

- Shigeno 重野
Shiji 史記
 Shin Ch'ae-ho 申采浩
 Shin T'ae-yun 申泰允
 Sain-to shrines 神社
 Shuantu (Korean: Hyōndo) 玄菟
 shin 神
 shin sech'c 新史位
 shin sahak 新史學
Shindan minsu 神檀民史
Shindan shilgi 神檀實記
Shin'ganhoe 新幹會
 Shin'gung Military School 新興武官學校
Shinminhoe - 新民會
 Shinshi 神市
 Sima Qian 司馬遷
 Sōgando 西間島
 Soja River 濔子河
 Son Chin-t'ae 孫晉泰
 Sōn'gyo 仙教
 Sōnbi 鮮卑
Sōsarok 西徒錄
 Sōyung 徐戎
 Sukshin 肅愼
 T'aebae'kkuk 太白國
 Tae Cho-yōng 大詐榮
Taedong ch'anggo 大東掌攷
Taedong sagang 大東史綱
Taedong yōksa 大東歷史
 Taejonggyō 大宗教
 Taen'g River 大凌河
 T'annaguk 耽羅國
Tan'gi gosa 檀奇古史
 Tan'guk 檀國
 Tan'gun'eyo 檀君教
- Tanjo saso* 檀祖事考
 t'ashim 他心
 T'ojok 土族
Toksa shillon 讀史新論
 t'ong 通
 Tongi 東夷
 Tongjesa 同濟社
 Tongnip hyōphoe 獨立協會
 Tongsa 東史
Tongsa chōryō 東史節要
Tongsa kangmok 東史綱目
 ūiri 義理
 Ūiji Mundok 乙支文德
Ūiji Mundok chōn 乙支文德傳
 Ūisa Treaty 乙巳條約
 Usan'guk 于山國
 Wiman 衛滿
Writings of Yimbingshi 欽水室全集
 (Korean: Ūmbingshil)
 Yemaek 濊羅
 Yi Ch'ōng-won 李滄源
 Yi Chong-hwi 李種徽
 Yi Ik 李穰
 Yi Kwang-su 李光素
 Yi Kōn-bang 李建芳
 Yi Kōn-ch'ang 李北昌
 Yi Pūg-man 李蒲滿
 Yi Sang-ryong 李相龍
 Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣
 Yi T'aejo 李太祖
 Yi Won-t'ae 李源台
 Yōjin 女眞
 yōjōn 列傳
 yōnp'yo 年表
 yuhoe 儒會

Sōngch'ōl's Radical Subitism

Mark Mueller*

1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the current sudden/gradual debate in Korean Buddhism. In particular, I look at the sudden-enlightenment sudden-cultivation (*tono-torsu*) theory of Master Sōngch'ōl, the present patriarch of the Korean *Chogye* Order. After a brief look at the background of the debate, I examine the historical, philosophical and religious dimensions of Sōngch'ōl's theory.

In my examination of the historical aspect, I attempt to uncover the basic premises of Sōngch'ōl's claim that his view of *tono-torsu* represents the orthodox teachings of most of the Chinese Sōn (Chinese; Ch'an, Japanese: Zen) School. When considering the philosophical aspect of Sōngch'ōl's thought, I look at the way that Sōngch'ōl defines enlightenment. I then analyze Sōngch'ōl's treatment of the relationship between enlightenment, ignorance and cultivation. When looking at the soteriological dimensions, the focus is on Sōngch'ōl's interpretation of the Buddhist path. In order to do this, I divide my treatment into four aspects of Buddhist cultivation which are particularly relevant to the sudden/gradual debate, namely, effort, faith, knowledge and skill in means.

In my conclusion, I briefly examine the significance of the historical, philosophical and soteriological dimensions of Sōngch'ōl's theory.

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Seoul Journal of Korean Studies, Vol. 5, pp. 105-126, 1992.

2. The History of the Sudden/Gradual Debate

Although it has been said that the sudden/gradual debate has its roots in India, the debate developed mainly in China. Actually, the sudden/gradual dichotomy can be said to have already existed in classical Chinese thought: Confucianism advocating a gradual approach to personal cultivation, and Taoism emphasizing intuition. Tao-sheng (355-434), a Buddhist monk who was greatly influenced by Taoism, is said to have been the first person to propose the theory of sudden enlightenment. Many see this as the beginnings of Sön thinking. Hui-kuan, a contemporary of Tao-sheng, is credited with the first hermeneutical scheme comparing the different schools. Since he subsumed the "sudden teaching" within his tenet-classification system, he may be said to be one of the first gradualist in the Sinitic sudden/gradual debate. Later, Fa-yao (401-476) synthesized the positions of Tao-sheng and Hui-kuan.

The sudden/gradual dichotomy was used from early on in a hermeneutical context. The doctrine of *upāya* (skill in means) provided the basis on which the sudden/gradual distinction was made in the classification systems (*p'an-chiao*) of the Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai Schools. The use of expedients was considered to be characteristic of a gradual approach.

The sudden/gradual debate later appeared in the nascent Sön movement. In 750, Ho-se Shen-hui (670-762) began his campaign against Northern Sön. Shen-hui claimed that the Northern School advocated gradual enlightenment, whereas the Southern School advocated sudden enlightenment and emphasized the non-duality of enlightenment and enlightenment. Shen-hui's emphasis on non-dualistic theoretical formulations led later Sön authors to fanatically reject all dualistic, goal-oriented approaches to enlightenment.¹ Sudden-awakening eventually came to have the force of a slogan, while gradualism became a disparaging term.

The legendary *Platform Sutra* verses have become the *locus classicus* for the sudden/gradual debate. The view of cultivation expressed in Hui-neng's verse came to be regarded, by all later Sön schools, as the correct Sön position on sudden enlightenment. However, it should be remembered that these verses were not an important part of the debate until the middle of the ninth century.²

1. The sudden/gradual debate was also the issue discussed at the famous "Council of Lhasa", which purportedly took place between 792 and 794.

