

Korean Zen Legends Illustrated in Temple Murals

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Part III:
Stories of the Zen Masters

I

Crossing the River Down by the Reed Leaves: The Story of the Venerable Dharma

The venerable Dharma was originally from southern India, and it was he who first brought Buddhism to China. His father, the king of the kingdom of Hyangji in southern India, was very sincere in his Buddhist faith, and this was quite beneficial to his people. He had three sons, the youngest of whom was the venerable Dharma, who was known as Borida when he was a child.

In this time, the most renowned venerable in all of India was named the venerable Jonza. He was very friendly with the king of Hyangji, and while visiting him he learned that Prince Borida was especially intelligent. When the king of Hyangji passed away, the whole nation grieved over his death, but Borida sat meditating for seven days in front of his father's coffin and then left in order to become a disciple of the venerable Banyadara.

Banyadara said to him: "You are already well versed in Buddhism, so from now on, you will be known as Boridharma, since dharma means 'cognizant and broadminded.'" For this reason, people started to call Borida Boridharma, and then they shortened his name and simply called him the venerable Dharma.

One day, Dharma said: "Venerable Banyadara, since you say that I am already qualified to be a venerable, where then should I go in order to teach the Buddha's path? Please, do let me know where I should go."

"Even though you have attained awareness, do not go too far. First of all, please stay in southern Indian until I have been in Nirvana for sixty-seven years. After that, you should head east, where you will make many proselytes. Remember, 'if you leave too early, you will grow tired in the hot sunshine before you arrive.'"

"Do you really think there will be people worthy of the Buddha's law in that country?"

"You will be surprised at the countless numbers in that region who are capable of attaining enlightenment. However, do not stay in the south too long, for there are too many people there who are so attached to the notion of reciprocal gain that they are blind to the true principles of the Buddha."

And so it came to pass: Sixty-seven years after his teacher, Banyadara, had attained Nirvana, Boridharma left for China where he became the founder of Zen Buddhism. First of all, he went to the country of Yang. King Muze of Yang was well known for his faith and devotion to Buddhism. When he heard about Dharma, he invited him to his house and said:

"Since I have become king of this country, I have done many things such as compiling sacred books and educating monks. What do you think I have achieved?"

"I would say that nothing has been achieved."

"Why do you say that nothing has been done?"

"All this has just happened coincidentally, according to the principles of Nature; the work

that you think you have achieved is only the shadow of those principles. Therefore, it is not real.”

“What, then, are true civic virtues?”

“Pure wisdom is delicate and harmonious, and its original core is empty, so this kind of civic virtue cannot be obtained by the law of this world.”

“What is the core of holiness?”

“No holiness is the highest holiness.”

“Who are you that you talk to me in this way?”

“I do not know.”

Muze had built many Buddhist temples and pagodas and had supported a great many monks. Because of this, he was very proud of what he had accomplished in his life and, furthermore, all the other monks that he had met had praised him for what he had done. Now, however, this strange monk, whom he had never met before, had the audacity to tell him that he had achieved nothing. Muze could hardly contain his anger.

When Dharma saw that he could do nothing with this man, he recalled what Banyadara had said to him about staying in the south for too long, so he prepared to leave for the country of Wee by crossing the Yangja River. Just as Dharma was about to cross, he saw great numbers of mounted soldiers rushing towards him. Muze had ordered them to kill Dharma because he could not bear what he had said to him. Dharma took some reed leaves, placed them on the river, and so was able to cross. Thereafter, Dharma arrived at Sorim temple on Mount Sung, where he mediated for nine years while waiting for the right time to come.

II

Attaining the Truth at the Price of Cutting off an Arm: The Story of the Venerable Hyega

Hyega was from Mure in Nakyang, and he was known as Shinkwang Hoi when he was a child. From his youth, Shinkwang demonstrated both deep benevolence in his behavior and a great love of books and reading. One day, while he was reading Buddhist scriptures, he suddenly attained a deep understanding of the Buddha, and so he decided to leave home and become a Buddhist priest.

After he arrived in Nakhyang, Shinkwang focused on sitting in cross-legged meditation for eight long years. One day while he was meditating, a spirit suddenly appeared to him in a vision, and said:

“Why are you still staying here since you are destined to become a great venerable? You should leave for the south right now.”

That next morning, Shinkwang had a splitting headache. Seeing Shinkwang’s great pain, his master tried to heal him, but a loud voice came down from heaven and said:

“All Shinkwang’s bones are being changed, so he will now suffer great pain.”

At that point, Shinkwang told his master what the spirit had said to him. When his master heard this, he said to Shinkwang:

“Since your face reveals lightness and auspiciousness, you will surely achieve what the spirit said to you. When the spirit said ‘you should leave for the south,’ it must have meant that your new master is to be the venerable Dharma.”

Having heard this, Shinkwang left to look for Dharma so that he could become his disciple. At that time, Dharma was in his ninth year of wall-gazing meditation while waiting for the right time to come. When he found Dharma, Shinkwang repeatedly asked him about the unsolved puzzle in his mind about what the spirit had shown him. However, Dharma never replied even a single word. The longer he waited, the more Shinkwang blamed himself for this matter.

“The ancients were willing to do anything to attain the Truth. They broke their bones, extracted their marrow, and shared their blood in order to save other people. They caked mud in their hair. They even jumped from cliffs in order to become the prey of starving tigers. If they were able to devote their whole heart to obtain Truth in this way, why am I unable to do as they did? What kind of person am I?”

On the 9th day of the 11th lunar month it snowed all night. Shinkwang spent that night in front of the cave where Dharma was sitting in meditation. When dawn came, the snow was up to Shinkwang’s knees. When Dharma came out of the cave, he saw Shinkwang covered with snow.

