Sŏn Master Daehaeng and Huayan Buddhism[1]

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Abstract

Sŏn Master Daehaeng (大行禪師, 1927–2012) was one of the most prominent Buddhist nuns in modern Korean Buddhism. She founded the Hanmaum Seonwon (Sŏn Center of One Mind), which expanded to include fifteen branch temples across South Korea and ten international branches, in addition to its headquarters in Anyang. Daehaeng's teachings integrate Buddhist doctrine with the bodhisattva practice of everyday life. At the time of her passing in 2012, she was working on a Korean translation of the *Huayan jing*, although it remains unpublished. Nonetheless, various materials suggest the influence of Huayan thought on her Buddhism. This article explores Daehaeng's Huayan thought in three sections: the first examines her life and key teachings; the second analyzes the wooden painting in the dharma hall of Hanmaum Sŏn Center, which she identified as a visualization of the Huayan Buddhist world; and the third and final section considers the connections between Daehaeng's teachings and Huayan Buddhism's approach to social engagement in our time.

Keywords: Sŏn Master Daehaeng, Hanmaum Seonwon, Huayan Buddhism, bodhisattva path, Buddhism's social engagement, echo-dharma

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1. Introduction

Sŏn Master Daehaeng (大行禪師, 1927–2012) was one of the most prominent Buddhist nuns in modern Korean Buddhism. She founded the Hanmaum Seonwon (Sŏn Center of One Mind), which expanded to include fifteen branch temples across South Korea and ten international branches, in addition to its headquarters in Anyang. Daehaeng's teachings integrate Buddhist doctrine with the bodhisattva practice of everyday life. At the time of her passing in 2012, she was working on a Korean translation of the *Huayan jing*, although it remains unpublished. Nonetheless, various materials suggest the influence of Huayan thought on her Buddhism. This article explores Daehaeng's Huayan Buddhist thought in three sections: the first section examines her life and key teachings; the second section analyzes the wooden painting in the dharma hall of Hanmaum Sŏn Center, which she identified as a visualization of the Huayan Buddhist world; and the third and final section considers the connections between Daehaeng's teachings and Huayan Buddhism's approach to social engagement.

2. Life in the Wilderness: On the Fundamentals of Existence

The Essential Teaching of One Mind (Hanmaŭm Yojŏn), published by Hanmaum Seonwon, provides a relatively detailed account of Daehaeng's early life, although some scholars question the reliability of her biography compared to those of other Sŏn masters.[2] According to this source, she was born in 1927 into a relatively comfortable household. The family owned a considerable amount of land in what is now the Itaewon area, and her father was running a company. Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910, and her father, a retired military officer, resisted colonial rule. As a result, he was repeatedly imprisoned and forced into a life of a fugitive, constantly hiding from Japanese authorities. Eventually, the family was suddenly evicted from their home—an event that occurred when she was around seven years old. Left with nothing, the family reportedly survived by building a hut on a hillside in Heukseok-dong. Although Heukseok-dong is now part of central Seoul, at the time it was an undeveloped area of wooded hills, lacking village infrastructure or basic facilities.

[2] Choe Won-sup (Ch'oi Wŏnsŏp) has noted that the chronology of Daehaeng's life is less clearly documented than that of other Sŏn masters, and that even the details of her life prior to 1980 remain uncertain. For example, see Choe, Won-sup,「미래 한국불교를 위한 묘공대행의 생애와 사상 재조명-탄신 100 주년 전시회를 가정하여-」. (Illuminating Myogong Daehaeng's Life and Philosophy for Future Korean Buddhism—Assuming an Exhibition Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of He Birth), *Hanmaŭm yŏn'gu* 9 (2022), 303-392.

Forced out of their home, the family struggled to survive in extreme poverty. For young Daehaeng, however, poverty was not the only hardship. Daehaeng recalled that her father was generous to others but, for reasons unknown, was harsh toward her. She later recounted avoiding home and sometimes sleeping outside, afraid of his outbursts.