2. McRae, in his article "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch'an Buddhism", (ed. by Gregory, Peter, *Sudden and Gradual*, Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1987) says that the traditional verses attributed to Hui-neng and Shen-hui should not be used to describe either the historical or doctrinal development of early Sö Buddhism.

2-1. In Korea

In Korea, the sudden/gradual debate has formed the background for the rivalry between the Sön Schools and the Kyo (scholastic) Schools. The antagonism between the adherents of Sön and Kyo has a long history. Beginning with Wonhyo (617-686), various attempts have been made to unite the Korean schools within a single tradition. On the other hand, adherents of Korean Sön have maintained the traditional idea of Sön as a "unique tradition". An antagonism between the Kyo and Sön schools eventually developed.

In the 11th century, Master Üich'ön (1055-1101) attempted to unite Sön and Kyo within Ch'önt'ae (T'ien-t'ai) thought. However, this attempt ultimately failed, perhaps because of Üich'ön's failure to provide a complete treatment of Sön in his thought.

Master Chinul (1158-1210) later brought Sön and Kyo together using Li Tung-hsüan's interpretation of Sön.³ His synthesis of Sön and scholasticism culminated in his theory of sudden-enlightenment gradual-cultivation (*tono-chömsu*). Master Pou (1301-1382), more commonly referred to as T'aego, is a key figure in the Korean Sön tradition. He went to China and received the orthodox Sön transmission of the Linchi lineage from Master Shih-wu (1272-1352). T'aego's lineage is well documented; consequently, almost all later Korean Sön masters have attempted to trace their lineage through him. In modern times, the most vocal advocate of T'aego's lineage is the present leader of the Chogye Order, Söngch'öl.

2-2. The Modern Korean Debate: Master Söngch'öl (1912-)

Toeong Söngch'öl was born in Kyöngnam Province, South Korea in 1912. He was ordained in 1936 and spent the following years doing austere practice in various meditation halls throughout the country. In 1967, he became the abbot of Haein-sa. In 1976, he published *Han'guk Bulgyöi Bömmaek*,⁴ a book in which the master attempts to prove that T'aego's lineage represents the orthodox Sön

3. Tsung-mi (780-841) was a Tang Dynasty monk. He was both the fifth patriarch of the Hua-yen Sect and a patriarch of Ho-se Shen-hui's lineage. Li Tung-hsüan (fl.700) is an obscure figure in the early history of the Hua-yen School. His practice-oriented approach had a profound influence on the Korean and Japanese Buddhist traditions.

4. Throughout the remainder of the paper, the following abbreviations will be used for the following works:

SM *Sönmun-jöngro* 禪門正統 (Seoul: Pulgwang, 1979)
 RG *H'an'guk Bulgyöi Bömmaek* 韓國佛教史 法脈 (Seoul: Pulgwang, 1987)
 SL *Sölim Böpin* 蘇林寶典 (Seoul: Ch'anggyönggak, 1987)

transmission in Korea. In this work, he also attempts to refute claims that Chinul was part of an orthodox Sŏn lineage. In 1982, Sŏngch'ŏi published *Sŏnmin-jŏngno*, in which the main source for his argument for sudden-enlightenment and sudden-cultivation (*tono-tonsu*) against the sudden-enlightenment and gradual-cultivation (*tono-chŏmsu*) of Chinul can be found. Sŏngch'ŏi has also translated and commented on a series of Sŏn texts in order to make the teachings of the Sŏn patriarchs more readily accessible. In addition, many of Sŏngch'ŏi's dharma-talks have been published in book form.⁵

Since 1980, Sŏngch'ŏi has been the Grand Patriarch (*Chong-jŏng*)⁶ of the Korean Chogye Order. The Chogye Order presently regards Chinul as its Founding Patriarch. Therefore, the denunciation of Chinul by the head of the Chogye Order is a radical move which has met much opposition.

2-3. Chinul (1158-1210)

One must understand the key role that Chinul has played in Korean Buddhism in order to comprehend the radical nature of Sŏngch'ŏi's rejection of Chinul's teachings. Scholars writing on Korean Buddhism almost all agree that Chinul is the ideological progenitor of Korean Buddhism and the modern Chogye Order. Even in modern times, evidence of Chinul's influence is found in every facet of Korean Buddhist doctrine and practice. Chinul's works have been the most popular native Buddhist writings in Korea, and two of Chinul's works are used in Korean monasteries in the sutra study hall (*kangwon*).⁷ The current system of monastic education also reflects Chinul's influence. After completing initial training as a novice (*jaeng-ja*), Korean monks study in the sutra study hall. After this, they are expected to go to the meditation hall (*sŏnwon*). This is in accordance with Chinul's idea that one should first gain conceptual understanding, and then investigate what one has learned.

OW Buswell Jr., Robert E. trans., *The Collected Works of Chinul*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.

(The page numbers are placed after the abbreviations)

5. For this paper, I have consulted all of Sŏngch'ŏi's published works, but I have mostly relied on his *Sŏnmin-jŏngno* and to a lesser extent on his *Han'guk Bulgyo ui Bŏmmuek*.

6. I have followed Buswell's translation of "Chong-jŏng" as "Grand Patriarch". In practical terms, "Chong-jŏng" means the spiritual leader of the order. At present, the Chong-jŏng is elected to serve a set term of ten years.

7. Due to Sŏngch'ŏi's opposition to Chinul's ideas, Haein-sa has omitted Chinul's works from the sutra study program in its *kangwon*.

2-4. The Chogye Patriarch Debate

Since the early 1960's, a debate has arisen over who is to be regarded as the Founding Patriarch (*chongjo*) of the Order.⁸ Actually, the modern Chogye Order—that is to say, the order conceived as a celibate monastic order with a sectarian identity—dates from 1962. Thus, the real issue at hand is religious rather than historical, namely, who is to be regarded historically as the leading figure of Korean Buddhism. As late as 1941, T'aego as the Founding Patriarch (*chongjo*) of the Korean Order, Korea's three main temples (Haein-sa, T'ongdo-sa, and Songgwang-sa), often called "the Three Jewels", also listed Master T'aego as the *chongjo*.

