

# Ch'imgoeng and the Nature of Late Chosŏn Buddhism

Younghee Lee  
University of Auckland

## Introduction

In this paper I will attempt to shed some light on late Chosŏn Buddhism through the focus of an examination of the writings of the Sŏn Master Ch'imgoeng Hyŏnbyŏn 枕肱 縣辯 (1616-1684), and in particular the three vernacular songs in the *kasa* form he has left us: *Kwisan 'gok* 歸山曲, *T'aep'yŏnggok* 太平曲 and *Ch'ŏnghaktongga* 青鶴洞歌.<sup>1</sup> His writings in Chinese, compiled after his death and published in a woodblock edition in 1695 in his Collected Works, together with the *kasa*, will be a valuable additional source.<sup>2</sup> In this way I hope to assess Ch'imgoeng's place in the development of Buddhist *kasa* and to clarify the position of Buddhism in late Chosŏn society.

## *Ch'imgoeng's life*

There are three sources of information about Ch'imgoeng's life. The first is the biography (*haengjang* 行狀) his disciples appended to Ch'imgoeng's collected works (*Ch'imgoeng chip* 枕肱集). This is the most extensive source, but by its very nature rather hagiographic in character. Of course, hagiography, too, although not always historically accurate, is of intrinsic interest if one wants to understand the mentality of the faithful and the historical context. The second source consists of writings in Chinese by Ch'imgoeng himself, such as a rather lengthy autobiographical passage in a piece written to encourage the addressee to improve himself, remarks about his life in a letter to a *yangban* acquaintance, and Ch'imgoeng's testament. Finally, there are also some autobiographical passages in Ch'imgoeng's *kasa*. Altogether this is sufficient to draw a rather clear and sometimes intriguing picture of Ch'imgoeng's life.

Ch'imgoeng was born in 1616 in the eighth year of Kwanghaegun's reign, on the twelfth of the Sixth Month in Naju, Chŏlla Namdo as the son of Yun Hŭng 尹興, a Confucian literatus. He enjoyed a reputation as a *sindong* 神童, a youth so bright that once he sees things he internalises them instantly and furthermore never forgets them. He lost his father at the tender age of nine and for a while grew up under the care of his mother. Because of the poverty that plagued Ch'imgoeng's family he was forced to enter a monastery. In some of his prose texts he vividly described the conditions of poverty under which he grew up.

"I was born in the small cottage of a poor family. Therefore I did not even have a piece of string in my pocket to tie around an ant's waist and there was not enough rice in the kitchen to attract flies. Even sadder it was that I lost my father. My mother was aged,

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a fourth text that sometimes is also counted as a *kasa*, but it is so short and simple that it is difficult to consider it as a proper *kasa*. It is included as a *sijo* in Pak Ŭlsu 1992, vol. I, nr. 2597, but as such, too, it is quite irregular. The song proclaims little else than that concentration on the invocation of Amitābha in the hour of death will ensure rebirth in paradise.

<sup>2</sup> *Ch'imgoeng chip* is included in Tongguk taehakkyo Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 2002. It has also been separately published, with a translation in modern Korean: Ch'imgoeng, 2001. This edition also contains a facsimile of the original, although the foreword, the biography and the *kasa* have not been included in this. Richly annotated versions of the *kasa* can be found in Im Kijung, 2000.

the older brother's clothes were thin and his younger brother was cold.” (Ch'imgoeng 2001:119, 228<sup>3</sup>)

And:

“This small monk early in life encountered a pitiable fate. Because I committed the grave sin [of lacking in filial piety, which should have ensured the parent's health ] my father passed away when I was nine. Two months after my father died my grandmother passed away as well. I felt as if I were a little baby bird who had fallen out of the nest. I was frightened and in a state of shock, as when a fly first encounters snow. And so I was entrusted to the care of a monastery...” (Ch'imgoeng 2001:111, 226)

In spite of this, he did very well once he had entered the *sangha*. In this stage of his life he avidly studied scriptures and developed his literary skills. His talents quickly found recognition and one passage in his biography recounts how the poet Yun Sōndo 尹善道 was so impressed by his ability and his looks (Ch'imgoeng seems to have resembled his deceased son) that he wanted to adopt him. The young man returned to the monastery, however, after some gentle prodding by his master. Following a serious accident, which was nearly fatal, Ch'imgoeng turned away from studying scriptures and chose meditation as his path to salvation, realizing that the Buddha should be found in one's own mind rather than in the sutras. His most important Sōn master was Soyo T'aenŭng 逍遙 太能 (1562-1649), whose successor he is considered to be as far as meditation is concerned (Yi Chōng 1993:316-317). Through T'aenŭng, Ch'imgoeng joined the lineage of Hyujōng Sōsan taesa 休靜 西山大師 (1520-1604).

