-long exile (Pyön 2004, 14-7; Kim T'aehwan 2011f, 109-13). Pyön points out that the deportation of a Chan master because of his patriotism and political activism is a rare event in Chinese history.

Dahui's Kanhwa Sön was first introduced to Korea by Chinul, who achieved his final awakening experience in 1197 while he was reading the *Dahui yulu* 大慧語錄. Although he never went to China, Chinul used Kanhwa Sön to crown his sudden/gradual approach of awakening and cultivation (*tono chömsu*), as can be seen in the last part of his magnum opus the *Pöpchip pyörhaengnok chöryo pyöngip sagi* 法集別行錄節要并私記 (abbr. *Chöryo*), written in 1209, and in the *Kanhwa kyörüiron* 看話決疑論 published five years after his death by his successor Chingak Hyesim 眞覺慧誡 (1178-1234). As a syncretic harmonization of doctrine and meditation (*söngyo ilch'i* 禪教一致),⁵⁰ this approach is essentially based on the thought of Shenhui and his successor Guifeng (Buswell 1983, 262-3). "Thanks to the backing of Chinul and his successor" at Songgwang-sa, Kanhwa Sön "quickly became the most common form of practice" within the Kusanmun 九山門 (Nine Mountain Schools) of "Korean Buddhism" (Buswell 1992, 150). However, toward the end of the Koryö dynasty (918-1392), Paegun Kyöngghan 白雲景閑 (1299-1375), T'aego Pou 太古普愚 (1301-1382), Naong Hyegün 懶翁惠勤 (1320-1376) and many other Korean monks went to the Chinese province of Henan to learn Kanhwa Sön with teachers of the Yangqi branch of the Linji school (Kr. Imjejong Yanggip'a). After having become proficient in it, and having received the Dharma of those masters, they came back to their homeland and established what can be called the "Sino-Korean Connection," a lineage which would challenge Chinul's authority (Sö 2011a, 77-8).

An essential aspect of the Sino-Korean Connection is its socio-political background, to which few scholars have paid attention. When King Kongmin 恭愍王 (1351-1374) ascended the throne, he wanted to reduce the influence of the Yuan (1271-1368) on Koryö's international relations. In order to succeed, he had to suppress domestic pro-Yuan factions, especially the most influential clans (*kwönmun sejok* 權門勢族) that were closely connected to the Kusanmun, and to favor the growth of new ones capable of backing him. To apply that policy to Buddhism, Kongmin chose to promote the development of the Sino-Korean Connection. To achieve that goal, he appointed T'aego to be the royal preceptor and entrusted him with the responsibility of all appointments within Buddhism, thus making him supervisor of the whole tradition. He created the

50. Chinul's position amounts to more than a mere unity of the doctrine and meditation schools (*öngyo habil* 禪教合一); it also includes a pervasive and all inclusive understanding of doctrine through the practice of meditation (*hoegyo kwisön* 會教歸禪), and a complete abandoning of doctrine to enter fully in the practice of meditation (*sagyo ipsön* 捨教入禪) (Kim Taljin 1987, 17).

Wŏnyungbu 圓融府 (Department of Complete Interpenetration) to assist him. Notwithstanding a conspicuous lack of contact with the rising gentry, T'aego was astonishingly well-connected to the rest of the polity. Besides the influential families to which he was naturally related by birth, his network encompassed Empress Qi 奇皇后 (1301-1369) and a number of power-oriented public servants, some of them disreputable. T'aego's activities significantly weakened the Kusanmun; and he, as well as Naong, became influential representatives of Buddhism with a large following, to such an extent that their lineages became the mainstream of the tradition. That strong trend was maintained by their disciples Hwanam Honsu 幻庵混修 (1320-1392) and Mogam Ch'anyŏng 木庵榮英 (1328-1390) during the reign of King U 禑王 (1374-1388). Nevertheless, they were not powerful enough to set in motion an overall reform of Buddhism, the general decay of which is inseparable from the downfall of Koryŏ (Ch'oe Pyŏnghŏn 1986; Ch'oe Kyŏnghwan, i-ii, 67-8; Ch'oe Yŏnsik 2011, 154-5). It seems that to a certain extent, T'aego's failure may be attributed to the ambiguity of his sociopolitical position as a Sŏn master, to the inadequacy of the Kanhwa Sŏn doctrine that he was advocating to take up the challenge of the historical context the kingdom was in, and to his failure to keep in touch with the rising gentry, who were looking for an entirely new socio-political paradigm.

After King T'aejo 太祖王 (1392-1398), and with the overwhelming influence of the Neo-Confucians at the court, T'aego and Naong's legacy lost its support and Chinul's teaching could resurface, albeit in the context of the *ŏkpul sungyu chŏngch'aek* 抑佛崇儒政策 (Policy of Repression of Buddhism and Promotion of confucianism). However, the Sino-Korean Connection made a decisive comeback during the seventeenth century in the aftermath of the Imjin 壬辰 (1592-1598) and Pyŏngja 丙子 (1636-1637), Japanese and Manchu invasions. Indeed, the participation of armies of monks in the fights against the invaders created a political climate favorable to a partial rehabilitation of Buddhism. But the two wars had thrown the peninsula into a state of chaos. To face the resulting crisis, the Neo-Confucians actively compiled genealogical records in an effort to create a strict social order based on clans. In order to revive itself, not only did the *saṅgha* have to redefine its identity, it also had to do it in line with the Neo-Confucians' endeavors. To do so, it began by proclaiming, despite a total lack of historical grounds, that all Chosŏn's monks belonged to the dharma-lineage of Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng 清休休靜 (1520-1604), better known as Sŏsan Taesa 西山大師: the most towering Buddhist figure of the Chosŏn dynasty, who was famous for having rallied an army of monks during the Imjin Invasion. Afterwards, the *saṅgha* proclaimed that Sŏsan was a sixth-generation disciple of

