

High Priest Hyujōng

—Unity of Zen and Doctrinal Buddhism—

U CHŎNG-SANG

Hyujōng's real name was Ch'oe Yō-sin and later he made many pennames for himself such as Sōsan, another name for Mt. Myohyang in North P'yōngan Province in which he lived long and to which he frequently retired.

As was usual in his time, there is an anecdote concerning his birth. His parent were in their fifties and without children. On a summer day his mother was dozing perched on the edge of the *maru*, or wooden floor, and met in her brief dream a hoary woman who told her: "Do not be surprised. I came to inform you of your impending pregnancy, a child destined to become a hero." When she awakened, the old woman was nowhere to be seen. It was a dream.

"What an absurd dream!" she said to herself. "To an old woman over fifty..." So saying she blushed with shame on the one hand and on the other with secret joy. She had a secret longing for an heir.

The next spring, the 15th year of King Chungjong's reign (1520), she gave birth to a son. Nothing had given so much delight to her husband, Ch'oe Se-ch'ang. During the reign of King Yōnsan when Se-ch'ang's father-in-law was implicated in a court plot and exiled, Se-ch'ang's father was also implicated and was stricken out of the *yang-*

ban registry. The family recovered their honor eight years later, but Se-ch'ang was living late life in his native town, Anju, as a local government official.

He named his only son Yō-sin, meaning "trust yourself." He so named his son because he was at the time so old that he could no longer prepare the way to success for him and did not expect to rely on him. Three years later, Se-ch'ang also had a revealing dream, in which an old man appeared and said: "I came to pay my respect to 'the child priest.' Please christen him 'Cloud and Stork.'" He asked the meaning and was told: "He is destined to wander about without settling in any one place, like cloud or like a stork." He did not expect the prophesy to prove right. But he sometimes called his son Unhak, Cloud and Stork, and at other times teased his cute baby as "the child priest." As he was growing up, his habit of play was different from others; he piled up stones and called them Buddha and built sand hills and called them pagodas.

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As prophesied he became a Buddhist priest, but it was more due to the unfortunate circumstances in which he grew up than to the prediction that he became a priest. He was born and grew up in a family not well-to-do but with the loving care of his parents. However from his ninth year, family misfortunes ensued one after another. He was bereaved of his mother at the age of nine, and of his father the following year. Later he wrote the following in his memorial ode to his parents: "In the morning when my mother died when I was nine years of age, she called my name three times and I cried bitterly. I recall the day my father passed away, the evening my father embraced me tightly in his bosom under the bedding and passed away before I realized it."

Thus he became an orphan in a year. It may be that from this time on he might have felt the emptiness of life and the longing for eternal life. At the time the magistrate of Anju, Yi Sa-jung heard the sorry fate of this orphan and sent for him. The boy composed and presented the following poem to the magistrate:

"The sun began to decline over the tall pavilion congealed in perfume.
And the snow that blankets the world looks like flowers."

This impressed him as much as rumor had led him to believe. He adopted him as his son. Shortly afterward, he came up to Seoul when his foster father was reassigned to the central government in Seoul. Thus he was able to enroll in the Sönggyungwan, the state college.

At the age of 15, he applied for the civil service examination for the first degree licentiate (Chinsa) but failed. Roused at the failure, along with a few of his unsuccessful colleagues, he left for the Honam area to meet Pak Sang, his teacher, who was on an official tour of the area. When he arrived there, Pak Sang had already left for Seoul. Dismayed at the news, the boys decided to have a sightseeing tour of the places of natural and historic interest in the province.

If Hyujöng successfully passed the civil service examination, he might have become a priest considerably later or not at all. This trip to the southwestern province with his

ill-starred friends became a decisive impetus for him to become a follower of Buddha.

The boys wandered around the large and small Buddhist temples scattered in and around Mt. Chiri and met an old priest, Sungin, in a small hermitage. He at once recognized the unusual features of Sösan and said the following, more to himself than to anyone in particular: "You have an unusual body and spirit. If you change your mind and study Buddhism you may forget eternally the worldly gains and be free from pain. However hard you try in your life, the reward for travail is but an empty name. What a pity for you, Confucian student!"

Sösan asked him: "What do you mean by studying Buddhism?" "Well," the old priest said, "the meaning cannot be explained in words." And he produced several Buddhist scriptures which he had never seen before and told him to read them carefully. What Sösan learned and practised were the sayings and deeds of Confucius and Chu Hsi, and his supreme goal was to become a high-ranking government official complete with learning and virtue. However, Sungin's suggestive sayings and his cursory reading of Buddhist sutras opened a completely different world before him in which what mattered most was neither honor nor material gain but the eternal life in the world of Buddha. He at once recognized the uselessness of his Confucian studies. Reading the change in his mind, Sungin introduced Sösan to High Priest Yönggwan, a very famous Buddhist of the time.

