ABSTRACT

The Sŏn Master and kasa poet Ch’imgoeng Hyŏnbyŏn (1616-1684) deserves to be studied for several reasons. The three kasa[vernacular songs] he wrote, Kwisan’gok[Retreating to the Mountains], Taep’yŏnggok[Song of Great Peace] and Ch’ŏnghaktongga[Song of Ch’ŏnghaktong], are the earliest Buddhist kasa that can be dated with certainty and thus occupy a special place in the history of Korean Buddhist poetry. Remarkable is the presence in Ch’imgoeng’s kasa of a strong autobiographical element, which is lacking in other Buddhist kasa from the Chosŏn period, though not uncommon in kasa written by men and women of the yangbun elite. Ch’imgoeng enjoyed a considerable reputation for his literary gifts, to which the poetry and prose in classical Chinese in his Ch’imgoeng chip, first published in a woodblock edition in 1695, also testify. Ch’imgoeng’s writings in Chinese, which are a valuable source for a better understanding of Buddhism in this period, also show how deeply Confucianism had penetrated in Late Chosŏn society. In spite of Confucianism’s hegemonic position, however, Ch’imgoeng’s literary production always remained essentially Buddhist. This applies a fortiori to Ch’imgoeng’s kasa, which show none of the insistence on Confucian ethics that characterizes many later Buddhist kasa.

Keywords: Ch’imgoeng, Buddhist kasa, Late Chosŏn, Confucianism, pre-modern literature.

Introduction

In this article I will examine the writings of the Sŏn Master Ch’imgoeng Hyŏnbyŏn (1616-1684), and in particular the three vernacular songs in the kasa form he has left to us: Kwisan’gok[Retreating to the Mountains], Taep’yŏnggok[The Song of Great Peace] and Ch’ŏnghaktongga[The Song of Ch’ŏnghaktong]. For a better understanding of Ch’imgoeng’s role as a kasa poet, I will attempt to place these songs against the background of the particular nature of Late Chosŏn Buddhism. Ch’imgoeng’s writings in Chinese, compiled and published in a woodblock edition posthumously in 1695 and entitled as Ch’imgoeng chip, which includes his kasa, will be a valuable additional source for this purpose.

Why is Ch’imgoeng so important that all by himself he merits becoming the focus of further study? A first reason might be that his work is part of the “plurality of extant materials” on late Chosŏn Buddhism, which according to Robert Buswell has been seriously underresearched and deserves to be further explored. Ch’imgoeng’s work is a fascinating source for the knowledge of 17th 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. I have primarily chosen to write about Ch’imgoeng, however, because he occupies a special place in the history of Buddhist kasa. As said, the three songs mentioned above were added to his collected works, which in print appeared in 1693. This makes these kasa the oldest Buddhist kasa of undisputable authorship. Of course, there are Buddhist kasa attributed to earlier monks such as Naong (1320-1376) and Hyujong (1520-1604), but it is a moot point whether the extant texts were really composed by them. Compared with later Buddhist kasa, moreover, Ch’imgoeng’s works stand out because, as I will argue, they show a somewhat less popular character and do not address the masses of the faithful as do well-known Buddhist kasa like Hoesingol (Conversion Song), which is sometimes attributed to Hyujong. Stylistically and in content they contain certain elements, furthermore, that are reminiscent of other genres, such as Son 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.1

Through my survey of Ch’imgoeng’s kasa and some of his other literary works, I aim to assess his place in the development of Buddhist kasa and, additionally, to provide an impetus for further, and more focused, studies of his position in the history of Buddhism in late Chosön society.

Ch’imgoeng’s Life

There are three sources of information about Ch’imgoeng’s life. The first is the biography [haengjang] that his disciples appended to Ch’imgoeng chip. This is the most extensive biographical source, but by its very nature is 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 in which it was written. The second source, consisting of writings in Chinese by Ch’imgoeng himself, such as a rather lengthy autobiographical passage

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

in a piece written to encourage the addressee to improve himself by self-cultivation, 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 allows us to draw a rather clear and sometimes intriguing picture of Ch’imgoeng’s life.