T'aego, and that the transmission of the dharma lamp between the former and the latter had taken place over time without any physical interruption of the lineage. That amounted to claiming – here again despite a conspicuous lack of historical evidence – a continuous human succession (*injök kyesŏng* 人的繼承) instead of a purely doctrinal one (*sasangjök kyesŏng* 思想的繼承). By doing so, the *saṅgha* intended to accumulate not only the prestige of Sōsan and T'aego, but also of the Linji school's Yangqi branch and beyond, through the Sixth Patriarch and Bodhidharma, of the Buddha Śākyamuni himself. If that Dharma Transmission Doctrine (*pōpt'ongsōl* 法通說) had the advantage of allowing Korean Buddhism to recover its patent of respectability in the face of the Neo-Confucians' Tao Transmission Doctrine (*tot'ongsōl* 道通說), it had the serious disadvantage of reducing its horizon to the Sino-Korean Connection, thus marginalizing or excluding the lineages and the teachings of masters like Pojo Chinul (Ch'oe Yōnsik 2006, 392-400).

To be sure, a debate over the identity of Korean Buddhism flared up again in the nineteenth century and lasted until the beginning of the twentieth. It was sparked by the rising influence of doctrinal studies which challenged the supremacy of Keyword Meditation as promoted by the text-phobic heirs of the Sino-Korean Connection. Paekp'a Kŭngsŏn 白坡互璇 (1767-1852), who gave up textual studies in favor of meditation, was its principal protagonist. In his *Sŏnmun sugyōng* 禪文手鏡, he presented a new doctrinal taxonomy (*kyosang p'ansōk* 教相判釋) crowned by the Imje school (to which he belonged), thus introducing an unheard-of gradation in the quality of the teaching provided by the five houses (*Oga* 五家) of Chan. The controversy is peppered with regional feelings of animosity toward the geographical areas in which its adversaries dwelled, and it readily resorts to the Confucian sense of seniority (*sōnbae hubae kwan'gye* 先輩後輩關係) to find fault with younger opponents at the expense of real debate. Although those who took part in it were generally well qualified, most of their arguments boiled down to hammering out truths that were already known, without bringing about any doctrinal breakthroughs. However, it is worth mentioning that Ch'usa Kim Chōnghŭi 秋史 金正喜 (1786-1856), a layman, criticized Paekp'a's "Keyword Meditation absolutism," saying that in order to be properly understood Kanhwa Sŏn had to be put back into the historical context from which it was born (Pak Haedang 2011, 225-6; 243-4).

All of the aforementioned examples demonstrate that the sudden/gradual debate has never been a purely doctrinal matter in Chinese and Korean history. On the contrary, just like Buddhism from its inception onward, it has always been closely connected to the sociopolitical background against which it was taking place. Assuming that Sōngch'öl is not an exception to that rule, we must

now demonstrate how close he was to the polity, especially to its political dimension, even though he worked hard at distancing himself from it. Since Sŏngch'ŏl neither collaborated with political power nor openly opposed it, this demonstration will resort to the description of the structural resonance between his life, his doctrine, and the political context in which it was taught.

Structural Resonance between the Way of the State and Sŏngch'ŏl's Way

Some see in Sŏngch'ŏl the avatar of paradox (*yŏksŏl ŭi hwasin* 逆說化身), because the more he turned his back on the polity, the more he unintentionally attracted it⁵¹ (Kim Sŏngch'ŏl, 26-32). To be sure, some two million people either attended his cremation or came to see his relics (*sari* 舍利). There were far less at Mozart's and van Gogh's funerals. It looks as if, even though he attempted to forsake the world by taking refuge in the most remote part of the Kaya massif, he kept sending a strong message to it. In other words, although he tried to hide from the polity, he never managed to escape it completely.⁵² Paraphrasing the first of Paul Watzlawick's five axioms,⁵³ which says that "one cannot not communicate," we could say that "it is impossible to be apolitical" or that "it is impossible not to be political."

If the following facts are considered, that paradox is easy to understand. Firstly, just as any mountain monk, Sŏngch'ŏl lived on the alms offered by the laity to the Chogyŏ order. Additionally, in order to receive alms, the order had and still has to produce truly awakened masters, whom it uses to crown and thus justify its whole organizational structure. Consequently, making public the existence of the Tiger of Mount Kaya was in the interest not only of his disciples, but also of the order; and both did not hesitate to do so.⁵⁴ Thirdly the laity, the order, and the recluses all need

51. Although this paper does not emphasize it, the possibility that Sŏngch'ŏl's behavior may have been more intentional than it is commonly believed cannot be completely excluded. In other words, as a *conspicuous* recluse (having one's hermitage surrounded by barbed wire, disavowing and chasing away one's wife etc.) Sŏngch'ŏl may have been precisely aware of just what he was doing with his *very public* insistence on being disconnected from the center. But the fact that Sŏngch'ŏl's behavior may have been intentional does not necessarily allow one to conclude that it intended to help the political establishment. Similarly, at this point nothing allows us to conclude that Sŏngch'ŏl has been purposely utilized by political leaders like, for instance, the forest monks in Thailand sometimes are (Taylor J. L., 285-91).