Life on the hillside was undoubtedly hard and difficult. Yet through this experience, Daehaeng appears to have gained early insight into fundamental truths about existence. She recalled that during her time wandering the hills and spending nights outdoors, she often asked herself, "Why are there rich and poor people in the world? And why are there more people who are poor, hungry, and sick than those who are wealthy?"[3] This was a profound question for a child to contemplate, especially while living in such destitution. Yet Daehaeng's anguish over life's inequities did not focus solely on unfairness. In *The Essential Teaching of One Mind*, she reflects on this early memory in contrast to a deeper realization she gained in the mountains: "In the forest, there were no gaps between rich and poor, no hierarchies of power—there was only life itself. Yet … life outside the forest remained unchanged, still filled with inequality and suffering."[4]

Whether in the 1930s, when Daehaeng wandered the mountains, or in 2025, nearly a century later, the experience of suffering and living in an unjust society remains a daily reality for many. The world has long been marked, however one explains it, by a persistent conflict between those who have and those who have not, between the powerful and the powerless. Yet if we focus solely on this dimension of life, we risk falling into despair or cynicism. Daehaeng's strength lies in her ability to perceive the other side of pain and inequality—what she calls "life" itself. Because she saw this life, and the suffering and conflict that inevitably arise from it, she turned inward, asking a deeper ontological question: "If there is a you who made me, show yourself—I want to see your form."[5]

Humans struggle in the face of life's absurdity. We are often frustrated by misfortunes and suffering that arise without apparent reason or cause. How one navigates a situation of such destitution shapes the direction and meaning of their life. For Daehaeng, communion with nature in the wilderness became the path to practice and awakening to the fundamental nature of existence. As she reflects: "I didn't learn truth

[3] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn: Daehaeng sŭnim haengjang, pŏbŏ chip* (Anyan, Korea: Hanmaum Seonwon ch'ulp'anbu, 2022), 27.
[4] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn,* 26-27.
[5] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 27.

from grand and noble sources like sutras or seated meditation—I learned from humble things. For instance, I learned the law of cause and effect from picking a single frost-covered chili pepper."[6] As such, Daehaeng grasped life's most fundamental principles through her encounters with various beings in nature.

Daehaeng's encounters with other beings in the mountains, where she once learned the laws of existence from something as humble as "a frost-covered chili pepper," intensified during her continued life of homelessness in the wilderness. She recounts several moments when she survived with the "help" of non-human beings. On one occasion, she was saved from a collapsing cliff by following a line of ants. At another, a sudden appearance of diving pigeons prevented her from falling off a precipice. On yet another, a snake brought her specific leaves that, when brewed, stopped her bleeding as she lay weak and coughing blood, expecting death. These moments reveal a profound communion with the natural world, one that goes beyond metaphor into lived interdependence. These encounters with nature and other living beings may sound like fables from a children's book. Yet through them, Daehaeng came face to face with the mystery of existence. Such experiences opened her to the depth and intensity of life itself. As she recalls: "The profound love and compassion common to all living things, that ultimate, desperate heart that seeks to save, rescue, and comfort each other, seized my entire body and soul so powerfully that I could not help but weep."[7]

Religious activities take many forms, and among them, *pilgrimage* is a practice that transcends both time and culture. At first glance, religious pilgrimage may seem difficult to grasp. Logically, visiting sacred sites appears paradoxical: when pilgrims journey to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, the Buddha himself is not physically present, nor does the site remain as it was at the time of his birth. Yet pilgrimage has the power to transform ordinary space into sacred space, offering access to a spiritual dimension that eludes everyday experience. It also transcends chronological time, allowing pilgrims to symbolically return to the age of sages and founders, thus collapsing the distance between the present and the sacred past.

The fact that pilgrimage enables travelers to transcend their present time and space to enter the world of the sages also suggests that pilgrimage is a transformative experience within the pilgrim's own body. As a journey undertaken through the body, pilgrimage becomes a holistic act—one that integrates the physical, spiritual, and emotional

[6] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 54
[7] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 73.

dimensions of being. This helps explain the enduring appeal of routes like the Camino de Santiago, where pilgrims walk for days or even for more than a month, often with blistered feet. Each step is not only a spiritual movement but also a bodily transformation, making the pilgrimage a fully embodied experience.

During her ascetic practice in the mountains, Daehaeng must have undergone such a holistic pilgrim's experience. She describes this experience:

> "While wandering in the mountains, I often looked up at the sky and pleaded, 'O dear, now that I reflect on my path, I realize I never knew how difficult it was for this unworthy one to walk this path'. This was because I thought of those ancient seekers of truth who risked their lives walking from Korea to China, and from China to India. Since no one forced me but I chose to follow and walk this path myself, there was really nothing to resent, nothing to call difficult, nothing to call joyful—but when I reflected on their hearts and intentions, those who silently walked while treating their bodies as mere straw, I came to understand the minds of the patriarchs and Buddha."[8]