“You must have some reason for standing in the snow all night? What is it? What do you want?”

“I humbly beg you to teach this foolish being about the Truth.”

“The Buddha’s Truth, to which nothing is superior, can be obtained only when one is able to endure the most difficult times and devote oneself to good works with patience for eons and eons. Can you do this? You do not have much charity; you only have limited wisdom; you are hasty and your mind is full of arrogance. And yet you dare aspire to attain the Truth? It is hopeless!”

As soon as Shinkwang heard Dharma words, he pulled out a sword and cut off his own left arm. Immediately and unseasonably, a plantain bloomed and prevented his arm from falling from his body.

Having seen Shinkwang’s eagerness for Truth, Dharma said: “All Buddhists forget about their bodies when they seek after Truth. Your determination in cutting off your arm will also lead you to get what you desire.”

Thereupon the venerable Darma renamed Shinkwang Hyega, and then Hyega’s arm reattached itself to his body.

“Please, tell me the law of Buddhism,” said Hyega to Dharma.

“Understanding of Buddha’s law cannot be received from other people.”

“My mind is stirred by things that I do not know. Please, subdue my mind.”

“I already did.”

Indeed, because of what Dharma said to him, he suddenly gained great understanding. After receiving the law of Buddhism, Hyega became the second founder of the school of Zen. The venerable Hyega stayed in Updo preaching Buddhism for thirty-four years. In the year 552, he handed down the law, and the following year he passed into Nirvana.

III

Coming Back to Life After Three Years: The Story of the Venerable Dharma

Hyomyeng, the emperor of Wei, admired Dharma's teaching greatly, so he thrice asked him to stay with him, but Dharma refused all three of his proposals. Dharma had also thrice refused to receive the gifts that Hyomyeng sent him, but because he could not continue to spurn Hyomyeng's sincerity, he reluctantly accepted two suits of surplice, one golden rice bowl, and a small amount of silk fabric.

One day, after the venerable Dharma had been meditating for nine years in Sorim Temple, he asked his disciples a question, knowing that it was time for him to return to India, "the center of heaven."

"It is time for me to go back to India now, so I would like to hear from all of you what you have learned from me so far."

Dobu spoke first: "In learning, nothing needs to be taken in and nothing to be taken out."

Dharma responded: "You have gained my skin."

A priestess named Chongji spoke next after Dobu, saying: "It seems as if Anan has once seen the Buddha kingdom, but he will never see it again."

Dharma replied, "You have gained my flesh."

After this, Doyuk stood up and said: "The four elements, earth, fire, water, and wind, that compose the physical world are originally nothing and the formality and spirituality that we attain in this world also do not exist. Therefore, as I understand all this, learning is also the same—nothing is obtained."

To this, Dharma replied that he had gained his bones.

Thereafter Hyega came forward, meditated for a moment, and then went back to his seat without saying a word.

Dharma said to him: "You have gained my bone marrow. The main law of Buddhism descended to me after the Buddha gave it to the venerable Gasup. Now I want to give it to you, so that you may follow the exact path of the law. I will also give you a surplice and a rice bowl, which manifest their own meanings."

Hyega asked Dharma to explain exactly what he meant once again, so Dharma said:

"This proves that internally you gain understanding by receiving the law and externally you make firm the fundamental meaning by receiving a surplice. There will come a time when doubting people will say: 'I am Indian but you are Chinese, so how can you prove to me that you have attained the law?' Then you should show the surplice, which you will have preserved well, and say to them: 'I am teaching; don't interrupt me; just listen to the law of the Buddha.'"

The purpose of my being here in this world

Is to save people by enlightening them through the Buddha's law
When one flower sprouts five leaves,
The fruit will come of its own accord.

When Dharma had recited this, he gave Hyega a collection of the Buddha's teachings, saying "since this collection follows the main stream of Shakamuni Tathagata's teachings, you can enlighten many people by following it."

In the same temple there were also two Pharisee-like monks, Gantong and Boriyuji, who were followers of two of the other three laws known respectively as *yoolsa* and *samjang*. They were very jealous of the venerable Dharma's virtue and they did not understand his true intentions. Accordingly, they had tried to kill him five times by putting poison in his food. However, since the venerable Dharma knew what they were plotting, he had saved himself by vomiting up the poisoned food each time. However, when the sixth time came, he had already passed on the law. Although he knew he would die if he ate the poisoned food that they offered him, he did so quietly. He passed away while seated at the table in the 19th year of the reign of King Hyomyengje of Hoowee.

His disciples buried him on Mount Ungyi, where they built a pagoda for him. Three years had passed by when a man named Songun, returning from an ambassadorial mission from the countries to the west of China, met the venerable Dharma traveling over the Chongreng highlands.

"Where are you going, priest?"

"I am going back to my own country, to the west of China. Your king has already passed away."

After saying this, the venerable Dharma strode on with his staff, from which was hanging a pair of straw shoes. When Songun arrived, his king had indeed already passed away and Hyojangje was on the throne.

When Songun told the king that he had met the venerable Dharma, he thought this was uncanny, so he commanded his subjects to dig up Dharma's grave. When they did so, they found that it only contained a single pair of straw shoes.

IV

A Woodcutter's Enlightenment: The First Story of the Venerable Hyeneng

The venerable Hyeneng was born in the year 638 in the southernmost district of China. At that time Tejong, who would later become the second king of Dang, had held the highest office in the land for twelve years. Before becoming a Buddhist priest, Hyeneng's family name was Noh. Because his father had passed away when he was very young, he supported his widowed mother by cutting firewood and selling it in the market from his early childhood. Even though he did not receive a good education, he showed outstanding qualities in his personality, great generosity for other people's needs, and was a very affectionate and dutiful son to his mother.