52. See note 51.

53. They were all designed to help the practice of family therapy. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Watzlawick

54. As one of Sŏngch'ŏl's oldest *sangjwa* 上座, i.e. disciple, Wŏnt'aek Sŏnim (b. 1943) has played and still plays an important role in making his master known to the public.

the peace and social order provided by the state in order to assume their respective functions. Finally, the state in return needs the moral and political support as well as the spiritual guidance that a Buddhist order and its masters can provide; and the former can hardly allow the latter to exist in a condition of anarchy, lest it have negative repercussions on the rest of the polity. But over and above those obvious connections, points of structural resonance, between Söngch'öl's Way and the Way of the State, i.e. the political context in which it was preached, may be the best way to explain his paradoxical personality. A point of structural resonance is a close resemblance and/or proximity between two or more facts that otherwise appear to be completely unrelated to one another, like two separate objects vibrating at the same sound wave rate.

The first point of structural resonance is the twofold suddenness (*tono tonsu* 頓悟頓修) emphasized by Söngch'öl during his Hundred Day Teaching in 1967,⁵⁵ when he began to criticize openly the sudden/gradual approach by stating that Chinul, its main protagonist, could not be honored as the founder of the Chogye order. In some regards, that teaching evokes the suddenness and rapidity of the coups d'état through which Pak Chönghui (1917-1979) and Chön Tuhwan (b. 1931) overthrew civilian presidents and seized power in 1961 and 1980 respectively. Pak justified his coup as well as the ensuing dictatorship by the urgent necessity to put an end to political, military and economic chaos, and to set the country on the path toward security, development and happiness, culminating in the so-called Miracle on the Han River (Heo, 20-2). To be sure, in order to put an end to the state of confusion reigning within Korean Buddhism and supposedly resulting from Chinul's way, the main principles of Söngch'öl's reform advocated the exclusive use of the shortcut approach of Keyword Meditation (*kyöngjölmun* 徑截門), which allows the rapid achievement of a sudden and complete awakening to the Middle Path, thus definitely transforming one into a Buddha, and making one capable of liberating all sentient beings from *samsāra*. In striking contrast with those principles, however, early Buddhism accepted a variety of meditation techniques and theories (Haktam 2011a, 57-8; 2011b, 4; Gregory 1997, 297; Kalupahana, 237-9) which integrated both the sudden and the gradual character of the awakening process (Ch'oe Pongsu, 54-5; Im Süngtaek 24-5), in a way that was far more focused on the process (see e.g. the eightfold path) than on the awakening itself (Kim Nami, 211-3).⁵⁶ In this light, Söngch'öl's claim to go back to the Buddha's teaching with Keyword Meditation

55. See note 9.

56. The Vipassanā teacher Goenka never claims that he has achieved awakening, but merely tells his disciples that he is more advanced than them.

not only sounds highly arguable, but also looks like a doctrinal coup d'état inaugurating and justifying a “sudden/sudden dictatorship.” It looks even more so when one considers that Chan and Sŏn masters before Sŏngch'ŏl have more insisted upon the sudden/gradual paradigm than upon the sudden/sudden one (Chongho 2012, 64-5). As a result of Sŏngch'ŏl's affirmations, many scholars think that Korean Buddhism has become so obsessed with the achievement of awakening that it suffers from an “awakening disease” (*kkaedarŭm ūi pyŏng*). However, in retrospect it seems that Sŏngch'ŏl's “Keyword Meditation absolutism” (Shim, 212; 233) has in fact led very few people to awakening (Masŏng, 227).

The second point of structural resonance between Sŏngch'ŏl and Presidents Pak and Chŏn is that they were all self-appointed men, endowed with a deep sense of mission and convinced of being the only way of salvation for Buddhism or South Korea (Hoe, 21), respectively. To be sure, just as Pak and Chŏn were not elected, Sŏngch'ŏl's awakening was never certified by anybody. He even maintained that there wasn't a single awakened master to be found on the Korean peninsula toward the end of the Japanese colonial rule, not even at Songgwang-sa 松廣寺 or Sudŏk-sa 修德寺 (Paengnyŏn, 35-6). Nevertheless, it seems that Sŏngch'ŏl went as far as to identify his mission with that of Huineng when he was told by the Fifth Patriarch Hongren 五祖弘忍 (584-674), “Only transmit the sudden teaching; go in the world and eradicate erroneous doctrines” (*Yujŏn tongyobŏp ch'ulse p'asajong* 唯傳頓教法 出世破邪宗).⁵⁷ This self-appointment and this identification allowed the “orthodox tradition of Keyword Meditation” to make a fresh start (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987c, 5; Sŏ 2004, 412-6), not unlike Pak Chŏnghŭi's coup, which marked the beginning of a new era of security and development for Korea.

The third point of structural resonance is the powerful demonizing and antagonizing mechanism which pervades all of Pak and Chŏn's discourses as well as those of Sŏngch'ŏl: against North Korean communism for the former (Heo, 22) and Chinul's gradualism for the latter. For Sŏngch'ŏl, Chinul is the one to beat, the prime target; and he does not hesitate at the outset of the *Sŏnmun chŏngno* to resort to verbal abuse (Sŏngch'ŏl 1993, 3-4).⁵⁸ As he maligns his adversary, Sŏngch'ŏl never listens to him thoroughly; he never tries to understand what Chinul said by putting it in its context. He even forbade the study of Chinul's *Chŏryo* at Haein-sa's *kangwŏn* 講院. Different from Wŏnhyo, Sŏngch'ŏl does not display a mind trying to “reconcile and unite various (conflicting) doctrines into a pervasive and inclusive understanding (*hoet'ongjŏk*