Ch’imgoeng was born as the son of Yun Húng, who was a Confucian literatus, on the twelfth of the Sixth Month of the eighth year of Kwanghaegun’s reign (1616) in Naju, Cholla namdo. He enjoyed the reputation as sindong; a youth so bright that once he sees things he internalises them instantly and furthermore never forgets. 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 Buddhist monastery. In some of his prose texts he vividly described the conditions 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, the older brother’s clothes were thin and his younger brother was cold.6

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 good 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...7

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. One passage in his biography recounts how, when he was nineteen, his teacher was asked by a local magistrate to write a dedicatory text for the ceremony of raising the roof beam of a new guesthouse, built in order to lodge travellers on official business. The teacher, however, entrusted this task to Ch’imgoeng. Ch’imgoeng in turn decided to ask the celebrated sijo poet Yun Sŏndŏ (1587-1671) to write the dedication. Yun Sŏndŏ was so struck, and even moved to tears, by Ch’imgoeng’s resemblance in voice and facial features to his second son that he just had lost. When Ch’imgoeng explained why he had come, Yun Sŏndŏ replied that as

1 There is a fourth text that sometimes also is counted as a kasa, but it is so short and plain that it hardly deserves that name. It is included as a sijo in Pak Ubsu 1992: vol. Uno 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.

2 Ch’imgoeng chip is included in Han’guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ, see Tongguk taehakkyo Han’guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ pyŏnch’an wiwhŏnhoe 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.

3 Buswell 1999: 159. It should be mentioned that in the past few years Chong Hyeran has devoted considerable attention to Ch’imgoeng within the framework of a PhD project. CJ. see her writings listed in the reference list of the present article.

4 See, for instance, Chŏng Chaeho 2003.

5 In Cho Tonggil’s comprehensive 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 works listed in the reference list of the present article. See Cho Tonggil 2005: 413.

6 Ch’imgoeng 2001: 119, 228. 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 in the same volume.

7 Ch’imgoeng 2001: 111, 226.
the original request had been made to Ch’imgoeng because he certainly would be capable of composing the dedication himself, and thus Yun made Ch’imgoeng write a draft. Highly impressed by the result he proposed that Ch’imgoeng would stay with him as his adopted son.8 Ch’imgoeng hesitated but nevertheless stayed with Yun Sŏndo for a while. He only returned to the monastery, in spite of Yun Sŏndo’s urgent pleas to remain with him, after his master had come to take him back.

Around this time something happened that made Ch’imgoeng drastically change course. One day, while cutting wood, he had a serious and nearly fatal accident. Confronted with death, he reflected on his life and decided to turn away from studying scriptures and to choose meditation as his path to salvation. He realized that the Buddha should be found in one’s own mind rather than in the sutras. His most important Sŏn master was Soyo T’aen’ung(1562-1649), whose successor Ch’imgoeng is considered to be as far as meditation is concerned.9 Through T’aen’ung, Ch’imgoeng joined the lineage of the most celebrated Sŏn master of the entire Chosŏn period, Hyujong Sŏsan Taesa.

For the rest of his life Ch’imgoeng avoided the boisterous “world of red dust” 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 yŏnbul. Going one step further, he would even whisper the formula Namu Amit’abul in the ears of cows and horses, his haengjang says.10 This does not mean that to him yŏnbul 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 yŏmbul for him was more than the mechanical repetition of Namu Amit’abul is clear from a quatrain in Chinese he wrote.11

True to the original meaning of yŏmbul, which literally means “being mindful of the Buddha” or “envisioning the Buddha”, this practice for him obviously also involved mental concentration on Amitābha. Another quatrain expresses his dedication to Amitābha in a more indirect manner.12

The mind contemplates the setting sun looking 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.

The sun seems to be used here, as in the previous quatrain, as a symbol for Amitābha, the “Buddha of Infinite Light,” and by extension for the rebirth in his Pure Land Ch’imgoeng craved.

Both his own writings and his biography present Ch’imgoeng as a highly serious and compassionate monk on a never-ending quest for enlightenment. At the end of his life, when he was already ill, he wrote a testament14 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[post]. 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.

Although Ch’imgoeng left behind a heritage of 119 Chinese poems, three kasa, a brief song, and 28 pieces in prose, this was against his intentions. He wished to disappear without a trace, and instructed his disciples to destroy his writings, but they ignored his wish and eleven years after his death decided to put together his collected works.