One day, when he went to the market place to sell his firewood, he happened to overhear a monk chanting a sutra while asking for alms:

Since there is no Reason to stay here, make a reason to stay.

When Hyeneng heard this, he suddenly gained great understanding in his heart, and he asked the monk, "what is it that you are reading now?"

"It is the Diamond sutra."

"Where did you obtain it?"

"I learned this sutra in the Dosun Temple in Hwangmehyen. The abbot of that temple is the venerable Hongren, who is the fifth successor of his sect, and he has about a thousand disciples. It is said that if you show faithfulness in reading this sutra and put what it teaches into practice, you will come to understand your real nature. That is why I, too, am eagerly reciting it."

After listening to what the monk told him, Hyeneng also conceived a desire for the Truth. He left home after receiving his mother's permission to become a monk and went to Hongren temple on Mount Hwangme. When he arrived, he visited the venerable Hongren, and paid his respects. The venerable Hongren asked him:

"Where do you come from? And what do you seek to acquire?"

"I am from Sinju in Youngnam, and the only reason that I am eager to see you is that I wish to learn the path to become a Buddhist."

"If you are from Yongnam in the south, then you are a barbarian. How can a barbarian become a Buddhist?"

"Even though there is a north and a south in the human world, there are no such things in the Buddhist scriptures. Even though I am not as worthy as you, I still can read the word of the Buddha, for he does not make any distinction between us."

"Even though you are a mere barbarian, you seem to know something... go to the back

garden and work there!”

“I believe that wisdom comes from the heart and that one’s true nature cannot change. I believe that pursuing these things is the work that I should do, so what is this other work that you want me to do?”

“Pshaw, do not pretend that you know anything! Just go to the mill and make flour!”

From that time, Hyeneng milled grain and split wood. Even though he was of slight build, he worked hard carrying stones for about eight months. One day, the venerable Hongren dropped by the mill and said to Hyeneng:

“Have you perceived that I mistreat you out of fear that evil people might harm you, for I know that you are a very promising person?”

“Yes, I am aware of your hidden motive.”

After the venerable Hongren talked with Hyega, he then gathered all other his disciples and said:

“Since living and dying is the most important thing in human life, why are you all still here just hoping to improve yourselves? Please, guard the wisdom you have attained, strive for *banya*, which is the highest wisdom in Buddhism and everyone’s true being, and compose music for the Buddha. If any of you gain great understanding while doing what I have just told you to do, then I will bequeath him a surplice and a rice bowl to mark him as the founder of the sixth sect.”

At that time, everyone assumed that Shinsu would be the venerable Ozo’s successor in receiving the law of Buddhism. After much deliberation and concentration, Shinsu composed the following lyrics for the Buddha and posted them in the street anonymously:

One’s body is an awakened tree
One’s mind is a bright mirror
Shake the dust from them and polish them all the time
So that there is no dirt on them

The venerable Hongren read these words and said, “if any of you lives according to this teaching, you will not fall into evilness, and you will gain great benefit from it.”

After he said this, he quietly spoke to Shinsu, saying:

“From what you wrote, I see that you have not understood your true being yet; you have only arrived at the front door of this truth. No matter how hard you try, you will gain nothing, not even the lowest understanding of Buddhism. Therefore, do your best through ascetic practices.”

Nonetheless, the public avidly memorized Shinsu’s words. Hyeneng heard one of monks chanting this sutra and asked him to bring him to where it was written. When he arrived in front of it, he bowed politely and said:

“Since I am illiterate, will one of you please read it for me.”

Hyeneng listened while someone read it aloud and then said, “I, too, would like to compose a sutra; please write down it for me.”

Those who heard him say this whispered among themselves condescendingly. Hyeneng knew this, and so he said:

“Those of you who seek after the Truth ought not to look down upon those who have just begun to seek it, for it is possible for beginners to obtain great wisdom and for awakened people to make mistakes. It is a sin for you to look down upon someone just because he is a beginner.”

Many of the monks were stung by his words, and one of them said: “You are right; I will write your words down on the ground. Please recite them.”

There is no tree that reflects awakening
The bright mirror also does not involve formality
There is originally nothing
There is no place where dirt can stir

The people all wondered at what Hyeneng recited. They admired him, saying, “people cannot be judged by their appearances. Why did we not recognize a Master?”

Just then, the venerable Hongren came by, read the lyrics, and then stamped them out, saying:

“These words are not mature enough. Go and do your own work.”

[The story of the venerable Hyeneng is continued in the next tale]

V

**Do Not Think about Good or Evil:
The Second Story of the Venerable Hyeneng**

The following morning, the venerable Hongren himself stopped by the mill and said: “Have you finished pounding rice?”

Hyeneng replied: “Yes, I finished a long time ago, but I haven’t started winnowing it yet.”

Thereupon, the venerable Hongren pounded the rice thrice with his stick and then went out. Hyeneng understood what the venerable Hongren meant and, during the third watch, around midnight, he went to pay his respects to Venerable Ozo. At the same time, the venerable Hongren, surrounded by a folding screen, was reciting a Buddhist sermon in which he said: “There is no reason to stay here, so make a reason to stay”

When Hyeneng heard this, he suddenly obtained great understanding and said:

“How could I have known that there would be no end to my real nature when I believed that there was a beginning? How could I have known that my real nature could not be shaken when I believed that it was shaking all the time? How could I think that my real nature was already filled? How could I have known that all laws came from one’s real nature?”