For the rest of his life Ch'imgoeng avoided the secular world as much as possible. But he was not indifferent to the fate of people in the secular world and encouraged whomever he met, even prostitutes, to escape from suffering through the invocation of Amitābha, practicing *yōmbul* 念佛. Going one step further, he would even whisper the *Namu Amit'abul* 南無阿彌陀佛 formula in the ears of cows and horses, his *haengjang* says (Ch'imgoeng 2001:195; Tongguk taehakkyo Han'guk pulgyo chōnsō p'yōnch'an wiwōnhoe, 2002:368). This does not mean that to him *yōmbul* only was a form of skilful means to save the ignorant. In his own life, too, he constantly invoked the Buddha Amitābha and he died sitting in meditation posture facing the west, the direction of Amitābha's Western Paradise. That *yōmbul* for him was more than the mechanical repetition of *Namu Amit'abul* is clear from a quatrain he wrote (Ch'imgoeng 2001:50, 213).

The mind contemplates the setting sun [shaped] like a hanging drum.  
The mouth invokes the name of the Buddha Amitābha.  
If you are able to always match mind and mouth,  
You will immediately be reborn in the Western Paradise.

True to the literal meaning of *yōmbul*, this practice for him obviously also involved mental concentration on the Buddha.

Both his own writings and his biography present Ch'imgoeng as a highly serious and compassionate monk constantly searching for enlightenment. At the end of his life, when he was already ill, he wrote a testament (Ch'imgoeng 2001:156, 239) in which he begged his disciples not to cremate his body but to leave it on the water side or in the woods as a feast for the birds and beasts, his last gift to sentient beings, a pious offering (*posi* 布施). His example was the Buddha in one of his former lives, when he fed his own flesh to a hungry tigress and her cubs. Ch'imgoeng's *haengjang* relates, however, that miraculously the animals left his body untouched.

<sup>3</sup> In all references to *Ch'imgoeng chip* first the page numbers of the modern Korean text are given and then those of the original text.

Although Ch'imgoeng left behind a heritage of 119 Chinese poems, three *kasa*, a brief song, and 28 examples of prose writing, this was against his intentions. He wished to disappear without a trace, not leaving any of his writings, but his disciples eleven years after his death nevertheless decided to put together his collected works.

#### *Ch'imgoeng's significance*

Why is Ch'imgoeng so important that he merits becoming the focus of further study? First of all, his work is part of the "plethora of extant materials" (Buswell 1999:159) on late Chosŏn Buddhism, which has been seriously underresearched and deserves to be explored.<sup>4</sup> Ch'imgoeng's work is a fascinating source for the knowledge of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Korean Buddhism in several ways. Internally to Buddhism, it tells us something about the state of the Buddhist community and one man's response to this. Externally, it clarifies the position of Buddhism and Buddhists vis-à-vis Confucianism and Confucians, in a period in which the latter called the shots. In spite of Buddhism's oppression and its inferior status in the eyes of the *yangban* elite Ch'imgoeng did not blindly defer to the powerful and did not hesitate to criticize them even when asking for favours. Ch'imgoeng, moreover, occupies a special place in the history of Buddhist *kasa*. As said, the three songs mentioned above were added to his collected works, published in printed form in 1695. This makes these *kasa* the oldest Buddhist *kasa* of undisputable authorship. Of course, there are Buddhist *kasa* attributed to earlier monks such as Naong 懶翁 (1320-1376) and Hyujŏng, but it is a moot point whether the extant texts were really composed by them.<sup>5</sup> Compared with later Buddhist *kasa*, moreover, Ch'imgoeng's works stand out because they show a somewhat less popular character and do not address the masses of the faithful as do well-known Buddhist *kasa* like *Hoesimgok* 回心曲 (sometimes attributed to Hyujŏng). Stylistically and in content they contain certain elements, furthermore, that are reminiscent of other genres, such as Sŏn poetry in Chinese or *sijo*. They also stand out because of their quality. Ch'imgoeng was an author of considerable literary talent and remarkably individual character, and deserves to be studied for this fact alone.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Ch'imgoeng's *kasa***

##### *Kwisan'gok*

The first of Ch'imgoeng's *kasa*, *Kwisan'gok* (Retreating to the Mountains), is a quite personal work and can be read as an autobiographical account of spiritual development. In the corpus of late Chosŏn Buddhist *kasa* the autobiographical is highly unusual. In fact, as far as I am aware, Ch'imgoeng provides the only instance. Among *kasa* in general, however, it is quite common. One of the most prominent examples, from roughly the same period, is furnished by Pak Illo 朴仁老 (1561-1642) who wrote both about his war experiences and his retirement in later years, and many *yangban* have left *kasa* in which they relate of unusual experiences they had, for instance when travelling or living in exile. The presence of an autobiographical element is only one of the respects in which Ch'imgoeng's *kasa* stand a little apart from the majority of Buddhist *kasa* and are closer to *yangban kasa*.