Left alone behind his colleagues, Sösan became a novice under Priest Yönggwan, practising Zen meditation and studying the deep meaning of various Buddhist sutras. After six years of apprenticeship under Yönggwan, he suddenly obtained "enlightenment" which was beyond verbal explanation. Exalted at his sudden awakening, he composed the following poem:

"At the cooing of a cuckoo I looked out the window.

Isn't it my native country, the spring hills: that fill my eyes?"

The following day he composed another poem:

"On my way home from the well with

water, I turn my face.

To see countless green mountains in the white clouds."

On the third day, he had his hair shaved off with a silver knife and took a vow of celibacy: "Even if I were to live my whole life as a stupid and illiterate person, I shall never become a Confucian teacher who lives by deciphering the meaning of characters."

With Sungin as his mentor and Puyong as his teacher of Buddhist Law, Sōsan became a Buddhist priest. He was given the Buddhist name, Hyujōng. Another of his pennames was Ch'ōngho.

After the ceremony of ordination, he spent several years in the Tosol-san and Turyu-san Mountains, Samch'ōl Cave and Taesūng-am Hermitage, and then set out for a tour of scenic places. One day he was passing through a village called Yoksong-ch'on on his way to his friend's. Here he obtain great enlightenment at hearing the crowing of a cock at high noon. He picked up a fallen leaf and wrote the following poem:

"Even if my hair turns white,

My mind stays young. The ancients have already said:

Now hearing the crow of a cock.

A man is able to finish a great work."

Later this poem was called the "Ode of Obtaining Enlightenment."

Thereafter he spent half a year in the Odae-san Mountains, one year in the Diamond Mountains, and one summer at Mt. Hyang-no-bong. Seven or eight years passed in his wandering like cloud and stork since he left Mt. Turyu-san.

During the times King Myōngjong succeeded Chungjong and there were signs favorable for the revival of Buddhism. Queen Munjong, the regent for the young king, was a devout Buddhist. She reversed the anti-Buddhism policy of the previous reigns and helped re-establish the two Orders of Zen and Doctrinaire Buddhism and restored the state examination system for Buddhist clergy. Confucian scholars rose against the move, but Queen Munjong proclaimed the rehabilitation of Buddhism in 1550.

The first state examination for Buddhist clergy was held the following year, 1551, in which Sōsan came out the first of the 406

successful applicants. Thus he was awarded the title of Tacsōn, the lowest grade in the hierarchy, and was promoted to Chūngdōk in 1553. He spent the summer of 1553 in Tondo-am Hermitage at Mt. Diamond, the hermitage located among soaring peaks of rock formations. From here he started for the Kwandong region. Passing through the famed Myōngsasimni, or ten-li stretch of bright sand, he composed the following poem: "The five-colored cloud over the Fairy Land Makes rain on the sobbing sand.

The flowers of wild rose have all gone.

We are three priests but there is only one ten-thousand-house."

Ten-thousand house refers to one of the three priests who happened to have the name, Chang Man-ho, meaning ten thousand houses.

The year when he turned 35 years of age, he returned to his native country after a long absence. Despite the long passage of time, his memories of miserable boyhood days were as fresh as ever. He was alone in his half-demolished house when a village girl passing by the house with her grandfather peeped through the broken window to find a strange man sitting there alone. The old man asked who he was, thinking it very strange to find a man in an abandoned house. It took some time before he could recognize the man was Yō-sin, the poor boy who had been orphaned some two and half decades ago. Despite the strong urging of the old man, Sōsan resolved to spend the evening in his old house, and before leaving the house he wrote a poem on the wall:

"Returning to my native village after 30 years

The villagers have gone, leaving the houses and the village in ruin.

The green mountain refuses to say any thing and the sun sets over the spring sky.

A cooing of cuckoo makes me sadder."

In the following year when he was 36 years of age, he promoted to chief secretary of the Doctrinal Order and three months later he was appointed concurrently as the chief secretary of the Zen Order. In the spring of the same year he paid a visit to Pongun-sa Temple, which was then headed by Priest Pou and under the patronage of Queen

Munjong. Later he became the chief of this temple, succeeding Pou. However, since he became the head priest of a temple and chief secretary of the two Orders of Buddhism, the knowledge dawned on him that the official duties imposed on him were not the concern of a priest who vowed to abandon worldly honor and wealth. Two years later, he resigned from his official duties on the pretext of eye disease and went back to Diamond Mountain.

The following poem entitled "Ode to Three Dreams," which he composed during his stay in the Diamond Mountain eloquently tells his spiritual attitude:

"The host tells his dream to the guest.

The guest tells his own to the host.

Now the two who are saying their dreams.

Are they not also in a dream?"