57. T. 2007.48.341c18.

58. See note 10.

ihae 會通的理解).”⁵⁹ Instead, to justify the sudden/sudden approach and exclude all others, he combines the use of Keyword Meditation with a strictly deductive approach based on the authority of the past masters that he quotes. As a result, in Sŏngch’öl’s so-called paradoxical Middle Path, Keyword Meditation renders the use of language meaningless, while the language of tradition as he understands it is used to condemn other viewpoints, thus ultimately bringing everything back to his own perspective. The result is a black-and-white logic between sudden and gradual that is far apart from the Middle Path between extremist viewpoints characterizing the Buddha’s approach (Kalupahana 237).⁶⁰ This logic may be summed up in four terms: the Middle Path is inexpressible; the masters of the past were right; I say what they have said, so I am right; Chinul said something else, so he is wrong. In absence of a conception of language like that of the Greek *logos*, which is both reason and speech and which requires that everything be clear and precise, and of an *agora* allowing an authentic debate, the expression “sudden/gradual debate” becomes a misnomer. In contrast with Sŏngch’öl’s mentality of *ad fontes*, Chinul writings, even though they are also based on the sources, display a much more speculative and balanced mind: both deductive and inductive, reflecting the practice of a Middle Path between radical analysis (*chŏn’ganmun* 全揀門) and comprehensive assimilation (*chŏnsumun* 全收門) (Chinul, 147-8). Following Qingliang Chengguan 清涼澄觀 (738-839), Chinul describes seven possible divisions of sudden and gradual (Chinul, 123-4). He thus allows a process of spiritual growth, not unlike Plato’s gradual ascension toward ultimate truth, albeit the latter rests on an ontology and takes place through the contemplation of the phenomenal world. Chinul’s quasi-Socratic quest for truth reminds us of Gandhi’s saying that an opinion radically different from his was the most important thing in the world.

Objectively speaking, if Sŏngch’öl could have made his point without demonizing Chinul and antagonizing the latter’s followers, why didn’t he do so (Sŏ 2007, 49-51)? A similar pattern of distortion of the teaching of one’s rival has been observed in Shenhui, in the Linji school as it criticized Shenhui, and in Dahui and Paekp’a’s behavior; and it was always linked to sociopolitical motivations. Although it is not possible to point directly to Sŏngch’öl’s motives, it may be underscored that as he attempted to overhaul Korean Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century, he constructed his verbal assault

59. *Hwajaengiök* 和諍的, *hoesöckhök* 會釋的 (see DDB).

60. Let us keep in mind that the doctrine of the Middle Path is the second of the five main principles used by Sŏngch’öl as the foundation of an overhaul of Korean Buddhism. See note 6.

against Chinul in a way that closely reflects the structure of the Cold War anticommunist discourse of the authoritarian regime under which he carried it out.

The fourth point of structural resonance functions with the aforementioned demonization mechanism. It consists of Presidents Pak and Chŏn's unrelenting quests for legitimacy in order to avoid the risk of low public approval as presidents resulting from their own self-appointments, and the quest of Sŏngch'öl to avoid poor acknowledgment by the *saigha* as self-appointed meditation master. Besides their constant brandishing of North Korea's threat (Heo, 25), Pak and Chŏn sought to legitimize the ironfisted security measures of their antidemocratic governments through steady economic growth (Heo, 24; 35). As for Sŏngch'öl, beginning with early Buddhism in 1967 and finishing with Huineng in 1987, he kept appealing to diverse layers of the Buddhist tradition to prove that his teaching was orthodox and that Chinul's was not. In the *Han'guk Pulgyo ūi pŏmmaek* 韓國佛教의 法脈 (Sŏngch'öl 1976), he insisted that T'aego's teaching corresponded to the sudden/sudden doctrine and that there was no other authentic dharma-lineage in Korea. In the *Sŏnmun chŏngno* (Sŏngch'öl 1981), to demonstrate that the sudden/sudden doctrine was the only true one and that Chinul's was unorthodox, he gathered together some three hundred and twenty three quotations pulled out of sixty *sūtras* and treaties (Sŏ 2004, 233). In his last work, the *Yukcho tan'gyŏng Tonhwang-bon, hyŏnt'o p'yŏnyŏk* 六祖壇經 敦煌本 縣吐編譯 (Sŏngch'öl 1987), he ultimately resorted to what he believed to be the Sixth Patriarch's *ipsissima verba* to make the same demonstration. Furthermore, in the *Sŏllim kogyŏng ch'ongsŏ* 禪林古鏡叢書, to prove that the patriarchs of the past had all transmitted the sudden/sudden teaching *alone*, he had thirty Chinese and two Korean masters' discourse records (*chanshi yulu* 禪師語錄) from the Chanzang 禪藏 translated into Korean. When put together, the aforementioned works represent a considerable amount of material, pervaded by an impressive inner coherence, but obviously characterized by a number of methodological flaws. Those concerning early Buddhism and Korea's dharma-lineage have already been mentioned. Let us now examine the others.

Overall, in the *Sŏnmun chŏngno*, Sŏngch'öl tends to quote Chinul from his anti-gradualist self-centered angle, thus drawing water to his own mill, but distorting the original meaning of what he cites (Park 1992, 253). For instance, in the preface of the work, he falsely pretends that Chinul declared that Shenhui was not Huineng's rightful heir (*chŏkcha* 嫡子) because he was a "chihae chongsa" (Sŏngch'öl 1981, 3-4; Sŏ 2004, 275-80).⁶¹ The same kind of distortion

61. See note 10.

pervades Sŏngch'ŏl's understanding of the Middle Path as it is displayed in the *Paegil pŏmmun*. Despite evidence to the contrary (Donner, 201-26), he claims, for instance, that the third patriarch of the Tiantai school Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597) interpreted awakening to the Middle Way in a strictly sudden sense, going so far as to suggest that he practiced Keyword Meditation as well (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987b, 46; 67; Sŏ 2004, 215-25). Furthermore, in the *Sŏnmun chŏngno*, when he describes the three-gated barrier (*sammun'gwan* 三門關) on the way to awakening, Sŏngch'ŏl inadvertently introduces a gradualist perspective in his own system of thought, thus contradicting himself (Sŏngch'ŏl 1981, 108-19; Sŏ 2007a, 46-7). Although his followers claim that he talked from a strictly synchronic perspective,⁶² the underlying diachronic viewpoint can hardly be denied (Sŏ 2011a, 100 note 37).