The opening lines of *Kwisan'gok* urge a "you," who may be the reader but also the author himself, to reject the false view that this life is anything but a fleeting dream, and counsels the reader to abandon all cravings for wealth and glory. This sets the tone. Then the

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that in the past few years Chŏng Hyeran has devoted considerable attention to Ch'imgoeng within the framework of a PhD project. Cf. the Bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Chŏng Chaeho, 2003. "Naong chak *kasa* ūi chakka sibi," *Han'gukhak yŏn'gu* 19, pp. 137-181.

<sup>6</sup> In Cho Tongil's history of Korean literature, which reflects the collective efforts of Korean literary historians, no attention is paid to Ch'imgoeng's works in Chinese, and the structure of *kasa* is said to be loose, a judgment I will question in my discussion of these songs. Cho Tongil, 2005:413.

autobiography begins, which matches what we know from Ch'imgoeng's *haengjang* and his autobiographical writings in Chinese. Leaving home at the age of 12 and becoming a monk at 13, he first studied the scriptures. In hindsight he compares himself with a man who talks of food, but does not eat, hinting that he did not practice the teachings of the Buddha, but merely read about them. A near-death experience when he was eighteen (when, as we know from other sources he gravely wounded himself while cutting wood) radically changed his views. He realized that he might have ended up in one of the horrendous hells where those with bad karma pay for their sins before they proceed to a new incarnation (cf. Younghee Lee forthcoming). Interestingly, he states that not even the bodhisattva Chijang 地藏 (Ksitigarbha), who is known as having made a vow to save all sentient beings from the torments of hell, could have rescued him. Thus he seems to favour personal effort (*charyök* 自力), rather than relying on the intercession of others, like Chijang (*t'aryök* 他力). But, he adds, personal accomplishments of a literary (*munjang* 文章) and artistic (*kiye* 技藝) nature are useless when one has to face the Judges of the Underworld. From this moment on, Ch'imgoeng withdrew from the world as much as possible to practice meditation according to the Linji (Imje) 臨濟 tradition, which he refers to as “the sharp-edged sword of [the Chinese meditation master] Zhaozhou 趙州”. In his quite detailed description of his zealous meditation practice he compares himself in poetic terms with a fast horse in the spring wind on the wide plains which only needs to see the shadow of the whip to surge ahead. If he is troubled by “the demon of sleep” he goes out and roams through peaceful woods and quiet valleys, and when his body and mind become too tired, he rests with his head leaning against a rock, one with nature. Blue cranes will join him, traditionally a sure sign that a person had reached a high degree of spiritual enlightenment. After the description of an evening scene, befitting the concluding part of the song, Ch'imgoeng finally announces that he will find his joy living like this, in a pure and uncontaminated state of poverty (*ch'öngbin* 清貧). Structurally the final line could very well have been the last line of a *sijo*. In its entirety the *kasa* is well-constructed, with an introduction, main part and conclusion, and a logical progression of arguments.

#### *T'aep'yönggok*

*T'aep'yönggok* (Song of Great Peace) is about spiritual peace rather than the cessation of war, unlike Pak Illo's *T'aep'yöngga*. Usually the term *t'aep'yöng* is associated with peace, affluence and good government in the secular world, but in this *kasa* Ch'imgoeng appropriates it for Buddhist purposes and the life of the spirit. Whereas in *Kwisan'gok* he turned his back on society and sang the praises of the solitary life of the hermit, in *T'aep'yönggok* Ch'imgoeng squarely confronts the outer world in the form of the many degenerated forms of Buddhism that he detected in the society of his times. In spite of the title it is actually a quite combative piece of writing, which should be read in the context of the many trials and tribulations of Buddhism in Chosön. The primary addressees were fellow-monks who had strayed from the right path rather than lay believers. It is as a call for the spiritual regeneration of the *sangha* that this *kasa* is of great interest.