During this pilgrimage, she "sang with birds, conversed with unnamed plants and trees, and at times soared freely through the vast sky."[9]

Daehaeng referred to a state of being in harmony with nature and in communion with all beings as *chuin'gong* (主人空), or "Master of Emptiness." This concept has become a signature of her teachings. From the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy, *chuin'gong* resonates deeply with the East Asian Buddhist notion of buddha-nature (K. *pulsŏng,* 佛性). Within the Sŏn Buddhist tradition, the idea of buddha-nature is rooted in Bodhidharma's teaching: "directly pointing to the mind to see one's nature and become Buddha" (直指人心 見性成佛), and further developed in the Sixth Patriarch Huineng's assertion that the mind is originally pure, with "no place for dust to settle." In the context of Korean Sŏn Buddhism, Daehaeng's *chuin'gong* may be understood as a contemporary expression of Pojo Chinul's (1158-1210) teaching that "mind is the Buddha," rearticulated for the 21st century.[10]

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[8] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 98
[9] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 99.
[10] The idea that "mind is the Buddha" appears in various places throughout East Asian Buddhism. In Chinul's Sŏn Buddhism, the teaching that "mind is the Buddha" emerges as his core philosophy. In his

In a gesture that bridges tradition and modern sensibility, Daehaeng reinterprets the familiar Korean term *chuin'gong* (主人公, "main character") as *chuin'gong* (主人空, "Master of Emptiness"), broadening the public resonance of her teaching. This reinterpretation gains traction precisely because the expression sounds familiar, even as it shifts its meaning radically. Daehaeng articulates *chuin'gong* through a range of vivid metaphors, including the following passage: "Before the sun, not even a point of darkness is tolerated. The *chuin'gong*, my original self, is the sun, and therefore the eyes of *chuin'gong* can see reality exactly as it is. Trust in the power of *chuin'gong*, the light of *chuin'gong*, the virtue of *chuin'gong*, the eyes of *chuin'gong*. With this trust, turn deeply inward toward *chuin'gong*. While seeing objects, do not become entangled in them; let them go and observe yourself with the bright eyes of *chuin'gong*."[11] In such descriptions, *chuin'gong* emerges as an energetically awakened self—the *main character* (*chuin'gong*, 主人公) who is at the same time the *master of emptiness* (*chuin'gong*, 主人空). The "I" is not a passive recipient of reality but an actively engaged presence grounded in luminous awareness.

Traditional Buddhist concepts such as *buddha-nature* and *emptiness* are notoriously difficult to grasp. Equally profound is Pojo Chinul's core Sŏn Buddhist teaching that the mind itself is the buddha. In his influential text *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind* (修心訣), Chinul writes with urgency: "The suffering of the three realms is like a house engulfed in flames—how can one remain inside, willingly enduring such prolonged agony? If you wish to escape the cycle of birth and death, nothing surpasses the aspiration to become a buddha. Yet even as we speak of seeking buddhahood, the buddha is none other than this very mind. Why, then, search for the mind in distant places?" [12] Chinul's words call for an inward turn, reminding us that liberation is not found elsewhere but within the very mind we already possess—a theme that reverberates through East Asian Chan/Sŏn/Zen Buddhist tradition and resonates with Daehaeng's articulation of *chuin'gong*. Chinul reiterates this central teaching—that the mind is buddha—in several of his other works, including *Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood* (圓頓成佛論) and *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection with Personal Notes* (法集別行錄並入私記).

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major works such as "Secrets on Cultivating the Mind" (修心訣), "Treatise on the Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood" (圓頓成佛論), and "Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes" (法集別行錄並入私記), Chinul repeatedly emphasizes this point.

[11] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 510.

[12] Chinul, 修心訣 (*Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*), 《韓國佛教全書》 vol.4.708, "三界熱惱, 猶如火宅, 其忍淹留, 甘受長苦. 欲免輪廻, 莫若求佛, 若欲求佛, 佛卽是心, 心何遠覓."

