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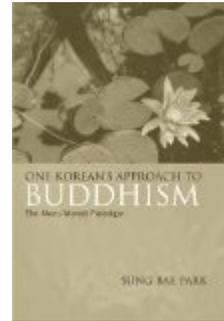
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sung Bae Park. *One Korean's Approach to Buddhism: The Mom/Momjit Paradigm*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. vii + 152 pp. \$59.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-7697-0; \$14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7914-7698-7.

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Reflections from a Career of Practice and Thought

The primary purposes of *One Korean's Approach to Buddhism* are to make the insights gleaned from a lifetime of reflection on Buddhist practice in the modern world more accessible to practitioners and interested students and to correct what are in the author's mind Western misunderstandings of Eastern thought. For much of his long career, Sung Bae Park has championed the seminal importance of the approach of essence and function (*t'i-yung* in Chinese) in understanding the truth of Buddhism and actualizing spiritual cultivation leading to enlightenment. In this book, Park emphasizes the Korean Zen paradigm of *mom/momjit*, which may loosely be translated as "body/bodily actions," and takes the reader through several different ways of understanding these concepts intellectually and practically. Park also stresses that *mom/momjit* is not exactly the same as the Chinese *t'i-yung* approach and reasons that it is in many ways more understandable to practitioners.

The tone of the book, which is comprised of an introduction, four chapters, and a short conclusion, is rather non-scholarly and accessible to a wide audience. Throughout the book, Park introduces and explains Buddhist doctrinal and intellectual terms, East Asian philosophical ideas, and other difficult academic vocabulary in a manner that should be generally accessible to most readers. Park is often at his best when he introduces his own personal experiences. One of the most engaging stories is found in the introduction. Park describes the personal experience he had in 1965 with the vener-

able Korean Zen master Sungchol (Söngch'öl, 1912-93) that explains why he has been obsessed with the essence-function paradigm for the entirety of his career.

In the first chapter, "Initial Considerations," Park defines and describes the *mom/momjit* paradigm from several points of view, from within the context of introducing basic Buddhist doctrines and the typical Buddhist worldview. Rather than translating *mom/momjit* into English, he leads the reader through various approaches to understanding the semantic range of these concepts. On the one hand, to Park, when translated as essence/function, *t'i-yung* sounds overly philosophical and removed from the readily understood realm of everyday life. *Mom/momjit*, on the other hand, Park explains by using the metaphor of a tree. *Mom* (body) refers to the hidden part, the roots, and *momjit* (bodily functions) refers to the trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit.

The second chapter, "Tools for Transformation," comprises Park's personal understanding of Zen practice, in particular the practice of *hwadu* (*hua-t'ou* in Chinese). He fruitfully combines Buddhist and Taoist ideas to describe how the practice encompasses the disciplines of harmonization of body, breath, and mind. He deciphers the Zen doctrine of no-thought (*wu-nien*), sheds light on the role of faith in the practice of Buddhism, and explains what he thinks enlightenment is. He also attempts to demonstrate the relationship between *hwadu* practice and the famously strange behavior of the beatings and

shoutings of the early Zen masters. To Park, faith in the Buddha's teachings is combined with the positive form of doubt, which is the product of investigating a *hwadu*, to lead the aspirant toward enlightenment. Enlightenment is primarily learning to comprehend one's innate potential, like a tadpole limited to a pond growing into a frog that is free to roam.

"Other Teachings," the third chapter, presents Park's crystallization of the fruit of the Korean Buddhist doctrinal tradition. He begins by deftly extracting and explicating gems from Wŏnhyo's (617–86) *Commentary on the Awakening of Faith, Treatise on the Vajrasamādhī Sūtra*, which illustrate the *mom/momjit* paradigm. Although I am not particularly convinced of his choice of "transparent" to translate the concept of "yüan-rung [sic]" (p. 84, read *yüan-jung* [perfect interfusion]), Park successfully integrates several key ideas from Wŏnhyo, to doctrines from the Hua-yen intellectual tradition, the *Diamond Sūtra*, and the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, showing how *mom/momjit* is a useful paradigm through which one can conceptualize the core teachings of these scriptures and intellectual traditions. For instance, he describes and explains the Hua-yen patriarch Ch'eng-kuan's (ca. 720/37-837/838) doctrine of the four dharma realms in his own terms. He argues that the first realm (*shih*, phenomena) corresponds to *momjit*; the second realm (*li*, principle) is *mom*; the third realm (*li-shih wu-ai*, no hindrance between *li* and *shih*) demonstrates that *mom* and *momjit* are inseparable; and the fourth realm (*shih-shih wu-ai*, no hindrance between *shih* and *shih*) suggests that only enlightened beings can see the latent buddhahood in all things. As Park has already successfully fused the doctrinal and Zen traditions by assimilating the views of Hua-yen and Ch'an (Zen), he next illustrates Chinul's (1158-1210) contributions to *hwadu* practice and then integrates Ch'an and Taoism as well as Confucianism by briefly describing the life and activities of Kyung-huh (Kyŏnghö, 1849-1912), an enigmatic Zen master of the late Chosŏn period of Korean history.

A recurring subtheme in the book is Park's conscious effort to address Christianity and to make his

understanding of the Buddhist doctrines he emphasizes applicable and understandable to a Christian audience. Although his intentions are appropriate, I suspect that Park's take on Christianity would not be recognized by most ordinary Christians, especially students not previously exposed to religious studies discourse. This is because much of the time Park employs intellectual reasoning to impute to Christian doctrine and theology positions that are clearly mirrors of Buddhism. Let me illustrate with a few passages: "Western religions similarly espouse the greatness and invincibility of God (*mom*) as compared with the weakness and sinfulness of man (*momjit*), and offer us the Kingdom of Heaven if we atone for our wrongdoings" (p. 29). Considering the centrality of the atonement of Jesus Christ in Christian doctrine—that Jesus suffered so that we do not have to suffer—a Christian reader might wonder what Park means by "if we atone for our wrongdoings." Does he allude to the Catholic doctrine of purgatory or something else? With respect to the fourth dharma realm of Hua-yen Buddhism mentioned above, Park explains, "in the context of Christianity, people abiding in this realm do not *love* God so much as they see themselves, and everything in their lives, including all others, *as* God" (p. 93). Park goes on to explain that although many Christian saints may have attained the stage of the third dharma realm, only sages like the Buddha and Jesus Christ have truly attained the fourth realm. Park then claims that although this fourth realm exists in all religions, it is either hard to find or not recognized as such. Ultimately these attempts are less successful than his more fruitful explanations of Buddhist material from a purely Buddhist perspective.

Park's book shows promise as an undergraduate introduction to Buddhism and seems specifically geared toward introductory courses in Asian religions. Although it is not comprised of much new information, it is written with a fresh approach directly intended for the classroom. Because Park straddles the fence between his Korean heritage and connections and his experience in American academe—in fact, sometimes Park writes as though his audience is actually Koreans—the book is also fruitful for thinking about issues of multiculturalism.

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