The venerable Hongren said: “Nothing is of any use unless you understand your real nature, and in understanding it, you will become a great man, a teacher for heaven and for people, and a Buddha.”

With these words, the venerable Hongren gave him the surplice and rice bowl that had descended from the Buddha. “Now you have become a “six ranker”; therefore carefully follow the law of Buddha and teach people what it teaches you. When Dharma came to this world, people did not have strong faith, so he gave them the surplice and rice bowl as visible external symbols of their belief. However, people nowadays are not concerned about their faith, but are only covetous of the surplice and the rice bowl. Therefore, I ask that you not pass on the surplice and rice bowl any longer, for evil people might harm you.”

After Hyeneng received the law of Buddha at midnight, he went to the riverbank and got into a boat in order to go to south. When the venerable Hongren came after him and tried to row the boat for him, Hyeneng said;

“Venerable Hongren, please be seated. I will row the boat.”

“No, I would like to ferry you to the other side by my own strength.”

“No, when I understood nothing, you might have had to ferry me across the river, but now that I do understand, I think it is right for me to cross the river by myself. Even though the word, ‘across’ is one, it can be translated in many different ways.”

“You are truly right. The law of Buddha will flourish under you. In three years time, I will no longer be on this earth. I want you to go south and not to say anything about this

until the right time comes. It will not be easy to spread the law of the Buddha.”

Thus, Hyeneng bade farewell to the venerable Hongren and left for the south. After several days had passed, the monks noticed that Hongren had stopped teaching the laws of the Buddha. They thought that this was strange and so they addressed him thus: “Is our master feeling ill?”

“No, I am fine, it is just that the spirit of my teaching has left for the south.”

As soon as they heard this, they realized what the venerable Hongren meant, and hundreds of monks and disciples people ran after Hyeneng to take away his surplice and rice bowl. Among them was a general named Hyemeng, who had not yet entered the priesthood. It was he who ran fastest after Hyeneng. When Hyeneng saw Hyemeng right behind him, he put the surplice and rice bowl on top of a big rock and said:

“The surplice and rice bowl are symbols of faith, so why are you trying to obtain them by force?”

After speaking thus, he hid himself in the forest. When Hyemeng tried to take the surplice and the rice bowl from the rock, however, he could not move them at all. Hyemeng was suddenly filled with fearful thoughts. He shouted to Hyeneng in the woods:

“Ascetic, I am not here to take away the surplice and the rice bowl, but to learn the law of the Buddha.”

When Hyeneng came out of the forest, Hyemeng paid his respects to him and asked him to teach him the law of Buddha.

“If you have come this far in order to learn the law of the Buddha, then throw away all your wild fancies and do not stir your mind at all. I will teach you the law of the Buddha. When you think about neither good nor evil, how, then, do things appear? After hearing this, Hyemeng obtained great understanding and said joyfully:

“Even though I was under the venerable Ozo, I did not understand my real nature. Now I that I have received this teaching, it is like knowing that it is cold from the feeling of drinking cold water. Ascetic, you are my master from now on.”

After that, Hyeneng founded Borim Temple on Mount Zhoge, and the law of Buddha began to spread from that time. Thereafter, Zen Buddhism flourished and came to full blossom in the time of the venerable Hyeneng.

The story of the venerable Hyeneng’s process of obtaining the Truth teaches that self-effacement is the most important principle, along with original ideas, mind control, and the patience to endure the hardships of seeking after Truth.

VI

Like a Bee Laboring to Pierce Through a Paper Window: The Story of the Venerable Shinchan

Shinchan became a Buddhist priest in Kyoreng Temple, which was located in the northern part of China. His master, the venerable Kyehyun, was a lecturer at that temple. He taught Shinchan enthusiastically, hoping that he would follow in his footsteps as a lecturer. Thanks to his inborn intelligence and his constant endeavors, Shinchan was able to surpass his master's abilities in a short time.

After Shinchan had read the laws of the Buddha extensively and had come to understand most of them, he longed to deliver himself from worldly sin, passion, and attachments through meditation. He told his master about this ardent yearning and desire, but the venerable Kyehyun's response was indifferent. After deciding that he could not waste his time any more, Shinchan left the temple secretly and went to study under the venerable Baekjang. From that time and for the next several years, Shinchan studied day and night until he shed tears of blood. Finally he was able to tread the path of *hyetal*, which is Buddhist deliverance from worldly agony. Having gained this understanding, Shinchan went back to his home temple, Kyoreng, thinking of his debt to his master, Kyehyun, who had taught him the law of the Buddha in the beginning and cared for him as his own pupil.

Kyehyun was very pleased at his pupil's return, but he still spoke to him harshly, saying:

“So, you've been gone for several years. Have you attained any understanding?”

Shinchan replied: “I have gained nothing.”

He said this to imply that there is nothing to be obtained in this world, for it is originally composed of nothing. However, his master did not understand what he meant, but only thought his pupil had idled his time away, and so he gave him lowly work to do in the temple. Shinchan, however, did not complain about this. He went to cut firewood and swept the yard, and, together with one of the acolytes, drew water from the well and made fires to heat the rooms.

One day, the venerable Kyehyun asked him to prepare his bath water and to wash his back. After Shinchan finished bathing his master, he tapped his back, muttering:

“This Buddhist sanctum is very nice, but the Buddha cannot show divine response to one's prayers.”

Hearing this, the venerable Kyehyun turned around and looked intently at him. Shinchan continued speaking fearlessly to his master's face, saying:

“The Buddha is not able to respond to one's prayers, yet his third middle eye grows bright.”