After Korea's liberation in 1945, the controversy between the married monks (*aech ŏsŏng*) and the celibate monks (*bhikkhu*) erupted. This debate intensified in 1954 when Syngman Rhee moved to dispel married monks from the order. In 1962, President Park Jung-hee newly established the Chogye Sect as an order uniting both the married and celibate sects. In February of 1962, both the married and celibate monks still agreed that T'aego was the Founding Patriarch of Korean Buddhism; however, the heated dispute between the married monks and the *bhikkhus* continued. In March, 1962, the *bhikkhus* changed the statutes of the Chogye Sect, making Chinul their Founding Patriarch. The married monks split off into the T'aego Order which kept T'aego as their founder.

There were several motivations prompting the change to Chinul as the Founding Patriarch of the Chogye Sect. In particular, it distinguished the new monastic order from the married order. In addition, Chinul was uniquely Korean. Unlike T'aego, who might be considered a Chinese flunkie for his trip to China to get confirmation of his enlightenment experience, Chinul is considered to be a uniquely Korean figure. This may explain the warm reception Korean scholars have generally given Chinul. The post-war Buddhist scholars have generally stressed the syncretic nature of Korean Buddhism, overlooking the fact that Korea also has had a strong Sŏn school which has often seen itself as an exclusive and separate tradition.

Sŏngch'ŏi's criticism of Chinul has brought to light two extreme tendencies running through Korean Buddhism: the syncretic tendency apparent in Wonhyo and

8. "Chosŏn Bulgyo Chogye-jŏng" has been used as the name for Korean Buddhism since 1941, although the general use of the term "Chogye" has been used from time to time throughout the history of Korean Buddhism. For an analysis of the term "Chogye", see Lee Un-ch'ung's article "Bulgyo Chogye-jŏng Chongjo Nonjaeng ui Bburi," *Yŏksa sanch'ŏek*, No. 4 (1991).

Chinul's thought, and the tendency towards an exclusive Sön approach.⁹ Söngch'öl is a particularly good example of this latter approach. Whereas Chinul attempts to show the unity of Buddhist thought—at times, even in defiance of all logic,¹⁰ Söngch'öl insist that Sön and Kyo are absolutely opposed.

3. Söngch'öl's Ideas Concerning Enlightenment

In Buddhist dialogue, any assertion can contain many different levels of significance. For example, the statement that Sön represents a mind to mind transmission from the Buddha has various levels of meaning: the historical-linking Sön with the historical Buddha; the philosophical-implying that Sön is primarily concerned with the absolute order to truth (*paramarita*); and the soteriological-encouraging the practitioner to have faith in the essence of the teachings rather than becoming overly attached to the external trappings of religion. Consequently, we must view Master Söngch'öl's ideas on sudden enlightenment from within the entire spectrum of interpretation. The sudden/gradual debate, and Söngch'öl's position, can thus be viewed from three standpoints:

1. The historical issue: which teaching represents the true meaning of the Buddha's Dharma?
2. The philosophical issue: which theory best explains enlightenment, ignorance, and the path in a consistent manner?
3. The soteriological issue—the key concern for Buddhists: which theory is best suited for leading sentient beings to enlightenment?

3-1. Söngch'öl's Historical Argument for Subitism

Söngch'öl advocates a return to the Buddha's original teachings, which means, for him, Sön. He believes that only Sön represents the authentic Buddhist tradition in its pure form. The key to Söngch'öl's historical argument for subitism is his insistence on the validity of the mind-to-mind transmission from the Buddha.

9. Many scholars have claimed that Korean Buddhism is characterized solely by its syncretic approach. For a refutation of this view, see Shim Jae-Ryong's article "Is Korean Buddhism Syncretic?" *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 2, pp.147-157, 1989.

10. A good example of Chinul's extreme syncretic character is found in Chinul's *Excerptis*. Chinul maintains that no view that one enters the first level of the ten stages of faith after awakening is ultimately the same as the view claiming that the arousal of *bodhicitta* occurs at the initial abiding stage. Even Yui (1720-99), the traditional Korean commentator on Chinul's works, admits that he cannot make sense of

"transmitted from mind-to-mind, from the Buddha to Bodhidharma, from Bodhidharma to the Sixth Patriarch, and so on to the Five Houses of Sön and the Seven Sects" SL366

"The present Korean Chogye Sect, taking Sakyamuni as its founder, is clearly the Dharma-heir of T'aego, who goes back, through the Lin-chi line, to his remote ancestor (in lineage), Master Hui-neng." HG187

Thus, Söngch'öl accepts the traditional Sön position that this transmission passed from Mahakasyapa to Bodhidharma and from Bodhidharma to the Five Houses and Seven Schools in China. In addition, Söngch'öl maintains that the orthodox Sön lineage came to Korea through T'aego and continued up through Master Sösan. T'aego's lineage is an important element in the argument against Chinul's *toro-chömsu*. By claiming that T'aego and his lineage represent the only orthodox Sön lineage in Korea Söngch'öl excludes Chinul from Sön orthodoxy. Chinul never received transmission; moreover, he de-emphasized the importance of mind-to-mind transmission.

After claiming that Chinul is not part of the orthodox Sön lineage, Söngch'öl proceeds to argue that even Chinul's ideas are not derived from that lineage. Chinul repeatedly quotes from Tsung-mi, who in turn, considered himself to be part of Shen-hui's Sön lineage. Master Söngch'öl says that this shows that Chinul was a disciple of the scholastics. A key quote used to prove this point comes from Chinul's *Chöryo* where Chinul himself say that Master Ho-tse Shen-hui was a scholastic, outside of the orthodox Chogye lineage of Hui-neng.