The originality of Daehaeng's teaching lies not only in her creation of the concept *chuin'gong*—the "subject of emptiness"—which draws from Sŏn Buddhism's traditional insight that the mind is both a buddha and empty, but also in the way she grounds this realization in her own lived experience. Ironically, Daehaeng attributes her awakening to *chuin'gong* not to scholarly study or monastic training, but to her encounter with profound existential pain and solitude: "Had I been well-versed in writing and Buddhist sutras, would I have felt such loneliness? And had I not been so lonely, could I have received the consolation of *chuin'gong*?"[13]

The fundamental solitude of existence is an inescapable condition for all beings. Yet, as Daehaeng observes, various worldly structures often serve to obscure this solitude. Education, family, society, material wealth, and social status all function as mediating forces that temporarily shield us from confronting the starkness of existential aloneness. Daehaeng reflects that had such structures been available to her during her years wandering in the mountains, she might not have encountered solitude in its rawest form. But she had no access to formal knowledge, social position, material comfort, or even familial protection. It was precisely because she faced existential solitude without mediation that the depth of her awakening became so profound. And perhaps because no human bonds were available to her, she was instead able to form deeper connections with non-human beings.

One might wonder how Daehaeng was able to cultivate such a strong and positive spirit in the face of overwhelming destitution. It is unlikely that she adopted this positive outlook from the very beginning. She must have struggled repeatedly, and through that struggle, a will to understand life—piece by piece—gradually emerged in her thinking. Her time in the mountains was not brief; it began when she was around seven years old, circa 1935, and continued until the founding of the Hanmaum Center in 1972. During this period, she received the novice precepts twice. In 1950, Daehaeng expressed her wish to enter monastic life to Sŏn Master Pang Hanam (1876–1951), the first Supreme Patriarch of the Jogye Order, the largest Buddhist order in modern Korea. She received the novice precepts from him, along with the Dharma name Ch'ŏnggak (靑覺). Even after receiving the precepts, Daehaeng did not remain within the institutional setting; instead, she "ran away" to the mountains, where she continued her practice—wandering through the peaks like clouds and flowing water.[14] Through her solitary practice in the mountain wilderness,

[13] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn,* 125-126.
[14] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Myogongtang Daehaeng Sŏnsa haengjang*, https://ebook.hanmaum.org/ecatalog5.php?Dir=433&Cate=&start=&catimage=&callmode=&eclang=, 9.

Daehaeng gradually deepened her spiritual realization, reaching a recognizable state of mental clarity and eventually founded Hanmaum Seonwon in 1972. After the death of Hanam in 1951, Master T'anhŏ (1913–1983), who had witnessed Daehaeng's rigorous practice, advised her to receive the novice precepts again in order to restore her standing within the sangha. Because Daehaeng had not been engaged with the sangha after receiving her initial precepts, her name had been removed from the sangha registry. Master T'anhŏ recommended Venerable Ujin as her teacher so that she could receive the precepts again. Venerable Ujin gave her the dharma name Daehaeng.[15]

Daehaeng's writings are filled with the heart-wrenching agony she endured during her years in the mountains. Yet because her awakening was so profound, the solitude and pain she experienced did not remain merely personal—they became the ground for deep empathy with all beings, especially those dwelling at the margins of existence. Reflecting on this, Daehaeng writes:

> "I never wanted to harm even the smallest creatures for my own benefit, because the pain was too deep. Because this world was so painfully bitter and so tearful, I hoped that at least others would not have to experience such bone-deep pain, that at least others could live without tears. Even now, I am drawn more to the pitiful, the uneducated, the inadequate. Not just people, but also to animals. Among them, I feel particular compassion for creatures like snakes, which everyone, human and beast alike, detests and abhors as repulsive."[16]

Like her experiences, Daehaeng's language describing her mountain asceticism is raw and unrefined. She speaks of the bone-deep pain and tearful anguish of existential solitude in unadorned, direct terms. This naked language mirrors the starkness of her life in the wilderness. Her deep compassion for those at the margins reveals not only the core of her own thought but also points to the fundamental purpose of religion itself: to recognize suffering and respond with awakened empathy.

Although all humans are, in a fundamental sense, marginal beings, most strive to present themselves as if they occupy the center of reality. They not only conceal their own marginality but, in doing so, construct hierarchies that place others—especially those

[15] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Myogongtang Daehaeng Sŏnsa haengjang*, 16.
[16] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn,* 126.

visibly at the margins—beneath them. This concealment often leads to condescension toward other people and beings, reinforcing systems of superiority and exclusion.