Only then did Kyehyun notice that Shinchan was a remarkable person.

At that time, the venerable Kyehyun used to read the law of the Buddha while sitting

straight at the table right under the window. One warm spring day, a bee that had happened to come into Kye Hyun's room tried to leave by piecing a new hole in the paper window. The bee could have gone out through the half open door, yet it kept making a futile effort to bore a new hole in the window. Watching this, Shinchan composed a poem and read it aloud so that Kye Hyun could hear it.

Refusing to go out through the open door,
Instead, you keep knocking on the closed door.
Although you strive for a hundred years,
There is no guarantee that you will ever get through.

When he heard this poem, the venerable Kye Hyun closed his book, looked silently at Shinchan, and said:

"I assumed that you had just idled your time away, but you did not. The change in your attitude is extraordinary. Under whom did you study and what have you learned so far?"

"Master, I apologize for speaking rudely before you. The truth is that I studied in the venerable Baekjang's temple and came back after gaining understanding of the laws of the Buddha. When I came back, you were still focusing only on literal learning. I pitied you for that, for I knew that you would not listen to me if I spoke directly about this, and so I had to lure you into thinking about this by using ill-mannered wording. I sincerely ask your pardon. Please, forgive me, Master."

Kye Hyun answered, saying:

"This is indeed admirable. Even though you started to follow the Buddha's path after I did, you have already surpassed me in terms of learning. I ask you to teach both me and the other monks the law of the Buddha in my place."

The venerable Kye Hyun beat the drum to summon the other monks, positioned the lecture's stage, and called to Shinchan to preach to them from it. Shinchan solemnly stepped up to the stage and started to preach a Buddhist sermon.

Divine light brightens itself, so it is out of worldly perception.
When one's true being is revealed, it gives true freedom in speech.
When the mind is not dazzled by the world, it naturally reaches completeness
Only if one can die to worldly relations, can one indeed be Buddha.

The venerable Kye Hyun was so impressed that he shed tears when he listened to the teaching of Shinchan, and he exclaimed joyfully:

"How unexpected that even I in my old age can learn these amazing teachings!"

In this way, the venerable Kye Hyun was able to see the true moon brightening in the sky with the help of his disciple after seeing his own finger point to the moon.

VII

Tempted by a *Kisaeng*: The Zen Priests Teachun and Han Toiji

Han Toiji, one of the eight greatest writers of the Song and Dang dynasties (618-907), was born in the middle of the Dang period in the county of Dengju in the province of Namyang. He prosecuted Buddhism harshly, and continuously appealed to the king about the slanderous statements of the Buddhists. Once, at a time when he was engaged in public works and held the title of *hanrim hawksa* or “officer in charge of scholarly works,” he even aroused King Hyunjong’s anger by appealing to a document known as the *Bulgongpyo*, which severely criticizes the Buddhist’s faith relating to the fragments of the bone of venerable Buddhist. The angry king relegated him to work as a *jasa* or prosecutor of military affairs in a place called Joju, which was in an outlying area 8000 ri (3200 km) from the capital city.

At that time, there was a learned and virtuous priest named Taejun who had been devoting his mind to meditation for many years in the Chukrengbong Temple in Joju. Many people admired him and considered him to be a living Buddha. Han Toiji had still not given up his endeavor to disgrace Buddhism, so he plotted to tempt the venerable Taejun by means of a *kisaeng*—that is to say, a poetry reciting, singing, and dancing courtesan, or an educated, high-class prostitute. For this reason, he called Hongren, who was known as the best *kisaeng* in Joju, and said to her:

“If you succeed in winning the venerable Taejun’s heart and inducing him to transgress the Buddha’s laws, then I will reward you greatly. If you fail, however, you will be severely punished.

When she heard this, Hongren received the proposal with delight, for she had great confidence in her own beauty. At once she set out on the long journey up a steep trail to visit the venerable Taejun. It was towards evening when she arrived, and she said to him:

“I have admired your virtue for a long time and I have come here to pray for a hundred days. Please allow me to stay in your temple.”

When he granted her permission to remain, Hongren shouted gleefully in her mind. From the very next morning, Hongren waited for a chance to tempt him while she served him, yet the venerable Taejun only concentrated on his meditations and did not even cast a glance at her for over a month. Since things transpired in this way, Hongren became very anxious and impatient, and she began to do anything that she could do to achieve her goal. However, the venerable Taejun was never shaken at all in his will to pursue the Buddha’s path and just kept on meditating.

The days slipped by until only one more day was left before the appointed time. While Hongren was staying in the temple, she became very impressed by the venerable Taejun’s great virtue and noble spirit, and she came to the profound realization of how frivolous her behavior had been thus far. However, she was afraid of the harsh punishment awaiting her if

she could not keep her promise to Han Toiji.

Therefore, on the last day of her 100 day stay in the temple, she came before the venerable Taejun, bowed deeply before him, and said tearfully:

“Oh priest, I have committed a mortal sin against you, but I am still so impudent as to ask you to pardon me. To tell you the truth, I was asked to tempt you by the *jasa*, Han Toiji, and the only reason I came here was to lead you into temptation. However, I now fully realize how foolish my behavior has been. Today is the 100th day, the deadline for the fulfillment of my promise to Han Toiji. If I return without having fulfilled my vow to him, he will punish me severely. What shall I do now?”

Smiling quietly and speaking softly, the venerable Taejun looked at Hongren who was crying sorrowfully before him, and said:

“Stop worrying and come to me. I will not let you be punished by him.”

Taejun spread the edge of Hongren’s skirt and wrote a poem on it in one fell swoop.