"Moguja [Chinul] said: Ho-tse Shen-hui was a master of our school known for his intellectual knowledge and conceptual interpretation. Although he was not the formal dharma successor to Ts'ao-ch'i (the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng), his awakened understanding was lofty and brilliant, and his discernment was clear."¹¹ *Chöryo* 263

Söngch'öl comments, "Pojo (Chinul), who praised the sudden-enlightenment and gradual-cultivation approach saying it represented Bodhidharma's Sön, declared in the forward to his *Chöryo*, that Ho-tse (Shen-hui) was a scholastic teacher. Moreover, he implicitly suggests that the descriptions of *chömsu* are not Sön but are ways to awaken to the mind while relying on the teachings." SM202

11. I have used Buswell's translation; however, it should be kept in mind that Söngch'öl translates quite literally from the Chinese when citing this verse. The phrase *Chit'ae jöngsa* ("master of our school known for his intellectual knowledge") can also be taken in its literal sense as "knowledge-vest-master". Söngch'öl seems to understand the quote in this way. I prefer Buswell's translation as it is consistent with the paragraph's general message.

"Therefore, all those who follow the *tono-chŏmsu* philosophy are disciples of the scholastic schools." SM3

The claim that Ho-tse Shen-hui's lineage is illegitimate is a major premise in Sŏngch'ŏl's attack on Chinul's Sŏn credentials. After all, Chinul relied heavily on the philosophical thought of Tsung-mi (who claimed to be a part of the Ho-tse lineage). Chinul also adopted Tsung-mi's interpretation of Sŏn. Sŏngch'ŏl then quotes passages from some of the more representative members of the orthodox Sŏn lineage in order to prove that Chinul's acceptance of gradual cultivation is unorthodox. In addition, Sŏngch'ŏl attempts to show that the key members of the Korean orthodox Sŏn lineage, namely T'aego and Sŏsan¹² (1520-1604), also rejected Chinul's ideas. In this, Sŏngch'ŏl's argument runs counter to the main current of scholastic interpretation which claims that Chinul's thought set the tone for the entire Korean Sŏn tradition.

For Sŏngch'ŏl, the relationship between Sŏsan and Chinul's thought is particularly problematic since Sŏsan, in his key work *Sŏn'ga gwigam*, clearly advocates an approach that was modeled after Chinul's approach, i.e. *tono-chŏmsu*. Sŏsan, like Chinul before him, also incorporates the approach of chanting the Buddha's name (*yŏmbul*). This leads Sŏngch'ŏl to reject the orthodoxy of the *Sŏn'ga gwigam*.

"The *Sŏn'ga gwigam* failed to completely exclude the idea of gradual awakening. It also incorporates elements of the Pure Land teachings which advocate chanting the Buddha's name in order to receive a better rebirth. The Sixth Patriarch rejects this teaching. This shows that the *Sŏn'ga gwigam* is not orthodox Sŏn." HG197

However, Sŏngch'ŏl claims that these ideas represent Sŏsan's earlier thought, before Sŏsan's awakening.

"Sŏsan, in his early work *Sŏn'ga gwigam*, advocates that one initially cultivate the scholastic teachings and then later drop them. But then, as (Sŏsan's) wisdom-eye opened, he became acutely aware of the harm caused by the scholastic teachings. Thus, he later rejected the scholastic teachings in his *Sŏn'gyogŏl*. Therefore, Ch'ŏng-hŏ's last teachings, set down in his *Sŏn'gyogŏl*, represent Ch'ŏng-hŏ's orthodox thought." HC199

In this way Sŏngch'ŏl accepts only Sŏsan's later works, done after Sŏsan had reputedly discovered pure Sŏn. Sŏngch'ŏl, in addition to his criticism of the sources

of Chinul's ideas, proceeds to criticize the contents of Chinul's philosophy. Sŏngch'ŏl says that Chinul's thought is foreign to the orthodox Sŏn School. Chinul claimed that one sees one's true nature at the first stage of faith; according to Sŏngch'ŏl, this is a theory which contradicts the teachings of Sŏn and even runs counter to basic Buddhist teaching.

"It has been said that the understanding-awakening achieved at the first of the Ten Stages of Faith¹³ is *kyŏnsŏng*. This is a completely new theory totally contradicting the words and teachings of both the Buddha and the Patriarchs. ...As a Buddhist, one must naturally reject such a statement." SM157

Sŏngch'ŏl also questions the interpretation that Chinul's teachings have traditionally received. He claims that Chinul's early and later works represent contradictory philosophies. Indeed, scholars of Chinul's thought have almost all mentioned a marked change in emphasis in Chinul's later works. In these writings, Chinul appears to distance himself from scholasticism. At the same time, Sŏn comes to occupy a more important position in his thought. Sŏngch'ŏl lauds this change as an indication of a "revolution" in Chinul's thought.

"In *Encouragement to Practice* and in *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*, Chinul emphatically declares that Ho-tse and K'uei-feng's *tono-chŏmsu* theory represents the orthodox transmission from Bodhidharma. Later, in his *Excerptis*, Chinul says that Ho-tse (Shen-hui) and Ku'ei-feng (Tsung-mi) were master of the scholastic sects (*Chihŏe-jongsa*)¹⁴ and were therefore not formal dharma successors to Ts'ao-ch'i (the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng). In addition, Chinul clearly states that his *tono-chŏmsu* relies on words to elicit understanding. This signifies a revolution in Chinul's thought." SM204

Thus, Sŏngch'ŏl concludes that Chinul's earlier ideas should be reinterpreted in light of the deeper insights the Chinul attained towards the end of his life. However, Sŏngch'ŏl still criticizes Chinul for his failure to openly renounce his earlier mistaken notions concerning *tono-chŏmsu*. Sŏngch'ŏl cites this as proof that Chinul, even subsequent to the revolution in his thinking, never became a true Sŏn master.

12. There are ten degrees (or "stages") of faith which make up the initial portion of the Fifty-two Stages of a *bodhisattva's* career toward the perfection of Buddhahood. Chinul follows Li T'ung-hsuan's rather unorthodox view in claiming that *kyŏn-sŏng* occurs at the initial stage of faith rather than at the first of the Ten Abodes.