As for the Dunhuang version of the *Platform sūtra*, Hongren does not condemn Shenxiu's gradualist poem, but on the contrary recommends its study, albeit recognizing the superiority of Huineng's sudden stance. Its content thus cannot be reduced to the sudden/sudden teaching alone (Gómez, 79). The coexistence of these two tendencies within the *sūtra* opens the door for more than one interpretation of Huineng's "*ipsissima verba*;" it also explains why gradualists also refer to the Sixth Patriarch's authority in contemporary Korea (Sŏ 2009, 222-3).⁶³

Regarding the content of the *Sŏllim kogyŏng ch'ongsŏ*, as mentioned above,⁶⁴ contrary to Sŏngch'ŏl's perspective Chongho's research has demonstrated that over time Chan and Sŏn masters have insisted more on the sudden/gradual paradigm than upon the sudden/sudden one.

All this goes to show that the more Sŏngch'ŏl tried to legitimize his sudden/sudden approach, the more he ended up revealing the weaknesses of his stance and falling into the contradictions of authoritarianism, not unlike President Pak's *Yusin* system, which also ran out of steam over time (Heo, 25-6).

The fifth point of structural resonance consists in the similarities between the spatio-temporal coordinates of the dictatorship and the Korean sudden/gradual debate. Geographically, Sŏngch'ŏl and Presidents Pak and Chŏn were all from Kyŏngsang Province. Moreover, before settling down at Haein-sa in 1967, Sŏngch'ŏl spent most of his life as a recluse in meditation halls and hermitages located in his native province (1936-1967). He only left the latter

62. Such a claim amounts to active belief because it refuses to acknowledge the opposite and complementary perspective.

63. Whether the masters whose sayings are found in the *Sŏllim kogyŏng ch'ongsŏ* were all strong advocates of the sudden/sudden doctrine remains an opened question.

64. See page 111.

briefly after achieving awakening at Tonghwa-sa 桐華寺 in 1940 in order to visit Songgwang-sa and Sudŏk-sa (1941-1942), located in the Chŏlla and Ch'ungch'ŏng Provinces. After having concluded, as aforementioned, that there were no awakened masters to be found in those monasteries, he went back to the Kyŏngsang area and never left it again (Sŏngch'ŏl 1994, 747-51; Sŏ 2004, 36). Interestingly, Haein-sa belongs to South Kyŏngsang Province's Hapch'ŏn district, which is Chŏn's native place. In contrast, although he was from Hwanghae Province, Chinul's activity is closely linked to Kilsang-sa 吉祥寺 (the future Susŏn-sa 修禪寺, later called Songgwang-sa), in Chŏlla Province, where he settled in 1197 and stayed until his demise, working at the creation of a new paradigm instead of reviving an old one like Sŏngch'ŏl. There is a long history of deeply entrenched hostility between the Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla Provinces, which was exacerbated by the crushing of the Kwangju Democratization Movement in May 1980. This history, along with the publication of Sŏngch'ŏl's *Sŏnmun chŏngno* and the *Ponji p'unggwang*⁶⁵ in December 1981 and 1982 respectively, led many a Chinul follower to perceive Sŏngch'ŏl's "coup" as the beginning of an all out doctrinal war aiming at Haein-sa's hegemony over Korean Buddhism.

More compelling perhaps than those geographical coordinates is the timing of Sŏngch'ŏl's life from 1967 onward, when he was appointed as Haein-sa's *pangjang* after practically three decades of life in solitude. Beside the fact that the real estate conflict between the celibate and the married monks was heading toward its end, thus bringing Buddhism to a state of relative calm, he may well have accepted that nomination because he was emboldened by the overall stabilization of the polity brought by Pak's administration. Furthermore, Sŏngch'ŏl's appointment as *chongjŏng* 宗正 (January 10, 1981) took place only a few months after Chŏn's inauguration as president (September 1, 1980) and his crackdown on Buddhism – about which Sŏngch'ŏl kept silent.⁶⁶ Finally, because of ailing health, Sŏngch'ŏl practically stopped exercising his duty as meditation master at the end of the 1986 summer retreat, even though he retained his *pangjang* title (Sŏngch'ŏl 1994, 751). Judging from the fact that he did not intervene to put an end to Sŏ Ŭihyŏn's infamous administration of the Chogyŏ-jong (1986-1994),⁶⁷ it can also be inferred that he could not fully play his role as *chongjŏng* anymore. In other words, about a year before South Korea approved the new constitution that would allow democratization,

65. See note 13.

66. See note 22.

67. See <http://blog.ohmynews.com/hanryang/214646>.

Sŏngch'ŏl's activity was drastically reduced.

From the aforementioned data, it can be seen that there are significant zones of overlap between the spatio-temporal coordinates of the ROK's dictatorship and Sŏngch'ŏl's activity in the second half of the twentieth century.