In ten years time I have not descended from the peak of Mount Chukreng,
I have seen both the world and the highest spirit and I realize that they are the same.
I am like a basket filled with water;
How can I pour a single drop on the skirt of Hongren, the flower, the world?

When Hongren came down the mountain and showed Han Toiji the poem on the edge of her skirt, he went up to see the venerable Taejun in person. When the venerable Taejun saw him, he asked:

“What Buddhist scriptures have you read so far?”

Han Toiji answered, “I have not read any of them thoroughly.”

When he heard this, the venerable Taejun retorted angrily:

“Then what reasons do you have for persecuting Buddhism? Has anyone ordered you to do so? Or have you just done so from your own motivation? If you did so because someone told you to do so, then you have acted like a dog, which always ought to do what its master ask it to do. If you did so from your own motivation, then you have deceived yourself, for you have criticized what you do not know since you have not read any scriptures.”

After this severe reprimand, Han Toiji saw the error of his ways and began to receive profound teachings from the venerable Taejun. Thereafter, he too became a great priest, understood the Buddha’s profound truth, and with the same writing brush that he had used to slander Buddhism, he now wrote many writings that praised the three treasures of Buddhism.

VIII

The Disciples Who Became Cranes: The Story of the Venerable Hakreukna

The venerable Hakreukna was the twenty-third leader of his school and the founder of a specific sect. He had succeeded to his position following the venerable Manala, the twenty-second director to whom the Buddha had passed on his “mental communication.”

Whenever the venerable Hakreukna practiced self-discipline in the woods, five hundred cranes always accompanied him. He wondered why this was and so he went to his master, the venerable Manala, to ask him about this.

“It is very strange... For what reason do these five hundred cranes never leave me alone?”

His master answered:

“You used to train yourself with five hundred of your own disciples in Buddhist rites. When the Sea King of the Sea God's Palace invited you to come for a feast, all your disciples wished to accompany you. However, when you looked them over, you found that there was no one who was capable of going to the banquet. For fear of lessening their spiritual merits, you wanted to go by yourself without letting them know about this. However, when they realized this, your disciples all strove to be first in saying:

““You have taught us that eating food is equivalent for everyone, and since eating food is equal for everyone, then Buddhist preaching will be equal for everyone. Why, then, do you not put what you have taught us into practice? Why is your behavior different from your teaching? How, then, can you call yourself venerable?”

“Due to the earnest pleading of your disciples, you reluctantly allowed them all to go with you to eat in the Sea God's Palace. However, because your disciples had not had enough self-training, their spiritual merits were greatly reduced and they have been transmigrating since that time. Now, they are wandering around about you, seeking the chance of deliverance for their souls.”

When the venerable Manala had explained the relationship between the five hundred cranes and himself, the venerable Hakreukna asked his master:

“Is there any way to deliver their spirits? Please, teach them the Buddha's law so that their souls can be released.”

The venerable Manala composed a Buddhist poem for them and said:

“The highest treasure of wisdom lies within yourselves; listen to my poem and be free.”

Thereupon he recited:

The mind is moved from place to place, leaving its base
Though wherever it goes, there is always refined conceit.
But if by accepting the move one recognizes one's true nature,

One will not be deceived by worldly pleasures or sadness.

The venerable Manala sat with his legs crossed as he recited his poem, and no sooner had he finished than he entered Nirvana and the five hundred cranes flew far off.

IX

Teaching by Holding up One Finger: The Story of the Venerable Guji

The venerable Guji had been on Mount Geumhwa concentrating entirely on spiritual exercises for decades during which he never once left the mountain at all. One day a Buddhist priestess named “Reality” visited him, circled him thrice, and then said:

“If you speak right away, I will take off my conical bamboo rain-hat.”

Because she got no response from the venerable Guji even after repeating herself three times, she was on the point of leaving when Guji said:

“Why don’t you stay here over night since it is too dark to go back?”

“If you answer my request, I will stay,” said she.

However, he was unable to answer her question right away, so she left him. Because of his inability to answer her inquiry, he realized the paucity of his spirituality, sighed at this sad reality, and said “I have only the form of a great man, but not the spirit of one.”

After this transpired, he made up his mind to leave the mountain and find a different Buddhist temple. However, the night before his departure, the guardian spirit of Mount Geumhwa appeared to him in a dream and said:

“Do not leave this mountain! Wait, and before long a priestess named “Physical” will come and teach you the law.”

Thus, the venerable Guji changed his mind and decided to stay. The next morning he cleaned the temple, pulled himself together, and waited for the coming one. As he waited, there came an old man with a worn-out net bag hanging from his shoulder. He was a Zen priest of *bulilcheolyong* (“Buddha-sun-heaven-dragon,” 佛日天龍). The venerable Guji recalled his dream of the previous night, took the old priest for the one to come, and told him all the details about what had happened to him in a spirit of full sincerity. Thereupon the old man said:

“I will sit down here exactly in the way that you were seated. Please do exactly what the Buddhist priestess who wore the conical bamboo rain-hat did before you.”

Guji acted on his words, but when he was about to go around him as the priestess did, the old priest shouted at once: “Do not move from there.”

“I will not move if you can tell me why you are saying so, but if not, then I cannot stop,” answered Guji.

At that moment the old priest held up one of his fingers. When the venerable Guji saw this, he gained great enlightenment, which brightened his darkened mind. From that time, whenever people came to him to seek his teachings, he did not say a word, but only held up one of his fingers.

One day, a guest came from a far distance to ask him about the law of the Buddha. When

he arrived, there was only a young monk looking after the temple, for his master Guji had gone out. The guest said:

“I am sorry that your master is not here, for I have come this far specifically in order to meet him.”