14. I have rendered the term *Chihŏe-jongsa*, quoted from Chinul, Sŏngch'ŏl seems to understand it

3-2. Söngch'öl's Philosophical Argument for Subitism

There are some theoretical assumptions common to all Mahayana Schools. There assumptions are important since they constitute the parameters of the sudden/gradual debate. The following ideas are commonly accepted throughout the Mahayana:

- 1) Buddhahood is innate.
 - 2) The self-nature is originally pure.
 - 3) Upon total awakening, all defilements are extinguished.
 - 4) Reality is one; consequently, *nirvana* and *samsara* are ultimately the same.
- Söngch'öl's ideas concerning awakening are set within these broad parameters of Mahayana thought. In his philosophical analysis, Söngch'öl attempts to clearly distinguish the relationships between enlightenment, ignorance and cultivation. Unlike Chinul who claims that these three factors exist simultaneously, Söngch'öl advocates a two-tiered scheme in which enlightenment represents a realization that excludes both ignorance and cultivation. Below, the key feature of Söngch'öl's concept of enlightenment are discussed.

1) Enlightenment and Ignorance Are Antithetical

Söngch'öl's philosophical argument for subitism is based on his conception of enlightenment. *Kyönsöng* [seeing one's true nature] is the term that Söngch'öl prefers for awakening. Söngch'öl equates *kyöngsöng* with complete and total enlightenment. Even the slightest defilement prevents one from seeing one's true nature.

"If so much as a single subtle thought is activated, the self-nature is obscured"
SM89

According to Söngch'öl, until one is enlightened, one "knows nothing". Even a bodhisattva, before enlightenment, is like a man seeing things through a veil. Söngch'öl, of course, accepts the Madhyamika notion that enlightenment and ignorance are fundamentally equivalent, but he feels that the basic distinction between ignorance and enlightenment must be maintained, as a "medicine", for those who are still ignorant. Otherwise, the practitioner is likely to become complacent in his practice before he has truly reached the final goal.

Söngch'öl criticizes Chinul's use of the term *kyönsöng* for something short of absolute enlightenment. For Söngch'öl, there can only be one enlightenment and this enlightenment is defined by the complete absence of all ignorance. Söngch'öl also criticizes Chinul's view that one cultivates after achieving *kyöngsöng*. Söngch'öl reasons that cultivation implies that there is still some ignorance to be dealt with:

consequently, he rejects Chinul's contention that sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation are intrinsically connected.¹⁵ According to Söngch'öl, enlightenment and cultivation are diametrically opposed, enlightenment excludes the presence of both the "disease" (ignorance) and the "medicine" (cultivation).

2) *Kyönsöng* is Never Partial

Söngch'öl claims that *kyönsöng* and ignorance are mutually exclusive terms; thus, he concludes that *kyönsöng* cannot be partial. According to Söngch'öl, there are no relative "depth" (*sim-ch'ön*) of awakening. Enlightenment is, by definition, complete. This idea leads to the interesting conclusion that all of the Sön patriarchs have achieved the same level of awakening as the Buddha.¹⁶ It also follows that the teaching of all truly enlightened masters (i.e. the Buddha and the Sön patriarch's) must be in agreement.

"The words of the Buddha and the words of the patriarchs do not advocate separate paths, because the Buddhas and patriarchs are all completely endowed with correct vision." SM141

Söngch'öl's criticism of the concept of partial awakening is extended to include all schemes depicting enlightenment as occurring in stages. This criticism, aimed primarily at T'ient-t'ai and Hua-yen thought, implies that any attempt at rapprochement between the Sön School's doctrine of sudden enlightenment and the Hua-yen School's fifty-two stages is impossible. Thus, Söngch'öl claims that Chinul's attempt to harmonize *Sön* (which advocates direct insight) and *Kyo* (which advocates a graded approach) is misguided.

3) *Kyönsöng* Does Not Occur Gradually

Söngch'öl denounces gradualism as the greatest "disease" doctrine of

15. See CW p.289.

16. Master Söngch'öl claims that all who are awakened are completely equal with the Buddha. This idea is suggested in the famous Sön phrase, attributed to Bodhidharma, which claims that one "sees one's nature, and becomes Buddha". However, such a view finds little if any sanction within the Buddhist tradition. Sangharakshita, in *A Survey of Buddhism* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1980, p.41), quotes the early Pali texts to show that "... the immeasurably superior status of the Buddha in relation to all other beings, not excepting Arhants, is categorically asserted." Early Buddhism aside, Söngch'öl's view may not even be consistent with what we know about the Sön school. According to Buswell: "Even a cursory examination of the lives of major figures in the Lin-chi school shows that few, if indeed any, practitioners of *kanhwa* Sön seem to have perfected practice and enlightenment simultaneously as sudden awakening/sudden cultivation would demand." See Buswell's article in *Pojo Sasang* No. 4, "Chinul's Alternative Vision of *Kanhwa* Sön and its Implications for Sudden Awakening/Sudden Cultivation", p.41

suddenness refers primarily to awakening. Sŏngch'ŏl implicitly accepts that the defilements are eradicated gradually. One of Sŏngch'ŏl's metaphors for enlightenment—the clouds clearing and the sun shining through—seems to indicate that ignorance is eradicated ("the clouds clear") over a period of time. Moreover, his use of the Three Gates (three progressive levels of awareness which must be present if one is truly enlightened) also seems to indicate that ignorance is slowly eradicated. However, Sŏngch'ŏl unambiguously states that enlightenment itself is not gradual.

Another point of contention centers around the interpretation of *po-im* (sometimes pronounced '*po-rim*'). This term refers to the preservation of the originally pure state of the mind after enlightenment. This idea appears often in Sŏn writings. It is problematic for Sŏngch'ŏl, since it implies that there is some need for cultivation after awakening. However, for Sŏngch'ŏl, *po-im* merely represents the natural actions of an enlightened man. Sŏngch'ŏl criticizes Chinul who interprets *po-im* as a form of cultivation which is necessary, in order to completely actualize the potential lying within one's Buddha Nature.

4) *Kyŏnsŏng* Instantly Manifests All the Virtuous Qualities of the Buddhas
 In order to fully understand Sŏngch'ŏl's treatment of the innate qualities inherent in Buddhahood, it is useful to contrast his view with that of Chinul. Chinul claimed that ultimate enlightenment is fully actualized gradually. This was in response to a problem posed by some of the Buddhists of Chinul's era concerning the mysterious abilities that are supposed to appear along with enlightenment. Many people must have wondered why certain masters who are supposedly enlightened lack the magical abilities of the Buddha. Chinul answered this problem by positing a period after enlightenment that allows for the gradual development of miraculous abilities.