In *T'aep'yönggok*, there is no gradual introduction. Right from the first line Ch'imgoeng addresses the first group of members of the *sangha* of whom he disapproves: those who have donned monk's robes in order to evade the duties of ordinary commoners rather than to gain enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> They don't look for the company of proper masters, preferring to stay with “Master One-Eye,” and consequently are totally ignorant. “Dozing under the Black Mountain, drooling in the Cave of Ghosts” (terminology traditionally applied to monks who meditate without the proper focus of the *hwadu* 話頭), they merely ruin the collars of their robes. Even if they achieve some degree of awakening, they have not

<sup>7</sup> Like the *Han'guk pulgyo chönsö* edition of *Ch'imgoeng chip*, I accept the emendation of the original text that replaces the character 後 in the first line with the character 役, which was proposed by Yi Ünsang 1962.

disciplined their minds sufficiently, and think of little else than stilling their hunger. Then, using a literary phrase that could have been lifted straight from a Chinese text (又有...), Ch'imgoeng addresses another category of practitioners, with a more valid claim to be called monks: old priests who have meditated for twenty, thirty years, but in spite of that have not been able to avoid false knowledge and false awakening, and satisfy themselves with the "leftovers of the soup." These monks nonetheless are immensely proud of their knowledge and fond of displaying it to innocent laymen, who kneel before them, folding their hands and rubbing them until pellets of dirt come off. They would deserve to be consigned to hell or sent far, far away into exile. The third target of Ch'imgoeng's criticisms are monks who betray their true calling by frequenting the markets to sell merchandise. Of course in this period Buddhist monasteries were more or less forced to engage in such commercial activities because of the reduced support from the elite. Ch'imgoeng might have criticized the political circumstances that drove the monasteries to produce and sell all kinds of commodities, but instead (probably quite realistically because there was little he could do about the situation) he chose to address the monks themselves and take them to task for the greed they developed because of this lifestyle. This included an excessive consumption of alcohol that made them totter along the road, carrying the scales they used to sell their wares on the markets. It may be noted in this context that Ch'imgoeng did not unconditionally condemn the drinking of alcohol by itself. In his *haengjang*, it is said that he would not refuse one cup of wine, but never drink more than this single cup. The alcohol would never have any influence on him, even if people who knew of his habits on purpose presented him with one very big bowl of liquor. This shows, the *haengjang* concluded, that he was *in* this world but not *of* this world. In any case, in *T'aep'yönggok* Ch'imgoeng warns these peddler-monks that in the final analysis all the material possessions they might obtain by engaging in trade are of no lasting value, completely useless when their brief lives end. Next, he directs his arrows against the monks who engage in angry disputes with each other, presenting a spectacle "learned Confucians will snicker at". They should stop all their fruitless debates about the relative merits of meditation and the invocation of Amitābha. In the concluding part of this *kasa*, Ch'imgoeng offers his solution for the crisis of Chosŏn Buddhism. Those who seek enlightenment first of all should study texts: Buddhist expositions and scriptures, of course, but, perhaps surprisingly, also Chinese philosophers (*cheja paekka* 諸子百家). But that does not suffice, because the practice of meditation also is essential. He describes meditation practice in the paradoxical wordings of various traditional *hwadu*: "riding the stone cow and the iron horse", "playing the stringless lute," etcetera, which also often crop up in Sŏn poetry in Chinese. The final part of the "curriculum" consists of wandering all over the country, making peregrinations to famous mountains, such as Chirisan, P'ungaksan (the "autumn name" of Kŭmgangsan), T'aebaeksan and Myohyangsan. In this way monks will find enlightenment and in the end will be able to "cast the net of great compassion" to save "the fish [i.e. sentient beings] in the sea of desires". Then the Song of Great Peace will resound.

The elements in this course of spiritual development exactly match Ch'imgoeng's own experience as he described it in a letter to a Confucian gentleman (Ch'imgoeng 2001:11-112, 226). There he relates how he first studied scriptures, then spent many years in solitary meditation and finally wandered around for ten years wherever his fancy took him, while his monk's robe "faded in the moonlight over the 12, 000 peaks of Pongnaesan [the summer name of Kŭmgangsan], and his straw shoes became worn-out "on the moss of the 89 temples of Pangjangsan [Chirisan]." For a scriptural justification of this practice (a common element in the life of a Sŏn monk), Ch'imgoeng alludes to the example of the boy-pilgrim Sŏnjae tongja 善財童子 (Sudhana) from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

### *Ch'ŏnghaktongga*

The brief *Ch'ŏnghaktongga* (Song of Blue Crane Village) sings the praises of spiritual practice in a beautiful secluded spot, in a much more lyrical vein than *T'aep'yönggok*. Ch'ŏnghaktong is the name of an actual place in the Chiri Mountains where Koun Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn 孤雲 崔致遠 (857-?) withdrew after he had returned from China. As an entry in