Daehaeng's deep concern for those at the margins emerged directly from her own life at the margins. She recalls: "Living in this world, when I was trampled upon, beaten, and despised by others, I walked a path of tears, dragging my body. At such times, I thought of insects crushed under pedestrians' feet. Our lives were no different from the insects' condition—understanding that their world has its own way of living, I observed in detail how they dragged their broken bodies away, weeping, after being stepped on. How can we call any life trivial and another life noble or refined?" She continues, "Had I not fallen into the pit myself, I would not have understood its meaning; had I not walked on muddy ground, I would not have understood its meaning."[17]

Daehaeng's experiences in the mountains and the existential truth she realized through them form both the foundation and core of her Buddhist thought. Her meditation on marginal beings led her to perceive existence not through the lens of hierarchy, but through the lens of equality. This deep sense of existential equality, in turn, becomes the ground for the co-existence of all beings. As Daehaeng writes: "There is no separation between poisonous herbs and medicinal herbs. … Since I and the grass are not two, and I and the grass and emptiness (空) are not two, how could what we call poisonous herbs kill me?"[18]

The relationship Daehaeng cultivated with nature during her mountain practice offers a vivid illustration of the environment that fosters awakening to the reality of all beings. Humans are not separate from nature but are an inseparable part of it. In this sense, our relationship with the natural world becomes a vital lens through which we can understand the foundation of human existence. Daehaeng's mountain practice testifies to this truth. Unlike in human society, in nature she encountered the equality of all existence. There, beyond the binary of good and evil, beyond distinctions between poisonous and medicinal herbs, she perceived the non-duality that underlies all things. She referred to this interrelationship among beings simply as "life." Daehaeng's awakening in the mountains thus offers a lived expression of what is now called *ecodharma*—a nature-centered interpretation of Buddhist practice increasingly embraced in contemporary Western Buddhism.

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[17] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 127.
[18] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn,* 126-127.

In today's world, where environmental issues are a pressing global concern, a group of Buddhist scholars and practitioners in the United States has developed the concept of *ecodharma*—a nature-centered form of Buddhist teaching that integrates climate change awareness, mindfulness, and meditation. Rooted in the principles of engaged Buddhism, the ecodharma movement foregrounds the intersection of ecological crisis and social injustice, particularly racial inequality. Central to ecodharma is the belief that Buddhist practice must include an ethical and practical responsibility toward the environment.

Advocates of ecodharma argue that ecological issues are inseparable from broader structures of social injustice, including racial discrimination and the marginalization of peripheral communities by dominant centers. In this context, some ecodharma activists contend that the movement should be led by people of color, as a corrective to elite, white-centered environmental discourses that often exclude or overlook marginalized voices. This position is deeply informed by the historical realities of Western, especially American, society. After centuries of racial discrimination and the historical trauma inflicted on communities of color, particularly African Americans, critics find it troubling when white intellectuals seek to link ecological concerns with social justice without addressing their own complicity in systemic violence.

While the United States has a distinct history of racial discrimination that has shaped the ecodharma movement in specific ways, the core concerns raised by ecodharma activists are not limited to any one racial or national context. As they rightly point out, the issue of marginalization transcends racial categories. In many parts of the world, societies continue to grapple with deeply rooted forms of discrimination against those living at the margins—whether due to class, caste, ethnicity, gender, or other social hierarchies. The suffering of these marginalized communities is often ignored, and public sensitivity to their pain remains limited. In this broader sense, the insights of ecodharma carry global relevance, calling attention to the interdependence of ecological well-being and social justice across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

At the very foundation of *ecodharma* lies the relationship between humans and nature. Since the onset of the modern era, dominant paradigms of civilization have viewed humans and nature as fundamentally separate, celebrating the "conquest" of nature as a marker of human achievement and superiority. However, when we return to the basic condition of existence—that humans are not apart from nature but inherently part of it—this relationship can open the possibility for profound self-recognition. In moments of genuine harmony with the natural world, human beings may experience a return to their

deeper selves. In this spirit, environmental activist and Zen Buddhist practitioner Tim Ream describes the awakening that arises through such intimate engagement with nature as "eco-kenshō"—a term that fuses ecological awareness with the Zen insight of seeing into one's true nature.[19] Ream notes that being in nature helps reduce attachment-based thinking, alleviates anxiety, and allows one to overcome complex emotional patterns, ultimately enabling a loosening of the ego's hold. While Daehaeng's ascetic practice in the mountains differs significantly from modern efforts to reconnect with nature, there are meaningful resonances with the practices of ecodharma activists. Like them, Daehaeng came to understand the origin of existence and the Buddhist worldview not through study of texts, but through direct, embodied experience with the natural world.