The sixth point of structural resonance between Sŏngch'ŏl and Presidents Pak and Chŏn is their imperviousness to criticism, which ultimately translated into their inability to perceive the signs of the times. Just as Pak failed to grasp how to react to the Pu-Ma minjung hangjaeng 釜馬民衆抗爭 of October 1979 and was finally assassinated (Heo, 25-6), Chŏn failed to understand that the drive for democratization would gain unstoppable momentum during the year preceding the hosting of the Seoul Olympic Games, and lead to the end of the ROK's dictatorship (Heo, 37-40). Similarly, even though he was begged in 1987 to say a few words in favor of the democratization movement as the supreme patriarch of the Chogyŏ order, Sŏngch'ŏl remained insensitive to all criticism as he categorically refused to do so, stating that he was a mountain monk. By choosing not to address the people's concerns at a major turning point in contemporary Korean history, he seems to have missed a unique opportunity to display his awareness of what was happening within the polity. Not surprisingly, his followers now have to struggle to provide a rational explanation for his uncompromising silence; and their task is significantly complicated when they try to maintain simultaneously that he was close to that polity.

In fact Sŏngch'ŏl's allegedly neutral silence at that time is all the more ironic since, as the third section of this essay has abundantly demonstrated, even the Buddha, to whose teaching he (Sŏngch'ŏl) claimed to return to,⁶⁸ did not hesitate to develop and maintain relations to kings whenever necessary, going as far as to ask one of them not to carry on armed revenge against his homeland. Moreover, from its inception onward, following the spirit of the *Agañña Suttanta*, Buddhism in Southeast Asia and elsewhere has not only adopted a way to conduct the *saṅgha* in concord with the polity, but has also been looking forward to the installation of an ideal *cakkavatti* – like Aśoka – ruling over a

68. This paragraph and the following ones do not intend to suggest that early and Aśokan Buddhism might be more true or authentic than Sŏngch'ŏl's polemics. Any such idealization of the past would be contrary to the spirit of Buddhism which “lacks any defining, unalterable essence (an atman, so to speak) and is itself the product of a complex of interdependent and ever-changing conditions” (Gregory 1987, 297). Rather, this section intends to show that Sŏngch'ŏl's polemics have not taken into account how early and Aśokan Buddhism were closely related to the polity, even as they claimed to go back to the Buddha Śākyamuni's teaching and way of life. In other words, although Sŏngch'ŏl's attempt to reform Korean Buddhism is based on a return to the historical Buddha's “original Buddhism,” it has obviously failed to see its political aspects. See note 5.

galactic polity. While not equivalent to the spirit of a modern democracy, all this indicates closeness to it rather than to dictatorship or tyranny.⁶⁹ Furthermore, since early in its history the *saṅgha* had to accept the intervention of heads of state to help it sort out – for better or worse – its internal conflicts. With the successive interventions of Presidents Rhee, Pak and Chŏn in its affairs, Korean Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century is far from having been an exception to that rule. As direct and decisive as they were, such state interventions rendered the *saṅgha*'s pretensions to political neutrality practically impossible.

Let us take, for example, Sŏngch'ŏl's silence at the time of the Oct. 27 crackdown and its aftermath.⁷⁰ Can that silence be purely interpreted as political neutrality, or was it motivated by other reasons? For instance, did Sŏngch'ŏl remain silent because as a *sansŭng* he was poorly informed about what had happened, or was it out of fear for his physical security? Was it out of prudence, as some maintain, to spare further persecution of Buddhism (Kim Sŏngch'ŏl, 22), or was it out of personal approval of Chŏn's actions? Granted, however, that the Buddha steered clear of politics to avoid disrupting the *saṅgha*'s practice, thus putting the safeguard of practice above everything else, why would Sŏngch'ŏl have kept an approving silence when practice had been seriously disrupted by the state-enforced raid on the Korean *saṅgha*? Could it be out of fear to compromise the broader peace and security provided by the state, even though it was a dictatorship, because without it overall practice would have been even more seriously disrupted? In fact, Sŏngch'ŏl and the Pongam-sa Kyŏlsa 鳳巖寺結社⁷¹ had to give up their practice in 1949 because of the Communist guerilla attacks taking place in the surrounding mountains, thus putting an end to the life of the community of monks intending to reform Korean Buddhism after Liberation (Wŏnt'aek 1995, 16). Sŏngch'ŏl also had to take refuge in the Pusan area during the Korean War, so he knew from firsthand experience how dramatic the consequences of war could be. In other words, even though he had renounced the world, the Tiger of Mount Kaya knew that the security of the country he lived in, including that of the Kaya massif where he practiced, depended upon the existence of a strong government with a powerful army. Accordingly, we may suppose that Sŏngch'ŏl was not willing to challenge Chŏn as long as he proved capable to provide overall security, even though he was far from being an ideal *cakkavatti*. But even if that hypothesis

69. According to Davids, the schism which gave birth to Mahāyāna was in part linked to differences in the conception of authority, the Vajjians wanting a less centralized hierarchy and more autonomy (Tambiah, 160-1, n. 2).

70. See note 22.

71. See note 5.

explaining Sŏngch'ŏl's silence about the Oct. 27 crackdown is correct, that silence cannot be considered neutral, because it obviously was the result of a political choice.

Finally, Sŏngch'ŏl's refusal to take a stand on the democratization movement under the pretext that he was a mountain monk also sounds ironic when we consider what the fourth section of this essay has clearly demonstrated: that Shenhui (through the *Platform Sūtra*), Dahui,⁷² Naong, T'aego⁷³ and Sŏsan⁷⁴ – in other words all the main masters quoted by Sŏngch'ŏl to back his rhetoric of immediacy – were deeply involved in political matters. As a result, the obstinate silence kept by the Tiger of Mount Kaya at a crucial point in time may appear, at best, as an enigma to be solved by historians of later generations or, at worse, as a staggering contradiction between his words and his deeds.