*P'ahanjip* 破閑集 by Yi Illo 李仁老 (1152-1220) attests, it quite early on earned a reputation as a kind of paradise on earth, a place where immortals dwelt, comparable to the legendary Peach Blossom Paradise of Chinese tradition (Yi Illo 1964:10-11, 350). The name of the place is indicative; where immortals of high spiritual standing dwell blue cranes will appear. To leave no doubt that Ch'ŏnghaktong is such a place one line in the *kasa* states: "a couple of blue cranes leisurely come and go!" The fact that exactly the same line is also found in *Kwisan'gok*, which was about Ch'imgoeng's personal retreat from the world, suggests that Ch'ŏnghaktong is the very spot where Ch'imgoeng himself withdrew to in order to find enlightenment. In the first part of this *kasa*, however, there is nothing that explicitly links it with Ch'imgoeng's personal life or even distinguishes the song as a text written by a Buddhist. Any *yangban* with a literary gift might have painted in words such a picturesque scene with towering mountains in the distance, curious rocks, luxurious foliage, a waterfall and sunlight penetrating to the bottom of a limpid pond in which mountains, clouds and blossoms are reflected (cf. Chŏng Hyeran 2005c). In fact, because of this *Ch'ŏnghaktongga* has been compared to Songgang's *Kwandong pyŏlgok* 松江 關東別曲 (Yi Pongyŏng 1959:37). But then there is a marked shift towards the personal and Ch'imgoeng infuses it with a strong Buddhist content. Suddenly startled, while still in a state of non-enlightenment (不覺), he lifts up his eyes and is overwhelmed by the shimmering view of a lonely peak towering over a lake in the glow of the setting sun. Enraptured, "drunk" he actually says, he ascends the slopes of the mountain and finds Puril Hermitage 佛日庵 ("Buddha Sun Hermitage," an actual temple in this area) where the "golden body" of the Buddha appears to him. Considering the association of Buddha and sun in the name of the hermitage, which is reinforced by the indirect reference to the Buddha image by the phrase "golden body," it is not far-fetched to think of Amitābha and his western paradise for the interpretation of the previous lines about the sight illuminated by the setting sun (in the west, of course) that so impressed the poet. The *kasa* ends with the following lines:

"The quiet monk in his tattered robes  
cannot contain the bliss of meditation,  
places a stick of incense in the jade burner  
and lets ring the golden chimes, once,  
in the wind over the ten thousand crags.  
Boy! Restrain your tongue,  
or loudmouthed versifiers will find us.

In this way Ch'imgoeng relates claimed the paradise of Ch'ŏnghaktong, far away from the "world of red dust," to his own experience and simultaneously claims it for Buddhism.

Stylistically, it is striking that the last lines take the form of a *sijo* with an extended middle line and a third line beginning with a characteristic three-syllable invocation followed by five syllables. In its totality this *kasa*, too, has a clear and purposeful structure. First there is a rather gentle description of the landscape. It as if a painter stands in front of a landscape and renders it in confident strokes of the brush, detail for detail. Then there is a quickening of pace, with the poet becoming personally involved in the landscape, ecstatically rushing up the mountain. And then at the end, after the apotheosis of the appearance of the Buddha, when enlightenment strikes the monk in a flash, everything turns quiet again. The single ringing of the chimes only accentuates the tranquillity, which should not be disturbed by the vulgar tourism of unenlightened dilettanti.

If one peruses *Ch'ŏnghaktongga* once again after reading Ch'imgoeng's prose account of his search for ultimate truth (Ch'imgoeng 2001: 119-121, 228-229) one realizes even more keenly that even this most lyrical of his *kasa* also can be interpreted as autobiographical. The three parts of the song, first the search for Nature, then the moment of unease transformed into ecstasy that changes everything, and finally his arrival at the site of enlightenment, present us with a vignette of Ch'imgoeng's own spiritual quest during which

his anxious seeking for salvation first resulted in disappointment before he made his final and decisive break-through.

### Ch'imgoeng's writings in Chinese and his relations with Confucians and Confucianism

In Ch'imgoeng's *kasa*, Confucianism is not an intrusive presence. Only once Confucian literati are mentioned when he warns his fellow monks in *T'aep'yönggok* not to make a spectacle of themselves in the eyes of the former. This is quite different, however, where his writings in Chinese are concerned, in which he frequently demonstrates a great familiarity with Confucianism. As he was a *yangban* son, we may assume that even in his early childhood, before poverty drove him away from home, he had already imbibed the most basic Confucian teachings through the usual primers for young students, but he himself writes that also in his later years his spiritual quest prompted him to read Confucian scriptures (as he also read Daoist works; cf. Ch'imgoeng 2001:120, 228).