Sŏngch'ŏl rejects this solution. For Sŏngch'ŏl, *kyŏnsŏng* implies the instant appearance of all the marvelous and virtuous qualities of the Buddhas.

"If one breaks through one's *hwadu* and perceives one's self-nature, one perfectly and completely realizes the Three Bodies (*trikaya*) and Four Wisdoms: all innate capabilities instantly appear." SM3

In response to the possible objection that such remarkable individuals are extremely rare, Sŏngch'ŏl concedes that enlightened individuals, in any day and age, indeed are extremely rare.

"As Huang-po pointed out, only about three of Ma-tsu's eighty disciples achieved

awakening. Awakening is extremely difficult." SMS

In their explanations of the relationship between the innate virtues implied in Buddhahood and *kyŏnsŏng*, Sŏngch'ŏl and Chinul offer opposing sequences. According to Chinul, after an initial enlightenment experience which embodies faith and a clear sense of the path, one cultivates one's potential Buddhahood in order to achieve complete enlightenment.

According to Sŏngch'ŏl, one's cultivation must focus on complete enlightenment and nothing else. When enlightenment is achieved, all the qualities of Buddhahood are achieved along with it. Thus, Master Sŏngch'ŏl rejects any use of the term *kyŏnsŏng*. Chinul uses the term *kyŏnsŏng* inaccurately. However, it is not a mere difference in terminology that distinguishes Sŏngch'ŏl's and Chinul's use of the term. Sŏngch'ŏl points out the fact that Chinul uses the term "understanding awakening (*hae-o*)" to refer to a realization that falls short of complete awakening. Sŏngch'ŏl says that the Sŏn tradition's thorough testing of the disciple seeking transmission ensured that nothing but complete enlightenment would be accepted as *kyŏnsŏng*. Sŏngch'ŏl's view of *kyŏnsŏng* as the highest goal of the Buddhist path contrasts sharply with Chinul's view that *kyŏnsŏng* is of only limited efficacy.

5) *Kyŏnsŏng* Is Realization

According to Sŏngch'ŏl, *kyŏnsŏng* involves only *de facto* realization.

"One can completely perceive one's Buddha-nature only through a realization involving the complete attainment of *kyŏnsŏng*. This is a view common throughout Buddhism." SM196

Sŏngch'ŏl repeats Chinul's metaphor of the frozen pond (use to symbolize defilements) in order to contrast his own view with that of Chinul. According to Chinul, *kyŏnsŏng* involves seeing that the ice (the defilements) is actually enlightenment, but subsequent cultivation is necessary to melt the ice (get rid of the defilements). Sŏngch'ŏl rejects the possibility of a preliminary stage of "seeing" (understanding). For Sŏngch'ŏl, *kyŏnsŏng* involves complete transformation: it "melts the ice". Any initial understanding-awakening is not *kyŏnsŏng*, because the understanding-awakening (*hae-o*) still has not been translated into a living experience. Thus, Sŏngch'ŏl concludes that Chinul never understood the difference between realization and understanding. Sŏngch'ŏl goes so far as to declare that Chinul, in his attempt to harmonize Sŏn and Kyo, merely intellectualized the Sŏn approach.

6) Söngch'öl's Criterion for *Kyönsöng*

As mentioned above, Söngch'öl separates ignorance and enlightenment (*Kyönsöng*) into two mutually antithetical categories. Söngch'öl feels that much confusion has been created by the use of those terms in a sloppy manner, so Söngch'öl uses Master Naong's Three Gates¹⁷ (*sam-gwan*) in order to provide a pragmatic criterion for enlightenment. One is said to be fully enlightened only if one is (1) constantly aware (*pa-tuan*) while awake, (2) while dreaming (this represents the 6th consciousness) and (3) while in deep sleep (this represents the 7th consciousness). Thus, enlightenment must be constant, without the possibility for retrogression. However, this constancy is effortless; it is an innate characteristic of enlightenment. Söngch'öl characterizes his view of Sön as "sudden-awakening sudden-cultivation" (*tono-tonsu*). However, this phrase is open to misinterpretation. If we accept Chinul's interpretation, *tono-tonsu* may be likened to cutting through a whole roll of silk all at once. In other words, all the defilements are eradicated in an instant. This sort of interpretation does not seem to be consistent with Söngch'öl's views. Söngch'öl accepts the possibility of eradicating the major defilements residing in the 6th consciousness as a prelude to eradicating the defilements in the 8th. This would seem to indicate that the eradication of defilements (cutting a roll of silk), in Söngch'öl's scheme, may occur gradually; however, seeing one's nature (cutting the final thread) must happen in an instant.

Söngch'öl and Chinul's divergent soteriologies may ultimately hail from the different soteriologies implied in *alayavijñāna* and *tathagatagarbha* thought. Walsen Lai describes the incongruity between the two systems:

"There is a technical problem in this wedding of two key concepts. The *alayavijñāna* is phenomenally tied to the flow of mental defilement (*asrava*) while the *tathagatagarbha* is essentially pure and only accidentally defiled. For the *alayavijñāna* to discard its ties with *samsara*, a qualitative change in its innermost being is necessary. The *Lankavatara sūtra* suggests the idea of a sudden "revelation", *paravṛtti*. However, this sudden "turn-over", though appropriate to the *alayavijñāna*, is inappropriate to the *tathagatagarbha*."¹⁸

17. Naong Hyegün (1320-76) was a Korean Sön master of the Linchi lineage who lived during the Koryŏ Dynasty. He used these three Gates as a criterion for right enlightenment. It should be kept in mind that the earlier "Three Gates" of the Chinese Sön master Huang-tung Hui-nan (1002-1069) are different in content.

18. Walsen Lai, "The Awakening of Faith In Mahayana, A Study of the Unfolding of Sinitic Mahayana Motifs", Doctoral Thesis: Harvard, 1975, pp.180-181.

