# Nāgārjuna as Viewed in Korean Buddhist Prayer Books

# Hae-ju Jeon

In this paper, I have described the way  $N\bar{a}g\bar{a}rjuna$  was viewed in Korean buddhist prayer books. In these books he was understood in various ways relating to the Avatamsaka- $S\bar{u}$ tra.

 $N\bar{a}g\bar{a}rjuna$  is also worshipped as the patriarch of the Hua-yen school. In this context he has been believed to be the author of the Hwaeomgyeong Yakchange(HY), a gatha of brief comments on the formation of the Eighty-Volume Avatamsaka-Sūtra.

However, it is difficult to say that  $N\bar{a}g\bar{a}rjuna$  is the author of the HY, one of the most important texts in the practice of Hwaeom Buddhism in Korea.

Although we have concluded Nagarjuna is not the real author of the HY, many Korean Buddhists still believe that he is the author, and the monks/nuns chant it reciting "Daebanggwangbul Hwaeomgyeong every day, Yongsu Bosal Yakchange(the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna's Song for Key Passages of the Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gandavyūha Sūtra)". This shows how much importance is given to Nagarjuna in Korean Buddhist rituals, Korean Hua-yen Buddhism, and Korean Buddhism in general.

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# I. Introduction

Nāgārjuna (150-250 C.E.) lived in India during the time of the appearance of Mahāyāna Sūtras. In the  $M\overline{u}lamadhyamakakārikā$ , Nāgārjuna correlated the spirit of all  $Mahāyāna-S\overline{u}tras$  with the concept of  $s\overline{u}nyatā$ , and became the founder of the  $M\overline{a}dhyamika$  School. This concept of  $s\overline{u}nyatā$  was widely adopted by the later Buddhists. Most East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist schools considered him as their founder (Mibu, Taishun, 1983:1), and revered him as the second Buddha (David Kalupahana, 1986:2).

Korean Buddhism is no exception. Although it was not Indian Buddhism but rather Sinocized Buddhism which was introduced to Korea, Nāgārjuna's influence on Korean Buddhism is still profound. We can find evidence for this from the Korean Buddhist prayer books which are used in everyday ritual practices.

The current Korean Buddhist prayer books reflect the synthetic characteristics of Korean Buddhism, and thus all the Buddhist thoughts and faith systems are intermingled within them. One of these prayer books is *Hwaeomgyeong Yakchange* (*the gatha for Key Passages of the Avatamsaka-Sūtra*), which also reflects *Hua-yen* thought. In the following, I will discuss how Nāgārjuna is viewed by the Korean Buddhists by examining *Hwaeomgyeong Yakchange* (Henceforth HY) and other prayer books.

#### **II**. General Feature of Korean Buddhist Prayer Books

As most religions consist of the founder, the doctrines, and the order as their essential elements, Buddhism has the Three Treasures: the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*. The Three Treasures are not only the key elements of Buddhism but also the objects of worship for its followers. Ever since the *Buddha*'s time, Buddhists have performed rituals to show their devotion to the Three Treasures. These rituals of reverence and worship of the *Buddha*, propagation of the *Dharma*, and support for the *Sangha* were developed in an increasingly sophisticated

manner, as Buddhism developed through the ages (Takasaki, Jikido, 1993:13-50) and were recorded in books. These sophisticated Buddhist rituals have played an indispensable role in maintaining the order and propagating the Buddhist doctrine to the public.

The most commonly used Buddhist prayer book in Korea is *Seokmun Euibeom* 釋門儀範(*the Guide Book for Buddhist Rituals*, Henceforth SE),<sup>1</sup> which was edited by *Ahn*, *Jin-ho*(安震湖), with assistance by *Kwon*, *Sang-no*(權相老) and *Kim*, *Dae-eun*(金大隱).<sup>2</sup> This two-volume book with eighteen chapters records diverse rituals. Volume one is composed of the following five chapters: Worship(禮敬), Prayers(祝願), Chanting of *Gathas* and *Dhāraṇīs*(誦呪), Buddhist Masses(齋供), and Memorials(各疎). Volume two contains the following thirteen chapters: Sincere Request to Buddhist Services(各請), Offering *Dharma* Food to the Dead(施食), Sending the Dead off by Giving *Dharma* Good to him/her(拜送), Painting of the Eyes of a *Buddha* Statue(點眼), Moving the Sacred(移運), Ordination(受戒), General Things(諸般), The Release of Captive Animals (放生), Things that keep in mind and recite(持誦), Letters(簡禮), Songs (歌曲), and Mystic *Dhāraṇīs*(神秘).