It is unmistakable that Ch'imgoeng knew the Confucian classics very well. In fact, even the literary pseudonym (*ho* 號) we know him by, Ch'imgoeng, which means "sleeping with one's head on one's elbow" is of Confucian derivation, as any literate person in Ch'imgoeng's times would have known. Ch'imgoeng himself used the relevant passage from Confucius's *Analects* also in a quatrain entitled "Yugö uüm" 幽居遇吟 (Living in Seclusion; Ch'imgoeng 2001:46-47, 213. Also cf. Chöng Hyeran 2005b: 10). The first three lines of this poem are an almost integral quotation of one of the Sage's sayings, Book VII, nr. 16 (Confucius 1979:88):

"The Master said, 'In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.'"

Because it is all from the *Analects* (leaving out only the phrase "attained through immoral means"), right up to the end of the third line there is nothing specifically Buddhist about the poem. The last line, however, changes all that and makes the poem (and by inclusion the saying of Confucius) completely Buddhist: "Aspiring to the golden dais, I listen to the wind in the branches." The golden dais/seal is a seat for someone reborn in the Pure Land. The last line, one might also add, makes poetry of the entire four lines.

For Ch'imgoeng Confucianism was not enough to satisfy all his spiritual needs, but he did not see any contradictions between Confucianism and Buddhism, nor did he hesitate to use Confucian arguments to further Buddhist causes. One example is an exhortation to contribute to the building of a hall for an old Buddha image at Sönamsa 仙巖寺 that for many years had been exposed to the weather (Ch'imgoeng 2001: 162-164, 240-241). The text begins with a quote from Confucius that encourages people to do good wherever they can, which Ch'imgoeng warmly applauds. Then he argues that among different forms of good, protecting the body of the Buddha brings unrivalled merit. Elucidating the specific history of the image for which a hall should be built, Ch'imgoeng quotes another priest, Master Kudam 瞿曇,<sup>8</sup> who had taken the initiative for the building project. Kudam had noted that the Buddha was such a great sage (he uses the term *söngin* 聖人 with its possible Confucian connotations) that he had inspired *kunja* 君子 (which one might translate here as "good Confucians" or just "Confucian gentlemen") to commission the bronze image. After some elaborations, Ch'imgoeng finally suggests that the readers, moved by the words of the Sage (Confucius), should contribute to the building of a hall for the image, adding as a final inducement the prospect that by practicing Confucian virtue in this way they would be able to rival Confucius's most prominent disciples. Of course, we should realize that this text, which was written in Chinese, was addressed to members of the *yangban* class with their Confucian education, and that therefore from a tactical point of view it made perfect sense for

<sup>8</sup> The name of this priest is identical to the Korean rendering of that of the historical Buddha: Gautama.

Ch'imgoeng to appeal to Confucian values when soliciting donations from this group. There needs to be no doubt, however, that Ch'imgoeng possessed a genuine appreciation for Confucianism (which is confirmed by his writings in general).

Another text that is of interest in this respect was written to collect funds for the painting (*tanch'ōng* 丹青) of the Chijangam 地藏庵 on P'allyōngsan 八嶺山 (Ch'imgoeng 2001:123-125, 230). Ch'imgoeng begins by stating that the "Way of the Confucian Gentleman (*kunja*)" is in decline. Some *kunja* have loyalty and faith (*ch'unngsin* 忠信) but are lacking as far as rites and literature (*yemun* 禮文) are concerned, with others it is just the other way around. Ch'imgoeng then quotes from the *Lunyu*, Book XII.8 (Confucius:113-114):

"Chi Tzu-ch'eng said: "The important thing about the gentleman is the stuff (質) he is made of. What does he need refinement (文彩) for?" Tzu-kung commented: 'It is a pity that the gentleman should have spoken so about the gentleman. "A team of horses cannot catch up with one's tongue." [This is a quoted saying that warns people to speak without first thinking deeply. YHL] The stuff is no different from refinement; refinement is no different from the stuff.'"