Söngch'öl's repeated reference to Yogacara levels of consciousness is understandable when we consider the affinities between his thought and the *alayavijñāna* soteriology mentioned above. Söngch'öl's insistence on a sudden break-through to enlightenment fits in well with the *paravṛtti* (sudden "revelation") spoken of in Yogacara thought. Yet, it contrasts sharply with Chinul's idea that one must continue to eradicate defilements after enlightenment.¹⁹

3-3. The Soteriological Aspect

Buddhism's ultimate goal is the realization of Buddhahood. As seen above, Söngch'öl attempts to clarify this goal and the path to this goal. Yet, the sudden/gradual debate concerns much more than mere philosophical analysis. Thus, to fully comprehend the significance of Söngch'öl's subitism, it is necessary to investigate its practical, religious dimensions.

It should be kept in mind that Söngch'öl's views concerning subitism are primarily directed to a specific audience for a specific purpose. The published works of Söngch'öl address a Buddhist public. This assumes that his audience already accepts the basic principles of Buddhism. Söngch'öl's address a Buddhist public. This assumes that his audience already accepts the basic principles of Buddhism. Söngch'öl's doctrine of subitism is aimed at an even more exclusive audience, namely, those who have made a strong commitment to achieving enlightenment in this lifetime. One may even go so far as to say that it is a teaching designed primarily for Sön monks.²⁰ Söngch'öl's strong anti-intellectual tendency and his rejection or minimization of the value of skillful means can only be understood in this context. Indeed, the strong Sön emphasis apparent in Söngch'öl's *Saun-jöngno* and *Hanguk Bulgyo-ü Sömmaek* is replaced by traditional Mahayana teachings in many of his other works. This apparent inconsistency is comprehensible only in the context of Buddhism's doctrine of means (*upāya*) where teachings are adopted to suit the capacity of the listeners. Much of the criticism which has been directed towards Söngch'öl and his ideas has failed to take this into account.

19. The divergent positions of Söngch'öl and Chinul may ultimately be traced to the debate between the "new school" of Hsuan-tsang and the "old school" of Fa-tsang. Fa-tsang incorporated the *tathagatagarbha* into his grand synthesis of Mahayana. It is interesting to note that Chinul based himself on Hsüang-mi, who was a great advocate of the Fa-tsang school.

20. In the introduction of his SM, Söngch'öl designates the primary audience, he is writing for "the advanced meditators, using the correct transmission's dharmic words recorded in this book as a compass, must not become confused by heterodox teachings." (Italics added.)

It has been said that the sudden/gradual debate is "soft on the edges". The debate is related to many topics which are not easily analyzed by means of an exclusively philosophical approach. The motto "sudden enlightenment" has been used to express a certain attitude towards various aspects of cultivation. Thus, the terms gradualism and subtletism are often used to refer to a tendency to emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects of the path, in particular, the role of effort, faith, the intellect, and skill in means (*upāya*). An analysis of the writings of any Buddhist master shows that the above aspects of cultivation inevitably appear in one guise or another. However, each aspect is given a different emphasis depending on the teacher. Below, I will look at Sōngch'ŏl's treatment of these four aspects of cultivation.

1) Effort

The role of effort has always been an important element within the sudden/gradual debate. In the *Platform Sutra*, Shen-hsiu is criticized for the dualistic notions in his verse, Shen-hsiu supposedly advocated constantly wiping the mirror clean, whereas the verse attributed to Hui-neng advocated a direct insight into the emptiness of the dualism posited between purity and defilement. In Hui-neng's verse, *gnosis* takes precedence over effort.

Yet, on a practical basis, the need for effort is hard to deny. In Sōngch'ŏl's thought, effort receives maximum emphasis. He feels that enlightenment is extremely difficult to attain; therefore, effort is vital. Effort is parallel to the role of faith in the thought of Chinul, Sōngch'ŏl tells us that even the lowest criminal (whose mind would be obscured with innumerable defilements) is capable of enlightenment in this lifetime if he meets a good master and puts forth maximum effort.

2) Faith

Sōngch'ŏl's attitude toward faith is best ascertained by means of comparison with Chinul. Chinul, while recognizing the need for effort, believes that it must have faith as its basis. For Chinul, everything proceeds from faith. Faith provides the initial insight into the non-dual nature of proper cultivation. It provides the inspiration. In addition, faith places one squarely on the path leading to the complete actualization of enlightenment. Chinul's attitude towards faith contrasts sharply with that of Sōngch'ŏl. Except for some of his Dharma-talks aimed primarily at lay audiences,²¹ faith is mentioned almost nowhere in Sōngch'ŏl's

21. For a good example of the different emphases in Sōngch'ŏl's teachings which are aimed at primarily lay audiences, see his dharma-talk "Faith is your Holy Land" in *Echoes from Mt. Kaya*.

writings. In Sōngch'ŏl's Sōn thought, faith does not really occupy any place. For there to be faith, there must be something to have faith in. Chinul claims that there is an initial experience of seeing one's nature and this experience is constantly reenacted through faith. Sōngch'ŏl, on the other hand, de-emphasizes the value of any experience short of total enlightenment. Sōngch'ŏl advocates cultivation that endures the "dark night", where all spiritual rewards are rejected. In this way, the practitioner does not become preoccupied with lesser insights that fall short of Buddhahood.