But more serious perhaps than Sŏngch'ŏl's silence on the Oct. 27 crackdown and the democratization movement is the fact that he also failed to understand the need of Korean Buddhism, at the dawn of a new era, for both doctrinal and practical diversity instead of Keyword Meditation absolutism. Some believe, without alluding to politics, that Sŏngch'ŏl's reform locked Korean Buddhism in the orbit of the Pongam-sa Kyŏlsa, which intended to go back to the Buddha's teaching as he and his companions understood it, thus rendering the tradition incapable of adapting to the modern world (Cho Sŏngt'aek 2011, 43). For Kim Chongin, “Sŏngch'ŏl's sudden/sudden doctrine, based as it is on a fundamentalist ideology, constituted the logical foundation for the emergency exit needed by Korean Buddhism” because it was “in a state of stagnation and decay such that it was incapable to overcome properly its heritage of oppression and the sudden changes of a new cultural environment” (Kim Chongin 2006, 337).

It is well worth noting that Sŏngch'ŏl's followers all too often display the same imperviousness to criticism and incapability to perceive the signs of the time as he did, using the rhetorics of immediacy and experience⁷⁵ to avoid all discussion and brush away the questions that could point to the great master's weaknesses and contradictions (Sŏ 2011, 94-5). Those two rhetorics are based

72. He is quoted thirteen times in the *Sŏnmun chŏngno* (Sŏ 2004, 319).

73. Although T'aego and Naong are each quoted only once in the *Sŏnmun chŏngno*, vol. 21 and 22 of the *Sŏllim kogyŏng ch'ongsŏ* respectively correspond to the translation of their sayings (ŏrok 語錄) (ibid. 318).

74. Sŏsan too is quoted only once in the *Sŏnmun chŏngno*; however, to prove that Sŏsan advocated the sudden/sudden teaching like Huineng and himself, Sŏngch'ŏl has added the annotated translation of the former's *Sŏn'gyogyŏl* 禪教訣 at the end of the *Yukcho tan'gyŏng hyŏnt'o p'yŏnyŏk* (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987c, 291-310).

75. The former expression has been coined by Faure (1991) and the latter by Sharf (2000).

on a subjectivism that accepts no point of view other than that of Sŏngch'ŏl. In the resulting intransigent discourse, everything proceeds from the ineffable experience of awakening that he is assumed to have made – and all the more important since he is a self-appointed master, as if the egg of his experience necessarily came before the chicken of his discourse (Sŏ 2007b, 472-83). But such a subjectivism fails to see that there exists no absolute interpretation of awakening experiences, because those interpretations are always conditioned by causality, i.e. by defined spatio-temporal coordinates, including socio-political ones (Hyŏnŭng 2009, 227-9). Sŏngch'ŏl was not completely unaware of this pitfall. To avoid it, he could have chosen not to talk at all like Vimalakīrti, but he did not so choose (Sŏngch'ŏl 1987a, 14). Consequently, whenever he opened his mouth he spoke a discourse conditioned, at least in part, by the coordinates of the polity of which he was a member. Interestingly, Luca points to the fact that in South Korea under the military dictatorship (1960-1988) the most successful religious groups actively supported anti-communism and capitalism, and never opposed military duty or criticized the working law.⁷⁶ She adds that the resulting consensus perfectly matched the American worldview during the Cold War (Luca 2011, 326-9). Even though Sŏngch'ŏl never adopted such a clear political stance, all the points of structural resonance developed in this chapter, especially the third point, demonstrate either directly or indirectly that the structure of his discourse espoused that of the dictatorship. It may be, at least in part, due to the fact that Sŏngch'ŏl was aware not only of the limits of his discourse but also, to a certain extent, of the contradictions he inevitably fell into, that he finally denied himself and his teaching in his *yŏlbansong*.⁷⁷ However, the fact that the Tiger of Mount Kaya had been more or less “divinized” by the media at the time of his dismissal – with its constant use of expressions like “Sŏngch'ŏl *k'ŭnsŭnim*,” “*K'ŭnsŭnim t'ansaeng*”⁷⁸ or “*Uri sidae ŭi Puch'ŏ Sŏngch'ŏl k'ŭnsŭnim*” – have greatly contributed to the validation of both his discourse and the subjectivism it proceeds from by rendering all criticism out of the question right from the start.

This last section has resorted to the description of the six points of structural resonance between Sŏngch'ŏl's doctrine and the political context in which it was taught. Though none of the points of structural resonance can adequately support the argument of this paper when standing alone, the significance of each one grows exponentially into a compelling constellation when they are put

76. See note 27.

77. See note 27.

78. A term mostly used when talking about the birth of an extraordinary human being.

in relation to one another. Together, they suggest that the overall structure of Sŏngch'ŏl's life and sudden/sudden teaching mirrors in many regards the dictatorship under which he lived and taught. At the same time it is in no way reducible to it, since the essence of most of these facts, when considered separately, is not specific of the Korean sudden/gradual debate. For instance, the demonizing and antagonizing mechanisms described in the third point of structural resonance are legitimizing techniques which pervade the entire history of the sudden/gradual debate. They can also be considered part and parcel of politics worldwide.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, when examined in the context of the contemporary Korean sudden/gradual debate and in relation to the overall picture, those mechanisms of misrepresentation of one's rival take on an undeniable significance, the same of which can be said of the other five points of structural resonance. The resulting constellation thus allows us to answer the question raised at the end of the second section: "Is it or is it not possible to extract oneself from the political dimension of the polity, while otherwise remaining in touch with some of its other facets as Sŏngch'ŏl attempted to do?" In view of all the aforementioned evidence, although there has never been either a red phone connection nor any other specific form of contact between the presidential Blue House and Paengnyŏn-am,⁸⁰ it clearly appears that the Way of the state to which the Tiger of Mount Kaya belonged paradoxically caught up with his Way as a *sansŭng* (山僧道).