Ch'imgoeng then applies the meaning of this to the temple building (the unadorned "stuff") and the *tanch'ōng* painting of the wood: just as "stuff" and "adornment" should go together, the newly built Chijangam needs the adornment of *tanch'ōng* painting. And so, carrying a subscription list, he asks the dignified gentlemen and good ladies at whose gate he calls for support. As the document discussed previously, this appeal is obviously addressed to *yangban* with a Confucian education. Yet, although he uses Confucian arguments, Ch'imgoeng does not shrink from criticizing the actual state of Confucianism. We should remember, however, that he was equally critical of the actual state of Buddhism in his times. Perhaps in his view both Confucianism and Buddhism partook of the malaise of *malse* 末世, the Latter Days of the Law.

Another text that makes quite clear to what kind of donors it was addressed was written for a collection for a great hall for the Nūnggasa 楞伽寺 on P'allyōngsan (Ch'imgoeng 2001:126-128, 231). Ch'imgoeng invokes a Confucian authority, Zengzi 曾子, at the end: "Zengzi said: 'What goes out from you will return to you.'" This is a quote from the *Mencius* Book I, B, 12 (Mencius 1970:70-71): "What you mete out will be paid back to you." This actually does not fit the way Ch'imgoeng uses it very well, because he of course means "if you do well you will be rewarded", pointing out that in the past persons who had made seemingly insignificant donations had reaped substantial rewards. Thus having twisted the meaning a little, Ch'imgoeng concludes "I beg you, gentlemen intent on the good (有志君子), please put your seal on this document!"<sup>9</sup>

That Ch'imgoeng's use of Confucian literature was not a mere ploy to elicit donations from potential sponsors with a Confucian upbringing is also suggested by the warm relations he entertained with several Confucian scholars (Chōng Hyeran 2005b). In particular, he seems to have a great regard for a man with the pseudonym Yayudang 野遺堂.<sup>10</sup> In *Ch'imgoeng chip* there is a letter in which Ch'imgoeng asks Yayudang to receive him, and among Ch'imgoeng's poems there are several that are dedicated to this figure (Ch'imgoeng 2001:109-112, 225-226, 24, 209, 27, 210, 28, 210, 43, 212). *Ch'imgoeng chip* includes a poem by Yayudang in which the latter calls Ch'imgoeng a true friend. The poems Ch'imgoeng wrote for Confucian acquaintances show that in spite of his turning away from

<sup>9</sup> For another example of the use of *kunja* to address potential donors see Ch'imgoeng 2001:165-170, 241-243, an appeal to contribute to the restoration of the Old Dharma Hall of Kūmsōnsa.

<sup>10</sup> I have been unable to identify this person. There is a scholar from Andong with the *ho* Yayudang, a certain Kwōn Chang, who has left some writings, but he lived from 1802 until 1874 and thus cannot have been the Yayudang Ch'imgoeng admired so much.



the world and his control over his passions he was not without human feelings. Time and again he demonstrates great affection for his interlocutors (who sometimes were just people he had met in passing) and expresses concern for their well-being and sadness when they have to part.

Ch'imgoeng's main problem with Confucianism may have been the exclusive claim to truth of some Confucian literati, but personally he was convinced of the fundamental compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism. Chŏng Hyeran has suggested that in one poem addressed to two Confucian scholars who came to ask him for some verses in a dream, he compares Confucianism with heaven and earth, which together form one "house" for man to live in, and also with the setting sun and the rising moon (Chimgoeng 2001:59-69, 215; Chŏng Hyeran 200b:7). In this interpretation, Ch'imgoeng predicts that Buddhism is on the rise and Confucianism on the wane.

Of course, Ch'imgoeng was not the only Buddhist monk who respected Confucian values. This was very common, as is also shown by another prose text in *Ch'imgoeng chip*, which is devoted to an association of more than forty monks created to promote the rebirth in the Pure Land of their parents (Ch'imgoeng 2001:154-155, 238-239). Ch'imgoeng praises this as an act of great filial piety. What is unusual in Ch'imgoeng's case is the extent to which he had immersed himself in the Confucian classics and consequently the facility with which he could converse with Confucian scholars on their own terms.

### Conclusions

Ch'imgoeng is the odd man out in the history of Buddhist *kasa*; first of all, because of the autobiographical aspects of his *kasa*, which are present in all three of his vernacular songs, although they are most explicit in *Kwisan'gok*; in the second place, because he addresses an audience that is different from that of more well-known Buddhist *kasa* such as *Hoelsingok*. In *T'aep'yŏnggok* he addresses his fellow members of the *sangha* and attacks their degeneration with an unusual vehemence, which however is tempered by hints that he himself, too, had not found the right path from the outset, but found the truth only after trying a variety of approaches. His personal quest also marks the other two *kasa*.