One of the key insights that *ecodharma* Buddhism offers is the recognition of the social dimension of karma. While karma has traditionally been understood in Buddhism as a framework for individual actions and consequences, modern movements such as engaged Buddhism have expanded this view to include the concept of *social karma* or *collective karma* (K. *kongŏp*, 共業). This broader understanding is fully consistent with foundational Buddhist teachings. If, as the metaphor of Indra's net suggests, the existence of any one being is defined through its relationship with all others, then an individual's karma cannot be entirely separate from the karma of the collective. Acknowledging the sociality of karma shifts the focus of Buddhist practice from purely personal liberation to active engagement with the conditions of collective suffering and responsibility. In this light, Daehaeng's life may be seen as a journey from individual awakening to a deep and sustained commitment to social engagement.

3. Daehaeng's Teaching and the World of Huayan Buddhism Visualized

During her time in the mountains and afterward, Daehaeng did not undergo formal Buddhist training. Instead, as she explained, she learned universal principles through observing and living with nature. After establishing the Hanmaum Sŏn Center, she translated major Buddhist sutras into Korean in a way that was accessible to the general public. At the time of her death, she was working on a Korean translation of the *Huayan sūtra*. This translation remains unpublished, though I understand her disciples are working to publish it posthumously.

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[19] BESS Family Foundation. *Earth-Based Mindfulness and Mediation: An Exploration of Ecodharma Practice,* 2024. Online https://online.flippingbook.com/view/18874694/, 12.

While her dharma talks rarely addressed specific Buddhist scriptures directly, Daehaeng occasionally referenced the *Huayan sūtra*. A distinctive artifact helps us gauge Huayan's influence on her Buddhism: the Buddhist Wooden Panel/Painting (K. *mokt'aeghwa,* 木幀畵) in the main dharma hall at Hanmaum Center headquarters. In a dharma talk on February 21, 1988, Daehaeng described this painting as a representation of the Huayan Buddhist worldview.

In the following, I discuss the Buddhist panel painting at the Hanmaum Center and how Daehaeng envisioned the Huayan world through this work. Although the artist, Venerable Ch'ŏngwŏn, created the painting, he worked closely with Daehaeng throughout its nearly year-long creation—from conception to completion. One could say that Ch'ŏngwŏn's artistry gave form to Daehaeng's vision.

Figure 1: Buddhist Wooden Panel Painting at the Hanmaum Center, photo taken by the author

The Buddhist Panel Painting measures 12 meters and 28 centimeters in width and 3 meters and 80 centimeters in height. It consists of three panels: the center depicts the world of the enlightened; the right panel represents the world of sentient beings; and the

left panel portrays the realm of hell.[20] Each panel shows Daehaeng's unique vision of the world and visualize her teaching of *chuin'gong* and how to practice Buddhism.

The center panel features an arrangement that is distinctive from the common setting of a Buddhist painting that one might find in a dharma hall of Buddhist temples. The Buddha is sitting at the center of the painting. On the right side of the Buddha, sixteen Korean national masters appear, and on the left, sixteen Korean Sŏn masters. These arrangements clearly depart from the usual image of the Buddha surrounded by traditional attendant bodhisattvas (K. *hyŏpsi posal,* 脇侍菩薩). This painting's representation of Korean masters in the main hall is unprecedented even in the paintings in Korean Buddhist temples. The choice reflects Daehaeng's emphasis on localizing Buddhism, making its teachings more accessible to Korean practitioners by visualizing Korean masters rather than focusing on Indian or Chinese ones. This localization aligns with Daehaeng's core teaching that practice begins from within oneself, not from external sources. According to Ch'ŏngwŏn, Daehaeng included Korean masters to emphasize the centrality of one's own existence—the *chuin'gong*, a self with agency. Yet as discussed earlier, this self is empty, thus preventing egocentric thinking.

Another significant element of the painting appears below the Buddha: a figure shown from behind, standing on earth and viewing the entire scene. This figure represents each viewer—the *chuin'gong* in Daehaeng's terminology—who observes and exercises agency in the world. The figure embodies Daehaeng's teaching that "Because I exist, there exists the Buddha."

The right panel (from the viewer's position) depicts the world of sentient beings—a radical departure from traditional Buddhist paintings in main dharma halls, which typically portray the Buddha's life or enlightened realms but not the world of sentient beings. Daehaeng placed this world of ordinary experience directly adjacent to the Buddha's enlightened realm. The panel illustrates the full spectrum of human life—birth, youth, marriage, and death; those who face failure and those who achieve success; some devoted to spiritual practice, while others pursue worldly pleasure. At the center of this world lies a circle containing an "eye," symbolizing the perspective of the sentient being, the *chuin'gong,* who possesses the agency to engage with and embody the Buddha's teachings.