Thereupon the young monk answered:

“I know the exact same law of the Buddha that my master does. It would be the same for you to hear it from him or from me, for I have been here long enough to know all about it. I believe I can do just as he does.”

The guest replied: “Very well then, I would like to hear it from you.”

The young monk said to him: “You have to ask me what Truth is.”

The guest asked him: “What is Truth?”

When he asked him about Truth, the young monk held up one of his fingers just as his master was wont to do, and then he added:

“My master never does anything except hold up one of his fingers whenever his guests ask him about Truth.”

After seeing this, the guest went down the mountain, his mind filled with suspicion. As it so happened, he met the venerable Guji on his way home and told him everything that had happened in the temple. After the venerable Guji had returned to the temple, he asked his young monk about what had happened during his absence. The youth answered proudly:

“While you were absent, a guest came and desired to hear the law of the Buddha from you. I saw that he was distressed about not seeing you after having come this far. Therefore, because there was no other remedy, I myself showed him the law of the Buddha in your place.”

The venerable Guji replied: “Very well. What exactly did you show him?”

The young monk said: “I just held up one of my fingers exactly as you always do for your guests.”

The master said: “Very well. Please repeat what you did for him.”

The young monk grew suspicious and said: “Master, you already know all about it.”

Guji just said again, “I only want to hear one more time the answer to the question, ‘what is the genuine Truth?’”

Thereupon the young monk held up his finger. At that moment, his master cut off his finger with a knife that he was holding in his hand. The young monk ran away crying, and the venerable Guji called after the fleeing youth:

“So lad, what is the genuine Truth?”

When he tried to hold up his finger, there was no finger to hold up and at that very moment, the young monk’s mind opened wide.

When the venerable Guji entered Nirvana, he said to many people:

“After I received my one way of meditation, I used it for the duration of my whole life, yet I still have not fulfilled it.

X

Taking a Seat On Top of a Tree: The Venerable Dorim and Baeknakchen

Baeknakchen of the Dang dynasty was famous not only for his literary abilities as a poet but also for his statecraft as a politician. He was extremely well-informed and knowledgeable about many things. Furthermore, he rose in official rank as a public prosecutor, and this led him to become filled with arrogance. This is a story from the time when he had just started off for his new post as a public prosecutor in Hyangju. There was a temple located not too far from Hyangju, and in that temple resided a famous venerable named Dorim. Having heard of the venerable Dorim's fame, Baeknakchen visited the temple with his attendants, thinking, 'I will test his abilities in person.'

When the weather was fine, the venerable Dorim often climbed up an old pine tree to sit in meditation. On the day when Baeknakchen called upon him, he was sitting in meditation on the top of the tree. When Baeknakchen saw him in the tree, he thought this looked quite perilous, and he said:

"Don't you think it is dangerous to sit where you are?"

The venerable Dorim looked down and said:

"It is more dangerous to stay where you are."

To this Baeknakchen replied:

"I have risen in official rank as a public prosecutor and now I govern both rivers and mountains. At this moment I am standing firmly on the ground, so what makes you think it is dangerous to be where I am?"

From Baeknakchen's tone it was obvious that he thought the venerable Dorim was speaking nonsense. Dorim recognized that he was filled with pride about his scholarly abilities and his official rank, so he made up his mind to correct him and returned his words coldly:

"You are filled with pride because of your worldly knowledge, which is only a tiny portion of all knowledge. Moreover, your worldly desire is endless and your rapacity is ceaseless, so how can this not be risky!"

Baeknakchen lost his nerve when he saw Dorim's insightful eyes looking plainly into his prideful mind, and also because of his unyielding spirit, for his attitude did not change even after he learned that he was a public prosecutor, so he said:

"Please, teach me a verse from the law of the Buddha that I can use it as my life's motto."

Baeknakchen voiced this request politely and abandoned his original intention of testing him in order to ask him for his teaching.

Thereupon, the venerable Dorim recited the following verse for him:

Do not carry out evil deeds,

But admire good deeds and do them.
Let your mind be clear,
That is what the Buddha's teaching is all about.

Baeknakchen, who was expecting him to say something remarkable, was disappointed by this simple answer, and so he said:

“Even a child knows that.”

Seeing that Baeknakchen was unsatisfied with his answer, Dorim calmly added:

“This may be a simple truth that even a child can know, but still it is hard for an old man of eighty to put into practice. After he said this, Baeknakchen finally realized something important, namely that there is no use in simply knowing knowledge. When people do not internalize what they have learned into their lives and personalities, all that they learn only adds arrogance and anguish to their lives.

From then on, Baeknakchen, the most famous writer of his time, led a devout Buddhist life because what he learned from the venerable Dorim gave him a thorough training in the law of the Buddha. Baeknakchen's many famous phrases, which touch the hearts of many people even to this day, spring from his understanding of the oneness of knowledge and conduct.

XI

A Face That Has No Anger: The Story of the Venerable Muchak

There was once a monk who devoted himself to praying on the slope of Mount Ohdae. He had entered the priesthood when he was very young and at the time that he was in the process of learning about religious precepts, education, and scholarly attainment, he was given the Buddhist name of Muchak. His purpose for staying and praying on Mount Ohdae was to worship the mountain, which many people considered to be the holy ground of Manjusri (the Bodhisattva of wisdom and intellect), in the hopes of meeting the Bodhisattva in person.

One day, as Muchak was coming back from town after asking for alms when he had run out of food, he met an old man who was leading a cow. He felt that this old man was out of the ordinary and so, without realizing it, he followed after him. After they had gone a good distance, a magnificent temple, which he had never seen before, came into view. When the old man stood in front of the gate and called out “Kyunje!” a young monk came out, took the cow’s reins, and entered the house. Muchak entered with them and made a polite bow to the old man. Just then, the young monk brought him a cup of fragrant tea, and the old man asked him:

“What has brought you here Mount Ohdae?”