3) The Intellect

Sōngch'ŏl is also concerned lest practitioners become preoccupied with the intellect. Whereas Chinul feels that knowledge is fundamentally neutral, Sōngch'ŏl considers it to be the greatest danger to those on the path. Sōngch'ŏl claims that it must be completely rejected if one is to follow the short-cut approach advocated by the Sudden School. Sōngch'ŏl's strong anti-intellectual stance is particularly evident in the advice he gives to his Sōn disciples. Of Sōngch'ŏl's five rules²² for Sōn students, two (the elimination of all talking and reading) attempt to completely put all intellectual activity to rest. Sōngch'ŏl feels that it is only when thinking has been turned off that one's practice can mature. Sōngch'ŏl's attitude concerning intellectual knowledge is summed up well in *Echoes from Mt. Kaya* where he states:

"If you are to awaken to your true self, then you must rid yourself of everything, including the Dharma Teachings. Buddhism itself is an obstruction; it is dust on your mirror. Devote all of your energy to your *hwadu*, and to your *hwadu* only."²³

4) Skill in Means

One of the key contentions of those who claim to be subtletist is that the Sudden School rejects, or at least minimizes, the role of skill in means. Although Sōngch'ŏl accepts that a gradual approach using the various expedients may be necessary for some who are unaware of the "One Vehicle", he strongly advocates, for all others, a short-cut approach which rejects all provisional teachings and expedients. For Sōngch'ŏl, the lack of expedients is a characteristic of the Ultimate Vehicle. Sōngch'ŏl thus tells his Sōn students to forget about the descriptions of the sutras and concentrate only on their *hwadu*. However, Sōngch'ŏl does not limit his advocacy of this approach to students with superior capabilities. He contends that

22. The five rules are: (1) reduce sleep; (2) stop talking; (3) eliminate all readings; (4) do not overeat; (5) do not travel around between the retreat seasons. These are listed in the *Echoes from Mt. Kaya* pp. 140-141.

23. See *Echoes from Mt. Kaya*, p. 86.

even a person with great karmic obstructions can make use of the Ultimate Approach if he puts forth the effort necessary. Sŏngch'ŏl believes that all practitioners should drop all use of *upāya* as soon as possible. Sŏngch'ŏl's attitude is thus starkly opposed to that of Chinul, who advocates a much more liberal approach towards the use of *upāya*. Chinul claims that even Sŏn students who aspire to the Ultimate Vehicle must often make use of the Provisional Vehicle (which uses *upāya*) from time to time. Chinul goes so far as to say that some Sŏn practitioners who have already had an initial awakening (*hae-o*) may sometimes need to revert to the expedients of the provisional teachings. Chinul even accepts the need for some expedient descriptions in the *hwadu* approach. This contrasts sharply with Sŏngch'ŏl's advocacy of the live word (*hwalgu*) for even those of the lowest capacities.

"No matter how low or inferior one's capacities may be, one must be guided by the live word.²⁴ Chinul's repeated advocacy of the disease of intellectualism—the dead word (*sagu*)—shows that even his *Observing the Hwadu* is just a dragon's head with a snake's tail." SL157, 158.

In this way Sŏngch'ŏl criticizes Chinul's liberal approach towards *upāya*. Chinul, while conceding that *upāya* are ultimately unnecessary, feels that sometimes they are needed by even those practitioners who aspire to the Ultimate Approach. This more liberal attitude to *upāya*, more characteristic of the traditional Mahayana schools, open Chinul to criticism for having intellectualized Sŏn.

4. A Critical Summary of Sŏngch'ŏl's Subitism

In the first part of this paper, the historical aspect of Master Sŏngch'ŏl's subitist argument was briefly presented. The dimensions of this argument were considered only briefly. Sŏngch'ŏl's historical argument for subitism rests chiefly on two premises: (1) he mind-to-mind transmission from the Buddha and (2) the teachings of the Southern School of Master Hui-neng as opposed to that of the Northern School. The historical arguments put forth by Sŏngch'ŏl in support of his radical subitist position are definately weak. Modern scholarship has debunked the historical foundations of a mind-to-mind transmission from the Buddha to the Sŏn patriarchs. Moreover, it is presently impossible to verify any of the Korean Sŏn lineages which have been proposed.

As for the orthodoxy of Chinul's lineage and thought, Sŏngch'ŏl misinterprets the significance of Chinul's labeling of Shen-hui as a "scholastic teacher" (*Chihkae jongsŏ*). By Chinul's time, Master Shen-hui Ho'sse's School of Sŏn had already died out and the rival Nan-yueh lineage had established itself solidly as the dominant tradition. Thus, Chinul's statement must be seen as a concession to the general consensus of his time concerning the orthodox Sŏn lineage. Chinul certainly was not trying to discredit Shen-hui. If anything, he was trying to rescue Shen-hui from obscurity. Chinul's characterization of Shen-hui as "a master of our school" and whose "discernment was clear" precludes the notion that Chinul had abandoned his previous, positive evaluation of Shen-hui. Sŏngch'ŏl has taken Chinul's words out of context. There is definitely a greater emphasis on Sŏn in Chinul's thought remains throughout, even in Chinul's later works.

Sŏngch'ŏl's contention that subitism represents the orthodox Sŏn of the Southern School is also problematic. The traditional Sŏn history, along with its terminology, has been rejected by modern scholars. Indeed, scholars have had to completely revise their conception of the early Sŏn Schools. Scholars generally agree that the depiction of the Northern School as gradual, and even the very idea of a Northern School as opposed to the Southern School, were largely inventions of Shen-hui. Recent scholarship has shown a complex picture of many competing Sŏn Schools, rather than a unified Sŏn tradition.

In contrast to the weak historical premises buttressing Sŏngch'ŏl's argument, Sŏngch'ŏl's philosophical explication of Sŏn's sudden approach is both consistent and illuminating. In particular, his attempt to distinguish a pure form of Sŏn is important to the future identity of Korean Sŏn. For Sŏngch'ŏl, complete awakening is the sole *raison d'être* of the Buddhist. Sŏngch'ŏl rejects Chinul's idea of an initial awakening, since such an idea inevitably leads to a debasement of the idea of awakening. This is a legitimate criticism of Chinul's thought. Chinul offers a general criterion for initial awakening; however, final awakening the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is vaguely described as the fulfillment of the myriad positive qualities of Buddhahood. At the practical level, Chinul's approach gives rise to numerous excesses. If *kyŏrsŏng* is merely a matter of faith or knowledge of the path, how is one to know when one has experienced true insight? People practicing meditation commonly experience various altered states of consciousness. If there is no clear criterion for enlightenment, practitioners might mistakenly assume that they have achieved genuine insight when they have not. Sŏngch'ŏl recognizes this danger. His use of Master Naong's 'Three Gates' provides a clear psychological criterion for enlightenment. The practitioner is encouraged to disregard any initial

24. This passage originally occurs in *Sŏkwan Sŏn, ŏc. 201garn.*