[20] A video presentation of this wooden painting/panels can be found on YouTube, "Hanmaum Seonwon A nyan Ponwŏn Mokt'aenghwa," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmHgP5wzY5E&t=121s

The hell realm panel depicts various forms of torment: people being dismembered, boiled in cauldrons, and having their limbs nailed. At the center of this hellish chaos stands a solitary figure within a circle. Framing these realms of sentient beings and hell are passages from Daehaeng's teachings. Above the hell realm appears: "Since karma is fundamentally empty with nothing to cling to, everything depends on this single thought in the present moment." Below it reads: "One thought creates hell, one thought achieves nirvana. Learn to master that one thought well."

Viewed holistically, the three realms—enlightenment, sentient beings, and hell—appear not as separate worlds but as interconnected domains. A practitioner living in the realm of sentient beings can create hell through misunderstanding their existential reality or achieve enlightenment through proper understanding and practice. The Korean national masters and Sŏn masters in the central panel stand as testament to the attainment of nirvana. Yet this achievement does not represent a fixed state; like the circles at the centers of the panels, everything exists in flux.

This brief analysis of the painting reveals why Daehaeng identified it as representing the Hwaŏm world. The figure standing on earth below the Buddha in the central panel, the eye in the realm of sentient beings, and even the person in hell's center represent potential manifestations of each one of us. These figures parallel Sudhana's journey on the bodhisattva path as described in the *Huayan sutra*, each embodying different aspects of spiritual pilgrimage.

The dharma hall features a series of paintings depicting Sudhana-like figures on a journey to learn about bodhisattva practice. The Huayan teaching that "The moment of raising the first thought [of enlightenment] is itself complete enlightenment" (初發心時即正覺) aligns with Daehaeng's teaching of one-mind (K. *hanmaum*), while her concept of *chuin'gong* appears as a modern interpretation of Sudhana.

4. Daehaeng's Teaching of Five Sharing (五共) and Huayan Buddhism

Daehaeng's social engagement can be seen as an extension of the pain, empathy, and shared nature she felt toward other beings in the mountains. That empathy and pain stemmed from the stark recognition of her own marginality—the realization that she stood on the periphery rather than at the center of society. As Daehaeng says, "I think I was able to know the true principles because I felt so deeply that I was an inadequate person. Because I was so inadequate, I don't know how much I cried while embracing that

inadequate self."[21] In modern Korean Buddhist history, there are few Sŏn masters who have dealt with the marginality of existence as intensely as Daehaeng did.

Daehaeng taught her followers about Buddhism in daily life. She taught, "Since the Buddha is present everywhere, do not think he exists only in the temple's dharma hall. Instead, believe inwardly and observe inwardly— in any place and at any time."[22] Daehaeng's attitude toward practice is also reflected in her explanation of truth. When she healed people's illnesses and helped fulfill their wishes, people came to expect teachings about some special truth from her. To such public expectations, Daehaeng responded: "Truth—or reality—is not something astonishing, mysterious, or overwhelming. Shouldn't truth be something profoundly simple? Truth is the heart that grieves for others and cherishes them; it is the pain that comes with understanding and embracing one another. What else could truth be?"[23]

This understanding of truth is closely aligned with Buddhism's most fundamental practical teaching: the elimination of suffering. Therefore, Daehaeng says, "Your very life, as you live and breathe, is the Buddha dharma, truth, meditation, and the path. It's not something you can learn through some systems, methods, and stages of practice - the system of dharma and method of practice exist within the very fact that you are here, now. The Buddha dharma is not something that exists separately."[24]

As a practice of *chuin'gong*, Daehaeng laid out five sharing or five ways of being together (K. *ogong*, 五共). Buddhist scholar Kim Ho-gwi proposes the structure of Daehaeng Dahaeng's Buddhist teaching as follows: "Hanmaum [one mind] corresponds to the fundamental principle of Dahaeng's Sŏn, *chuin'gong* corresponds to the mode of being, and *ogongbŏp* [five ways of sharing] corresponds to the practice of Daehaeng's Sŏn."[25]

We have discussed Hanmaum and *chuin'gong* before. Their practical teaching, *ogong* (five togetherness, or five sharing 五共), consists of five ways of being together: the principles of living together (K. *kongsaeng,* 共生), sharing mind/heart together (K. *kongsim,* 共心), being one body (K. *kongch'e,* 共體), using together (K. *kongyong,* 共

[21] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 132.
[22] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn*, 148.
[23] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hamaum yojŏn*, 230-231.
[24] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hamaum yojŏn*, 274.
[25] Kim, Ho-Gui,「대행선 형성의 사상적 배경-본래성불사상과 관련하여」("The Philosophical Background of Daehaeng Seon: Regarding the Thought of Inherent Buddhahood"), *Hanmaŭm yŏn'gu* 1 (2018), 98.