Leaving this poem behind him, he climbed Mt. Hyangnong which commanded a superb view below him, so grand and superb that he was ashamed of his life as the chief priest and the chief secretary of the Order. The following poem entitled "Hyangnong-bong Poem" shows how he felt at the time on the top of the high mountain:

"The capital cities of the world are but an ant's nest,

Heroes of the ancient times but mayflies.

The moon shines through the window on my clean pillow,

And the sound of ceaseless pine wind is ever more leisurely."

He never thought this poem would implicate him in a conspiracy plot in later years.

He left Diamond Mountain and moved back to a hermitage on Mt. Turyu. When he was living there, a Confucian scholar in the neighborhood paid a visit to him at the hermitage. He said half-derisively: "You seem in needy circumstances compared to the pomp of your former years, and gloomier." "Well," Sōsan said after a hearty laugh, "even before I became the chief secretary, I have slept on the pillow of Mt. Diamond with a single robe and a bowl. Now I have laid myself on the pillow of Mt. Turyu with a surplice and a begging bowl. Since I have lived my life in the mountains, not in the mundane world, worldly honor does not delight me nor

the loss of it make me sad. These are things of the mundane world, not the world of mind."

In October 1589, an abortive revolt was staged by Chōng Yō-lip from Chōnju, which was soon pacified. But the rank and file Buddhist clergy were arrested in the wake of the revolt because many of them took part in the revolt. Many Buddhist temples scattered around Mt. Kyeryong and Kuwōl in fact served as rebels' hide-outs, which put Buddhism in a very difficult position. As the event developed, many who had relations with Buddhism suffered directly or indirectly. The public security office arrested a priest by the name of Muōp who during interrogation implicated Sōsan in the incident by citing his "Hyangnong-bong Poem" and also falsely accused Sōsan's trusted disciple, Yujōng (Samyōngdang). Thus Sōsan was arrested on Mt. Myohyang and Yujōng in Kangnūng.

Accused as he was of sedition, Sōsan had no complaints and his answers to interrogation were clear, logical and perfectly calm. In no way did he look like a man who could plot sedition. King Sōnjo sent for his book of poems for his personal examination, only to be struck with his outstanding talent in poetry and loyalty. The king had him acquitted and sent him a piece of bamboo painting in monochrome, asking him to compose a poem. Thus freed from custody, he composed the following couplet in his deep appreciation of the king's grace:

"A bamboo branch from Hsieh-hsiang

King's brush made its leaves grow.

If I, a mountain priest, carry it with me

Each of the leaves will bear the sound of autumn."

In answer to this poem, King Sōnjo composed the following poem:

"The leaves are given birth by the tip of my brush,

The root did not come from the earth.

Even the moon will not cast its shadow

Nor the wind make any sound."

King Sōnjo awarded him sumptuous gifts in recognition of the troubles and hardships he had undergone. Since then Hyujōng's name became widely known.

Three years after the abortive revolt of Chōng Yō-lip, the Japanese invaded Korea in 1592. Landing at Pusan on April 14, the

Japanese army captured Pusan and Tongnae and moved up to Seoul. The king and his entourage fled as far north as the Amnok River. It was after the King's entourage reached Üju that the king received news of the first victory, which, however, was not won by the regular army but a militia unit led by Cho Hön. A detailed report said that Priest Kihodang played a significant role in the battle. This news reminded the king of Hyujöng. He immediately sent for him at Mt. Myohyang.

Hyujöng was then an old man in his seventies. At the admonition of the king, he made a vow before him that he would mobilize all the priests and had those who could not fight pray for expulsion of the enemy and the able bodied priests fight the enemy with him. The king appointed him as the chief of the 16 Orders of Buddhism in eight provinces and ordered the creation of a priest militia unit under him. Thus appointed as the priest-general, Hyujöng sent out appeals to his fellow priests to rise against the enemy to rescue the kingdom.

Thus aroused, Sösan's disciple Samyöngdang (Yujöng) raised a priest militia unit in Kangwön Province and fought his way to P'yöngyang; Priest Kihodang, who participated in the recapture of Ch'öngju under Cho Hön, fought the enemy in the Diamond Mountain; Priest Ch'oyong rose in the Honam area; and Priest Haeon in the Yöngnam area. Later Samyöngdang joined force with Sösan and participated in the recapture of P'yöngyang. Priest Kihodang was killed in the Kumsan Battle and Priest Ch'oyong participated in the battle at Haengju Fortress under General Kwön Yul.

Finally the Ming Chinese expeditionary forces helped the loyal troops and the militia units to drive out the enemy. The king returned to Seoul the following year. Confucian officials were jealous of Sösan's frequent and easy access to the palace. Some complained that Sösan had more frequent audience with the king than a minister. But his name was known even to the enemy camp and the Chinese expeditionary forces. The Chinese general wrote the following panegyric:

"You never cared for honor and profit.
But concentrated on the study of Budd-

him.