Ch’imgoeng’s Kasa

Kwisan’gok
The first of Ch’imgoeng’s kasa, Kwisan’gok, is a quite personal work and can be read as an autobiographical account of spiritual development. In the corpus of late Chosŏn Buddhist kasa autobiographical elements are 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(1561-1642) who wrote both about his war experiences and his retirement in later years. Many members of the yangban status group, both male and female, have left kasa in which they unfold unusual personal experiences they had, for instance when travelling or living in exile. The presence of autobiographical elements is only one of the respects in which Ch’imgoeng’s kasa stand 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

The moon hides behind the western mountains, an icy wind blows.
The stars that fill the sky vie in brightness.
Under my hempen cover I cannot suppress my shivering.
Cradling my head on my elbow I anxiously wait for the sun to rise.
dream, and counsels the reader to abandon all cravings for wealth and glory. This sets the tone. Then the autobiographical part 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. He was gravely wounded when he was eighteen, as it is known from his haengjang, while cutting wood, this near-death experience 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. Interestingly, he states that not even the bodhisattva Chijang [Ksitigarbha], who is known as having made a vow to save all sentient beings from the torments of hell and often appears in this capacity in Buddhist paintings of Late Choson, could have rescued him. Thus he seems to favour personal effort[charyōk], rather than relying on the intercession of figures like Chijang[čaryŏk]. But, he adds, personal accomplishments of a literary[munjang] and artistic[kiye] 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 Imje[Linji] tradition, which he refers to as ‘the sharp-edged sword of Zhaozhou,’ the Chinese meditation master. 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 (irrespective of any particular faith or creed). 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 in this way, in a pure and uncontaminated state of poverty[ch’ŏngbin]. Structurally and metrically the final line could very well have been the third and last line of a sijo, with an exclamation at the beginning and a rhetorical question at the end: ‘Hey, is it (only) mine, this ‘tradition of a house of uprightness[č’ŏngbaek kap’ŭng], I wonder.’ The phrase č’ŏngbaek kap’ŭng actually seems more apt to refer to the family tradition of a household of honest, incorruptible Confucian scholars. Implicitly Ch’imgoeng therefore compares the Buddhist Way with the Confucianism of the yanghan, asserting the superiority of the former over the latter. When we review the kasa in its entirety, it is well-constructed, with an introduction, main part and conclusion, and a logical progression of arguments.

14 Ch’imgoeng 2001:136, 239.
16 The addition of “only” is justified by its explicit appearance in many last lines of sijo that follow the same formulaic pattern.

Taep’yŏnggok
Taep’yŏnggok[Song of Great Peace] is about spiritual peace rather than the cessation of war, unlike Pak Ill’s Taep’yŏnggu. Usually the term Taep’yŏng 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’gol he turned his back on society and sang the praises of the solitary life of the hermit, in Taep’yŏnggok 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 Choson. The primary addressees were fellow-monks who had strayed from the right path rather than lay believers. It is as a call for the moral and spiritual regeneration of the sangha that this kasa is of great interest.

In Taep’yŏnggok, 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 done monks robes in order to evade the duties of ordinary commoners rather than to gain enlightenment. 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, the topic of meditation), they merely ruin the collars of their robes. Even if they achieve some degree of awakening, Ch’imgoeng alleges, they have not 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, 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 the innocent laymen who kneel before them, folding their hands, and assiduously rubbing them until pellets of dirt come off. Such monks would deserve to be consigned to hell or sent far, far away into exile. The third target of Ch’imgoeng’s criticisms is monks who betray their true calling by frequenting the markets to sell merchandise. Of course in this period Buddhist monasteries were forced to engage in such commercial activities even more than in previous periods because of 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

17 Like the Han’guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ edition of Ch’imgoeng chipt, I accept the emendation of the original text proposed by Yi U˘nsang 1962, which replaces the character ūk [\] in the first line with the character yok [\].
Ch'imgoeng was not a rigid puritan and did not unconditionally condemn the drinking of alcohol by itself. In his haengjang, it is said that he would not refuse one cup of rice wine, but never drank more than a 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 Taep'yonggok Ch'imgoeng warns these peddler-monks that in the final analysis all the material possessions they may 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 malaise of Chosŏn Buddhism he discerned. Those who seek enlightenment first of all should study texts: Buddhist expositions and scriptures, of course, but, perhaps surprisingly, also Chinese philosophers[cheja paekka]. 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 Chiri Mountains, P'ungaksan[the “autumn name” of Ku'mgangsan], 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.18 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 Ku'mgangsan], and his straw shoes became worn-out “on the moss of the 89 temples of Pangjansan[Chiri Mountains].” For a scriptural justification of this practice, which is a common element in the life of a Sŏn monk, Ch'imgoeng alludes to the example of the boy-pilgrim Sonjae tongja (Sudhana) from the Avatamsaka Sutra. These peregrinations are also the subject of one of Ch'imgoeng's poems in Chinese:

Roaming the mountains
East of the Chiri Mountains I've seen the moon above Taebaeksan.
West of the Diamond Mountains I've watched the clouds over Mt. Myohyang.
Only when you expand the mind's eye, roaming mountains far and wide,
you may say that the world is small. 19

Ch'onghaktoongga
The brief Ch'onghaktoongga[Song of Blue Crane Village] sings the praises of spiritual practice in a beautiful secluded spot, in a much more lyrical vein than Taep'yonggok. Ch'onghak is the name of an actual place in the Chiri Mountains where the great literatus Koun Ch'oe Ch'iwon(857-?) withdrew after he had returned from China, where he had pursued a career as an official. As an entry in Pahan chip by Yi Illo(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.20 The name of the place is indicative; where immortals of high spiritual standing dwell blue cranes will appear. To leave no doubt that Ch'onghak 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 Kwisangok, which was about Ch'imgoeng's personal retreat from the world, suggests that Ch'onghak, whether it is an actual place or an imagined ideal, 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, curiously shaped rocks, luxurious foliage, a waterfall, and sunlight penetrating to the bottom of a limpid pond, in which mountains, clouds and blossoms are reflected.21 In fact, because of this Ch'onghaktoongga has been compared to Songgang's Kwadong pyŏlgok.22 But then there is a marked shift towards the personal and Ch'imgoeng infuses the kasa with a strong Buddhist content. Suddenly startled, while still in a state of non-enlightenment[pulgak], 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[Puriram, the “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 landscape illuminated by the setting sun (in the west, of course, like the Pure Land) that so impressed the poet. Visualization of the setting sun is one of the spiritual exercises the Buddha enjoined on those who wish for rebirth in Amitābha's paradise, according to the Sutra on the Visualizing the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. The kasa ends with the following lines:

The quiet monk in his tattered robes
cannot contain the bliss of meditation,

19 Ch'imgoeng 2001:45, 212.
places a stick of incense in the jade burner
and makes the golden chimes ring, 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 the paradise of Ch'ônghaktong, 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 scenery. 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 benighted dilettanti.

If one peruses Ch'ônghaktongga once again after reading Ch'imgoeng's prose account of his search for ultimate truth 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.

Confucians and Confucianism in Ch'imgoeng's Writings

In Ch'imgoeng's kasa, Confucianism is not an intrusive presence. Once Confucian literati are mentioned when he warns his fellow monks in Kwisan'gok not to make a spectacle of themselves in the eyes of the former, and in the last line of Kwisan'gok there is an oblique reference to the Confucian ideal of the moral rectitude of the upright scholar. But that is all. This is quite different, however, where his writings in Chinese are concerned, in which he frequently demonstrates a great familiarity with Confucianism. These texts tell us a great deal about the intellectual background of Ch'imgoeng's life. As Ch'imgoeng was a yangban son, we may assume that even in his early childhood, before poverty drove him away from home, he had already imbided 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.23

It is quite evident that Ch'imgoeng knew the Confucian classics very well. In fact, even the literary pseudonym ho we know him by, Ch'imgoeng, which means “sleeping with one's head on one's elbow” and which we have already encountered as a lightly disguised “signature” in a poem quoted earlier, 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 “Yugo˘uu˘m.”25 The first three lines of this poem are an almost integral quotation of one of the Sage's sayings, Book VII, nr. 16:

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, although the omission is significant because to a Confucian wealth and rank obtained through proper moral cultivation would be perfectly acceptable. The last line, however, radically dispels all Confucian intentions 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 is a seat for a person 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 So˘namsa that for many years had been exposed to the weather.27 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,28 who had taken the initiative for the building project. Kudam had noted that the Buddha was such a great sage, he uses the term sŏn'gim with its possible Confucian connotations, that he had inspired kunja to commission the bronze image. After some elaborations, Ch'imgoeng finally suggests that the readers, moved by the words of the Sage, i.e. 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 primarily to members of the yangban class with their Confucian education, and that therefore from a tactical point of view it made perfect sense for Ch’imgoeng to appeal to Confucian values when soliciting donations from this group. There is no doubt, however, that Ch’imgoeng possessed a genuine appreciation for Confucianism, which is confirmed by his writings in general. In this context, the following poem, which he wrote for a Confucian gentleman, deserves to be quoted:30

A poem respectfully offered to Licentiate Ch’oe
The luminosity of the moon illuminates the face of heaven.
Fallen petals’ scarlet reddens the ground.
The taste that truly links us all
is the spirit, I reckon, of the Old Man of Lu.

Although the moon here may be an allusion to the Buddhist dharma (as in the title of the famous poetic narrative of the life of the Buddha, the Wönch’ön’ganggijok, “The Song of the Moon that is Reflected in a Thousand Rivers”), the “Old Man of Lu” is of course no one else than Confucius.

Another text that is of interest in this context was written to collect funds for the painting[tanch’ông] of the woodwork of the Chijang Hermitage on P’allyönsan.31 Ch’imgoeng begins by stating that the “Way of the Confucian Gentleman[kunja]” is in decline. Some kunja have loyalty and keep faith[ch’ungsin] but are lacking as far as rites and literature[yemun] are concerned; with others it is just the other way around. Ch’imgoeng then quotes from the Lunyu, Book XII.8:

Ji Zicheng said: “The important thing about the gentleman is the stuff[chil] he is made of. What does he need refinement[munch’ae] for?” Zigong 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.’ The stuff is no different from refinement; refinement is no different from the stuff.” 32

Ch’imgoeng then applies the meaning of this to the building itself, the unadorned “stuff”, and the tanch’ông painting of the wood: just as “stuff” and “adornment” should go together, the newly built Chijang Hermitage needs the adornment of tanch’ông 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, the Latter Days of the Law.

What kind of donors were addressed is also made quite clear in a text that was written to raise funds to build a great hall for the Nünggasa on P’allyönsan.33 Ch’imgoeng at the end invokes a Confucian authority, Zengei: “Zengei said: ‘What goes out from you will return to you.’ This is a quote from the Mencius, Book I, B, 12: “What you met out will be paid back to you.” This actually does not fit the way Ch’imgoeng uses it very well, because of course he means to say “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(yi ji kunja), please put your seal on this document!”34

That Ch’imgoeng’s use of Confucian literature was not a mere ploy to elicit donations from potential sponsors with a Confucian upbringing is confirmed by the warm relations he entertained with several Confucian scholars.35 In particular, he seems to have a great regard for a man with the pseudonym Yayudang.36 In Ch’imgoeng chip there is a letter in which Ch’imgoeng asks Yayudang to receive him,37 and among Ch’imgoeng’s poems there are several that are dedicated to this figure.38 From these it appears that their friendship endured in spite of long periods of separation. This is one example:

Harmonizing with a poem by Yayudang
In the last month of winter, the first snow of plum blossom petals,39 but no one to enjoy it with, writing poems.
The immortal of poetry is far away now
and so I grieve under the bright moon.40

Ch’imgoeng chip also includes a poem by Yayudang [“the immortal of poetry” in Ch’imgoeng’s poem] in which the latter calls Ch’imgoeng a xingjin, a term that is used to refer to the original disciples of the historical Buddha and thus meaning

30 Ch’imgoeng 2001:27.
32 Lau, tr. 1979:113-114.
33 Ch’imgoeng 2001:126-128, 231.
35 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 Kumsansa.
36 Ch’ow, Byeran 2005b.
37 I have been unable to identify this person. There is a scholar from Andong with the ho Yayudang, a certain Kwon 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.
39 Ch’imgoeng 2001:24, 209, 27, 210, 28, 210, 43, 212.
40 The falling white petals of the plum blossom, which blooms when winter has not yet departed, may easily be mistaken for snow.
someone who is in harmony with the truth.42

The many poems Ch’imgoeng wrote for his acquaintances, Confucian or otherwise, show that in spite of his turning away from 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 as well as sadness when they have to part.43

Sending Scholar Cho on his way to the capital
Meeting in this lonely village we sit together in the night, Unaware of the moon fading behind the plum blossom outside the window. So sad, tomorrow morning after we have parted, one of us will return to the capital, one to the mountains.

