

The Path, Practice and Realization :
A Study, with Special Reference to
Early Buddhism, in psychology and
Philosophy of Seon Buddhism as
Expounded by Chinul

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Abstract

Chinul has been studied extensively. The contribution the present study seeks to do is to try to understand him with reference to the teachings in early Buddhism contained in the discourses of the Pāli canon. Chinul perceived himself as a Seon practitioner and made use of views and techniques found in that tradition. The unique character, however, was that he executed an amalgamation of two traditions which were normally understood to be antithetical to each other, namely, textual and meditative traditions as found in his contemporary Buddhism. The textual traditions in Chinese Buddhism had their roots in the Indian schools of Buddhism. Although these traditions absorbed considerably from native Chinese traditions such as Taoism and Confucianism their overall meditative practice was very much Indian. The best way to understand this link will be to approach it through the study of early discourses. In addition to the Chinese translations of Āgamas, the complete body of literature available to us today is the Pāli canon. An added advantage is that this body of literature represents an unbroken tradition of textual study and practice. The present study makes use of this literature in order to understand Chinul's interpretation of the doctrine and the accompanied practice, although it could well be that Chinul may even have not seen a single discourse in Pāli.

The present study reveals that some of the key problems

and issues that Chinul, in particular and the Chinese and Korean Buddhist traditions in general, grappled with were not totally unknown to the earliest phase of Buddhism. For example, the questions such as whether realization is sudden or gradual and whether textual study is needed or not have been debated and discussed from the very beginning and across many traditions, although not in the same intensity as such debates were conducted in East Asian Buddhism. The present study shows that much light can be thrown on these issues by studying the early Buddhist literature available in Pāli, preserved in South Asia.

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