*Kwisan'gok* and *Ch'ŏnghaktonga* are not explicitly addressed to any group, but are not very likely to have appealed to the ordinary Buddhist faithful to whom other Buddhist *kasa* are mostly addressed. Because of their content and style, they seem to be intended for fellow seekers of the Way, whether monks or laymen. Ch'imgoeng marshalled his literary gifts to transmit the Buddhist message to readers or listeners with a relatively high level of education, increasing the persuasive power of his writing by putting aesthetics in the service of his didactic purposes. In his writings in Chinese it is even more obvious that he addressed the elite, from which he hailed himself, impoverished as his family may have been.

Ch'imgoeng's acceptance of and familiarity with Confucianism --part of the accommodation between Buddhism and Confucianism which had started in early Chosŏn, but assumed new dimensions in late Chosŏn (Buswell 1999)-- facilitated his dealings with members of the *yangban* status group, whether these contacts were purely social or designed to solicit donations for pious enterprises. In spite of his frequent quotations from the Confucian classics, however, Ch'imgoeng never turned into a Confucian in monk's robes, as some other erudite monks are said to have done (cf. Yi Chino 1997:250-258). In this respect the poem mentioned earlier in which he used the lines from the *Analects* from which he took his literary name is characteristic.

In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water,  
The using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found.  
Wealth and rank to me are as passing clouds.  
Aspiring to the golden dais, I listen to the wind in the branches.

With the last line he enlisted the author of the first three lines, no one less than Confucius himself, in the service of Amitābha. The poem is also representative of a man who had

intended to leave no trace of himself, no relics and no writings, repudiating empty fame, after a life that from childhood onwards had been dedicated to the quest for salvation.

\*

### **Bibliography of works cited**

Buswell, Robert E. Jr. 1999. "Buddhism Under Confucian Domination: The Synthetic Vision of Sōsan Hyujōng," in JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (eds.), *Culture and the State in Late Chosōn Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, pp. 134-159.

Ch'imgoeng. 2001. *Ch'imgoeng chip*, translation by Yi Yōngmu. Seoul: Ch'unch'usa.

Cho Tongil, 2005. *Han'guk munhak t'ongsa* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Seoul: Chisik sanōpsa.

Chōng Chaeho, 2003. "Naong chak kasa ūi chakka shibi," *Han'gukhak yōn'gu* 19, pp. 137-181.

Chōng Hyeran. 2003. "Chimgoeng ūi kasa munhak yōn'gu," M.A. thesis, Chōnnam taehakkyo.

----. 2005a. "Ch'imgoeng hansī-e nat'anān suhaeng ūi pallyōja-rosō ūi tal," *Kosiga yōn'gu*, pp. 295-326.

----. 2005b. "Ch'imgoeng hansī-e nat'anān yugyo-wa ūi kyoyu".  
Internet publication: [www.kll.co.kr/10library/](http://www.kll.co.kr/10library/)

----.2006c. "Ch'imgoeng ūi *Ch'ōnghaktongga* yōn'gu".  
Internet publication: [www.kll.co.kr/10library/](http://www.kll.co.kr/10library/)

Confucius. 1979. *The Analects (Lun yū)*, translated with an introduction by D.C. Lau. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Im Kijung. 2000. *Pulgyo kasa wōnjōn yōn'gu*. Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu.

Lee, Younghee. Forthcoming. "Hell and Other Karmic Consequences: A Buddhist Vernacular Song of Chosōn," In Robert E. Buswell Jr., *Korean Religions in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mencius.1970. *Mencius*, translated with an introduction by D.C. Lau. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Pak Ŭlsu. 1992. *Han'guk sijo taesajōn*. Seoul, Asea munhwasa.

Tongguk taehakkyo Han'guk pulgyo chōnsō p'yōnch'an wiwōnhoe, 2002. *Han'guk pulgyo chōnsō* vol. 8 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu.

Yi Chino. 1997. *Han'guk pulgyo munhak ūi yōn'gu*. Seoul: Minjoksa.

Yi Chōng. 1993. *Han'guk pulgyo inmyōng sajōn*. Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa.

Yi Illo. 1964. *P'ahan chip* in Koryō Taehakkyo minjok munhwa yōn'guso (transl. and annotation), *P'ahan chip.Yongjae ch'onghwa*. Seoul: Koryō taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu.

Yi Pongyŏng. 1959. "Mi-palp'yo ũi 'Ch'imgoeng kasa'-e taehayŏ," *Kugŏ kungmunhak* 20, pp. 33-37.

Yi Ũnsang. 1962. "Ch'imgoeng taesa-wa kŭ ũi kasa," *Kugŏ kungmunhak yŏn'gu* 6, pp. 7-24.