用), and becoming food for one another (K. *kongsik,* 共食). Hyeseon expresses this teaching of five sharing more elegantly as follows: Daehaeng teaches the realization of One Mind as "living together with countless living beings (共生), with shared mind/heart (共心), with shared origin (共體), with shared function (共用), and with shared nourishment (共食)."[26]

The teaching of the five ways of sharing can be understood as a modern articulation of the Huayan concept of Indra's net, offering a more concrete and accessible expression of its meaning. If our beings are like the jewels in Indra's net, then what must we do to embody that realization in practice? Daehaeng outlines the practice through five sharing, or five ways of being together. Daehaeng's teaching that "countless beings are teeming and living together in a single human body" shows that the "together" (K. *kong*, 共) is also emptiness (K. *kong*, 空).[27] Furthermore, Daehaeng declares that "Even one's own body is not truly 'mine'; it is a community [composed of countless interdependent elements]." [28] Therefore, the five ways of togetherness (K. *ogong*, 五共) are both the emptiness of existence (K. *ogong*, 吾空) and the emptiness of awakening (K. *ogong*, 悟空).[29]

This aligns well with Huayan Buddhism's emphasis on the practical dimension of Buddhism. This is why Daehaeng says, as quoted earlier, "Since the Buddha is present everywhere, do not think he exists only in the temple's dharma hall. Instead, believe inwardly and observe inwardly—in any place and at any time. "[30]

5. Conclusion

Daehaeng did not have formal education in Buddhism but learned it through her experiences in the mountains. Her dharma talks rarely delve into the discursive contexts of Buddhist scripture, instead focusing on the application of Buddhist teachings to daily life. Hanmaum Center defines Daehaeng's teaching as "everyday Buddhism" (K. *saenghwal Pulgyo* 生活佛教). Her references to Huayan Buddhist teaching, especially in

[26] Hyeseon, 《한마음과 대행선》 (Hanmaŭm and Daehaeng's Sŏn) (Seoul: Unjusa, 2013), 259.
[27] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hamaum yojŏn*,380.
[28] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hamaum yojŏn*, 380.
[29] The passage makes use of wordplay in Chinese characters where different characters pronounced "gong" (sharing 共, emptiness 空) and "o" (five 五, oneself 吾, awakening 悟) create layers of meaning that are difficult to fully capture in English translation.
[30] Hanmaum Seonwon, *Hanmaŭm yojŏn,* 148.

her vision reflected through her design of the wooden panels in the main dharma hall of Hanmaum Center, clearly demonstrate the influence of Huayan Buddhism on her thought. Three of her main teachings—one mind, *chuin'gong*, and five sharing—also reveal the Huayan teachings in her Buddhism.

In evaluating Daehaeng's teaching for our time, I interpret it as a new form of Buddhist social engagement. Buddhist social engagement has taken various forms throughout history. Limiting the context to modern Korean Buddhism, it is evident that Buddhist social engagement has evolved according to the changing needs of the times.

In the case of Daehaeng, her teaching of social engagement reveals a modern version of the bodhisattva path, especially one that embodies the journey of the youth Sudhana in his quest for bodhisattva practice. In his journey to meet fifty-three dharma teachers, Sudhana comes to learn about bodhisattva practice from people representing diverse layers of society. His teachers are not limited to renowned bodhisattvas and monastics but include a language specialist, a distinguished man, a laywoman, a seer, ordinary boys and girls, kings and queens, mariners, fishermen, and even a heretic.

Daehaeng's teaching of everyday Buddhism requires such a practice of Buddhism in the milieu of diverse lifestyles and ways of living. The drawing of boys meeting people in the dharma hall of Hanmaum Center symbolizes this journey of coming to understand diverse aspects of life and applying Buddhist principles in dealing with different dimensions of existence.

The wooden panels, which visualize the world of Huayan Buddhism, convey that ordinary people should recognize both the emptiness of all beings and their own agency to create a better life. These panels not only embody the core of Daehaeng's Buddhist teaching but also offer compelling evidence of her deep connection to Huayan thought.

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