But on hearing the urgency of the kingdom

You came down from the mountain in a hurry."

Two years later, he resigned from the military services due to his old age and entrusted the duties to his disciples, Samyöngdang and Ch'oyong, and returned once again to his hermitage in Mt. Myohyang. In recognition of his great services at the time of national crisis, the king bestowed on him the highest title of the Buddhist order, and had memorial shrines built for him. The first shrine thus erected was the P'yoch'ung-sa in Miryang, birthplace of Samyöngdang in which the tablets of Sösan, Samyöngdang and Kihodang were enshrined. Another memorial shrine was built in Taehüng-sa Temple where Sösan's belongings were preserved. The third one was built in Mt. Myohyang where he lived the longest. His portraits and memorial stones were enshrined and erected in other major Buddhist temples of the country in later years.

After a short sojourn in Mt. Myohyang, he moved to Sögwang-sa Temple and wrote *Unbong Sögwang-sa-gi*, the chronicle of Sögwang-sa Temple in Mt. Unbong, which described in detail the association between the founding king of the Yi dynasty and Priest Muhak and the history of the temple. At the time he wrote this chronicle, which was not included in his collected works, he was 79 years old. The book is a very important historical document and valued for his handwriting.

Time was running out for Sösan. It was on the morning of January 22, 1604. He called all the priests in the Wönjok-am Hermitage on Mt. Myohyang around him and gave them the last of his preaching. After the ceremony was over, he had his portrait brought before him and wrote the following on the back of the painting: "The portrait was I eighty years ago, and eighty years later I became the portrait." And then he composed another poem in praise of Buddha:

"Everything that calculates and schemes
Is but a flake of snow that falls into a hot brazier.

An ox fashioned with earth goes over the

water.

And then the earth and the heaven were broken in pieces."

Again he wrote two letters, one for his beloved disciple Samyōngdang and the other for Ch'oyong who could not join him at his last moment, and then it is said that he passed away as he was seated.

Sōsan's philosophy is best expressed in his *Sōn-ga-gugam*, or *The Paragon of a Zen Priest*. It is an introduction to the Zen sect which was widely known in China and Japan. His motive and purpose in writing the book are well illustrated in the following quotations of his preface:

"In ancient times, those who studied Buddhism did not say what Buddha did not say, and did not do what Buddha did not do. Therefore what they cherished most was only the holy writings contained in sutras. However, what the students of Buddha recite nowadays are the writings the conventional scholars recite, and what they want to learn are the poems of scholar-officials. It is very sad to think that these are what the students of Buddha cherish the most. Although I myself am none too good a man, I have selected, in order to lessen the burden of my juniors with which they will plough the massive collection of Buddhist scriptures, about one hundred most essential sentences from the scriptures. Now that I have finished the selection, the sentences are very simple but replete with meaning...."

In the beginning of the book intended to establish a unified Order of Buddhism, he explained the general idea of Buddhism in the following words: "There is a thing which is by nature infinite, bright, supernatural, and ethereal, with no beginning and end, cannot be named or expressed in shape."

In *Sōngyo-sōk*, *Explanation on Zen and*

Doctrinal Buddhism, which was written later than the above book, his views and thought came out clearer. In the book he comparatively analyzed Zen and Doctrinal Buddhism and pronounced that the Doctrinal sect is but a means to enter the Zen sect. He said Zen is the mind of Buddha and the Doctrinal is the word of Buddha. The word must go into the mind; thus one must go through the Doctrinal into the Zen. In this book he established his firm conviction on Buddhism and explained the fundamental tenet of unified Buddhism, which was then divided into the Doctrinal and the Zen sects, one blaming the other. His idea of going into Zen through the Doctrinal sect meant that Buddhism is one that cannot be divided into two. His idea was not a novel one but his strong advocacy, of the unity of the two sects almost brought them into one, and many studied the Zen and the Doctrinal schools at the same time in order to achieve Buddhahood.

Sōsan's idea of the unity of Zen and the Doctrinal school derived from Priest Pyōksōng who dwelt on Zen but did not abandon the Doctrinal, and Priest Puyong, his mentor, who, starting with the Doctrinal, later reached the conclusion that the essence of Buddhism lay outside the Doctrinal. His idea was not new, but it was he alone who could unify the two opposing sects of Buddhism which persisted since the previous dynasty. His position in the history of Korean Buddhism is eminent, and his presence marked a turning period in the Yi dynasty Buddhism.

His other books include *Sōngyo-gyōl* (the Secrets of the Zen and the Doctrinal schools), and *Samga-gugam* (Paragons of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism), *Ch'ōnghodang-jip*, (Collected Works of Ch'ōnghodang), and others.