World Conqueror and World Renouncer

In his attempt to reform Korean Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century, T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl proclaimed a return to the Buddha Śākyamuni's teaching and promoted the sudden/sudden doctrine of awakening to the Middle Path through the practice of Keyword Meditation. As a result, he condemned as unorthodox Pojo Chinul's sudden/gradual approach and gave rise to the ongoing Korean sudden/gradual debate. By doing so the Tiger of Mount Kaya

79. Newt Gingrich, for instance, perfectly masters these techniques.

80. It is, in part, because of that absence of obvious contact that this article has not attempted to trace circuits of influence or imitation. In order to strengthen the points adduced here, further research could examine whether there are indirect connections with, for instance, the vigorous hatred of communism among – and the reactionary politics of – Japanese Buddhists before 1945, or the collaboration of the Taiwanese Buddhist community with the "anticommunist" politics of the period of martial law in Taiwan. Indirect connections with Japanese Buddhism through books are probable since Sŏngch'ŏl could read Japanese fluently. He may also have been to Japan for studies, although this point remains unclear.

placed his reform under the direct authority of the historical Buddha and the Sino-Korean Connection, which includes the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and Linji Yixuan as well as T'aego Pou and Sŏsan Taesa. Moreover, by presenting the Buddha and all of the aforementioned masters as unconditional promoters of the sudden-sudden doctrine like himself, Sŏngch'ŏl attempted to gain the legitimacy he otherwise lacked as a self-appointed master. In order to understand better why Sŏngch'ŏl chose this strategy and not another as the foundation of his overhaul of Korean Buddhism, this essay has set the sudden/gradual debate in the broad historic and political context in which it is embedded. Because of Sŏngch'ŏl's reputation as a world renouncer who adamantly steered clear of politics, almost no research had chosen this angle of approach until now.

Adopting a diachronic perspective, this essay underscores that the Buddha Śākyamuni, early Buddhism and Aśokan Buddhism have all been in close touch with rulers and/or aimed at the enthronement of a dhamma-wheel-turning form of governance. It also highlights the fact that early Buddhism emphasized both the gradual and the sudden characters of the awakening process as well as a variety of practices. Furthermore, surveying the history of the sudden/gradual debate in China and Korea, this essay demonstrates that it has never been purely doctrinal; on the contrary, it has always been closely related to sociopolitical developments. Indeed, in all cases the sudden/sudden doctrine has been used, with or without the support of rulers, as a means to weaken or even suppress one's adversaries in order to achieve supremacy within the tradition, or otherwise simply to assert the status of one's school or of the Buddhist tradition within the polity.

When examined from a synchronic perspective, it appears beyond doubt that the contemporary Korean sudden/gradual debate is no exception to that rule of connection with sociopolitical developments. To be sure, even though Sŏngch'ŏl lived as a world renouncer and apparently did not get state support, the reform he led intended to enhance the social and thus also political status of Buddhism and Buddhist monks after centuries of oppression, and to suppressing the sudden/gradual paradigm so as to reinforce Haein-sa's prestige within Korean Buddhism, if not its domination over it. But over and above that, this essay points at a constellation of six points of structural resonance between the spatio-temporal coordinates of Sŏngch'ŏl's activity and the overall organization of his discourse, on the one hand, and the way of proceeding of the state under which he carried his overhaul of Buddhism on the other. This strongly suggests that in many regards the spirit of Sŏngch'ŏl's reformation was shaped by the political and geostrategic landscape in which it was imbedded. In other words, it appears that the contemporary Korean sudden/gradual debate

mirrors the socio-political tensions resulting from the division of the Korean peninsula into two at the time of Liberation as well as the global anticommunist atmosphere of the Cold War. The almost constant risk of an all out nuclear war which defined that context may also contribute to explain why the sudden/gradual debate has reached in South Korea a degree of exacerbation unheard of elsewhere before. At this point, nothing allows us to know where Sŏngch'ŏl stood politically; but, even as he placed his reform under the authority of the Buddha Śākyamuni and the Sino-Korean Connection, he displayed an overall understanding of Buddhist doctrine and practice which appears to be shaped by the world-view of the world conquerors who guaranteed the peace and security of the country in which he lived and practiced as a world renouncer.

There is no doubt that T'oeng Sŏngch'ŏl was an exceptionally great monk (Sŏ 2012, 52-3); nevertheless some aspects of his legacy are definitely controversial. History will not forget, for instance, his silence at the time of the 1980 Oct. 27 crackdown and at the peak of the democratization movement in 1987. Accordingly, the best way to transmit an authentic image of him to posterity may be to acknowledge those aspects instead of trying to deny or justify them. To be sure, he was connected to the polity, but obviously not in the way some of his followers would like future generations to believe. His hermeneutics of Buddhism, i.e. his interpretation of the tradition in the second half of the twentieth century, thoroughly reflects a pre-democratization spirit, not a post-democratization one. As we are at the dawn of the 25th anniversary of Korean democratization, it could be of the utmost importance when envisaging the future of the Korean peninsula, of Korean Buddhism and of the worldwide propagation of Keyword Meditation, to keep in mind the socio-political context in which the contemporary Korean sudden/gradual debate was born and which it reflects.

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