He answered, “I came here to see Manjusri in person and to seek teachings from him.”

“Do you think you are capable of seeing Manjusri? How many people does your temple have, and how do they live?” he asked.

“There are about three hundred people in my temple and they spend most of their time reading the scriptures of the Buddha and learning about religious precepts. What is it like in this temple?”

“Three and three in the front yard, three and three in the backyard, dragons and snakes are blended, and unenlightened people and venerables are living together,” answered the old man.

Muchak could make no sense of what he meant by this answer.

It soon grew dark, so Muchak asked him to let him stay one night in this temple, but the old man replied:

“No one is allowed to stay if he is attached to anything”

After saying this, the old man asked the young boy to see Muchak off, and then left his guest and retired to his room. It was already dusky evening, and he found himself alone with the young monk, Muchak asked him:

“Can you tell me what he meant when he said ‘three and three in the front yard and three and three in the backyard,’ when I asked him how many monks were in this temple?”

Thereupon the young monk suddenly called his name loudly, “Muchak!”

He answered in the confusion of the moment by stammering, “y..y..yes...”

Then the monk hastily asked him: “What is the number of people?”

Muchuk was at a loss for words, so he only retorted: “What is the name of this temple?”
“It is called Temple Banyan.”

No sooner had the monk said this and pointed to the temple than the magnificent structure was gone. Muchak was speechless with surprise, and when he looked around for the young monk, he found that he had also disappeared, but he heard a poem being recited in the empty space from which the temple and monk had vanished.

A face that has no anger is a true sacrifice for a dead spirit,
A tender voice is an elegant perfume,
A sincere and pure heart without blemish
Is the heart of the Buddha.

After Muchak realized his own blindness in not recognizing Manjusri even while in his presence, he strove harder than ever to discipline himself. In the end he succeeded to the law of the venerable Yangsan and became free from all attachments.

One winter day when Muchak was cooking rice and adzuki-bean porridge, Manjusri’s magnificent face appeared in the steaming soup. Manjusri reminded Muchak of what had happened on Mount Ohdae and greeted him by saying.

“Muchak, how have you been?”

However, Muchak suddenly swept Manjusri’s face away with his spatula. Mujurisu was startled at this behavior and said:

“I am Manjusri whom you have been longing to see. I am he!”

Muchak answered:

“Manjusri is Manjusri. Muchak is Muchak. Even if the Buddha were to appear to me, I would give him a taste of my spatula.”

Then Manjusri said: “A bitter cucumber is bitter up to the root. A sweet melon is sweet up to its stem. This is the first time that I have not been welcomed by people for the past three generations of my training.”

Having said this, Manjusri disappeared quietly from sight.

The Muchak who had waited on Mount Ohdae for three years hoping to see Manjusri in person and this Muchak were one and the same one, but, having attained understanding of the truth, he was very different in his behavior. When Manjusri revealed himself before him in person, he commanded him with a loud voice and swept his face away with his spatula; this story shows the sharpened spirit of those venerables who have obtained understanding of Truth.

XII

An Incarnation of the Bodhisattva: The Story of the Venerable Cloth Bag

There was once a high priest who was originally from Myengju in the country of Dang and whose Buddhist name was Kyecha. He was a monk of ample proportions and he was called “the venerable Cloth Bag,” for he always carried a large bag with him. This bag was filled with all sorts of things so that he could give people anything they asked him for if what they desired was in his bag. Children especially loved him, for he always took delicious things out of his bag and shared them with them and thus spent time with them. Once, when he raised his hefty body after sitting for a long time on a snowy day, people noticed that there was no snow at all on his clothes, and they thought this was very strange. While he went from house to house asking for all sorts of things, he always refused money if people offered it to him. The venerable Cloth Bag told fortunes, and his predictions about people’s lives were always correct. Even on sunny days without a cloud floating in the sky, if the venerable Cloth Bag wore wooden shoes with high supports, it always eventually began to rain; and even during the long rainy season, if he wore straw shoes, it soon stopped raining and the sun shone brightly. Therefore, people predicted the weather according to the venerable Cloth Bag’s clothing.

These are just a few of the stories about the venerable Cloth Bag, but readers can better learn about his life by reading the poems that he left:

With a wooden rice bowl, going from house to house, asking for food,
This lonely being is floating through thousands of miles.
No one has eyes for seeing others with good hearts.
Therefore I asked the floating white cloud which path I should be on.

He who has a dignified and unrestricted mind is not busy with work
Enjoying in a leisurely way, he is a man among the men who entered the priesthood.
Even though he sees a true moral doctrine before his eyes
He would not consider it to be worth as much as a strand of hair.

This big cloth bag that is owned by me
Never hinders me, for it is empty
If I spread it wide, it can cover the whole world
Yet if I fold it, even its shadow disappears without a trace

Even if my body is divided into millions of pieces
Every single piece reveals the true image of the Bodhisattva

Even though I show everything clearly to people
They simply do not see and understand.

The venerable Cloth Bag passed into Nirvana after finishing his fourth poem in the third year of the Chengmyeng dynasty (917). Since then, however, people from other villages have said that they have seen the venerable Cloth Bag walking around and carrying his bag hung on his crook. Many people have painted him and worshiped his portraits. His whole body is still in the Eastern Hall of the temple of Ackrim in China, and the Chinese have worshipped the venerable Cloth Bag as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva from early times.