In another poem,44 Ch’imgoeng gently mocks his own inability to shed his attachment to his friends:

On receiving an invitation from Kûmhwasan
How laughable, the way I behave. Alas, it’s not for me, to be a real man! Though sixty years have passed since I was born, It’s still difficult to ignore the call of a friend.

Although the invitation presumably was from a fellow monk, as Kûmhwasan was the location of the Chinggwang Temple, this poem, too, contains a reference to Confucius in the term he uses to express “sixty years”[isun]. This is derived from Confucius’s saying “At sixty my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.”

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. Ch’ong 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 and Buddhism with heaven and earth, which together form one “house” for man to live in, and also with the setting sun and the rising moon.45 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 created to promote the rebirth in the Pure Land of their parents.46 Ch’imgoeng praises this as an act of great filial piety, the supreme Confucian virtue. 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.

When we look at Buddhist kasa published in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which mainly were addressed to a wider and probably less educated audience, we notice a complete acceptance of Confucian morality. Ch’imgoeng’s own kasa are more concerned with spirituality than with ethics and therefore pay scant attention to Confucianism. His writings in Chinese, however, eloquently demonstrate that this was not due to Ch’imgoeng’s rejection of Confucianism.

Conclusion
Ch’imgoeng is the odd man out in the history of Buddhist kasa; first of all, as I have already pointed out, 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 Hoesimgok. In Taep’yônggok 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 his way to the truth only after trying a variety of approaches. His personal spiritual quest, which lasted all his life, also marks the other two kasa.

Kwisan’gok and Ch’ônghaktonga are not explicitly addressed to any particular audience, 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 serious fellow seekers of the Way, whether they were 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—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.47 In this respect the poem mentioned earlier in which he used the lines from the

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42 Ch’imgoeng 2001:25, 209.
43 Ch’imgoeng 2001:41, 212.
46 Ch’imgoeng 2001:154-155, 238-239.
47 Buswell 1999.
Waiting for the Sun to Rise

Analects from which he took his literary name is characteristic. Here I quote it in its entirety:

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. Confucianism was such an integral part of the social and intellectual life of Late Chosön that it could hardly be ignored, but in his writings in Chinese Ch‘imgoeng managed to make it subservient to his own faith. In his kasa, Confucianism hardly intruded, in contrast to numerous other kasa of later years, which insisted that only those who displayed the Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty would be reborn in Amitābha’s Pure Land. In this respect, too, as a kasa poet Ch‘imgoeng was an unusual figure.

GLOSSARY

charyŏk 自力
cheja paekka 諸子百家
Chijang 地藏
Chijangam 地藏庵
chil 賀
Ch‘imgoeng chip 枝椈集
Ch‘imgoeng Hyŏnbyŏn 枝椈懸筆
Chinggawang 澄光
Chirisan 智異山
Cholla namdo 全羅南道
ch‘ŏngbaek kap’ung 清白家風
ch‘ŏngbin 清貧
Ch‘ŏnghaktonggga 青鶴洞歌
Chosŏn 朝鮮
ch‘ungsin 忠信
haengjang 行狀
ho 賀
Hoesimgok 回心曲
hwadu 話頭
Hyujo’ng Sŏn Tae s’as 休靜 西山大师
Imje[Linji] 臨濟
isun 耳順

Ji Zicheng 智子成
kasa 歌辞
kiye 技藝
Koun Ch‘oe Ch‘i’wŏn 孤雲 崔致遠
Kudam 聲景
Kŭmgangsan 金剛山
Kŭmhwasan 金華山
Kŭmsŏnsa 金仙寺
kunja 君子
Kwandong pyŏlgok 關東別曲
Kwanghaegun 光海君
Kwisan’gok 蘇山曲
Kwŏn Chang 權璋
malse 末世
munch’ae 文彩
munjang 文章
Myohyangsan 妙香山
Naju 羅州
Namum Amt‘abal 南無阿彌陀佛
Naong 惣翁
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