The contents of this book display the general feature of Korean Buddhist rituals and its basic faith system. In "Worship"(Chapter I) are found instructions for the rituals to be practiced in the Main hall and other Halls. According to this book, in the Main hall are practiced the following eight kinds of rituals: Perfume Sprinkling(香水海禮), Devotion to Three Treasures informally(小禮懺禮), Scent Burning for the Five *Dharma* Bodies(五分香禮), Meeting the *Buddha* Nine Times in the Seven Places(七處九會禮), Revering the Four *Buddhas* and *Boddhisatvas*(四聖禮), Devotion to Three Treasures in learning the Buddhism in the monastery(講院上講禮), Devotion to Three Treasures formally(大禮懺禮), and Penitence in Front of *Avalokitesvara*(觀音禮文禮) (Kim, Wol-un, 1991:34).

There are also devotional words performed at thirteen other halls,

<sup>1</sup> For the formation and succession of the prayers in the SE, see Jeon, Hae-ju(1998:97-99).

<sup>2</sup> Park, Se-min(1993) gathers 124 volumes and 74 different chanting and ritual texts, including bibliographical information about the texts, and existing in Korea before the SE.

including the Hall for *Amitā Buddha*, the Hall for *Arhats*, and so on, in which different rituals are practiced. The names of these halls also depict names of the various *Buddhas*, *Bodhisattvas*, and Buddhist gods as revered by the Korean people. The recognition of 104 gods, which includes thirty nine gods from the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, is especially interesting. Their existence indicates that Korean Buddhists not only integrated traditional shamanism into their belief system but also highly esteemed *Hua-yen* thought. In the same context they chant the HY when they perform the rituals for these gods.

In "Prayers"(Chapter 2) are introduced the following five prayers: routine devotional morning prayer to main *Buddha* (行禪祝願), devotional prayer to main *Buddha* in the top seat (上壇祝願), prayer to the gods of *Avatanısaka-Sūtra* in the middle seat (中壇祝願), prayer for the living (生祝式), and prayer for the dead (亡祝式). In "*Gathas* and *Dhāranīs*" (Chapter 3) are introduced the *Dhāranīs* for morning and evening chanting (朝夕誦呪), the *Heart-Sūtra* (般若心經), and awakening *gathas* or *dhāranīs* to be chanted with a wooden block or iron bell in the morning and evening (鐘聲). It is especially in the *dhāranīs* for morning chanting that the *Hua-yen* faith system is reflected as well as *Avalokitesvara* faith and the *Amitābha* faith. In "Buddhist Masses" (Chapter 4) are introduced the rituals for five kinds of masses including a mass for the spirits in the water and on the land. In "Memorials" (Chapter 5) are introduced the seventeen memorials for *Buddha*.

The thirteen chapters in volume two represent diverse forms of faith systems. such as Hua-yen Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism. Avalokitesvara, Amitābha, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha, Arahat, gods of Seven Stars, mountain gods, gods of kitchens, dragon gods, the four heavenly gods, gods in ten directions, and Sakrodevandrah. The SE classifies these faith systems as "the Universal Gate of Yellow Leaves" (黃葉普渡門). Under the category of the "the Gate of the Way of Liberty Free from All Concepts" (格外拈弄門), the SE also introduces various rituals related to Seon(Zen) Buddhism, such as Patriarch Hwadu, sitting meditation, and awakening through meditation. However, it does not give this section any special attention.

As shown above, Korean Buddhist prayer books with their inclusion of a diversity of faith systems well reflect the synthetic feature of Korean Buddhism. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that among the variety of faith systems the most prominent one is *Hua-yen* system. The worship for *Buddha* and *Bodhisattvas* in the "Worship", and the chanting of *Beopseongge*(The Gatha of Dharma-nature) and the HY confirms this (Jeon, Hae-ju, 1998: 97).

#### III. Nāgārjuna as the Patriarch of the Hua-yen School

As I explained previously, Nāgārjuna understood in Korean Buddhist prayer books has a strong connection with Hua-yen(Hwaeom) Buddhism. Although he is the founder of the Madhyamika school, he also influenced Hua-yen thought. Among more than twenty of his extant works, the Commentary on Ten Abidings, the Ratnavali, and the Mahāprajňāpāramitā-śastra are involved with Hua-yen thought. Nāgārjuna wrote a commentary on the Ten Abidings, which is the oldest extant commentary on the Avatamsaka-Sūtra (Huayen-jing Zhuanji, T. 51, 156c, by Fa Zang). It is well known that this commentary discusses the first and the second bhumi in the Sutra of Ten Bhumis, which Kumarajiva translated into Chinese (402-412 C.E.) on the basis of Buddhayasa's recitation. The Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śastra includes comments on the (不思議解脫經), Bu-si-yi-jie-tuo-jing which corresponds to the Gandavyūha-Sūtra (入法界品) and the ten bhūmis of the Avatamsaka (華 嚴十地). The Ratnavali includes the ten bhūmis of the Avatamsaka-Sūtra in the fifth chapter of the Rajaparikatharatnamali (寶行王正論). These writings represent Nāgārjuna's view of the Ten Bhūmi Bodhisattvas.

It is also known that Nāgārjuna was involved with the spread of the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*. The story of Nāgārjuna's visit to the dragon palace in *the Records of the Avatamsaka-Sūtra* 華嚴經傳記(*Huayen-jing Zhuanji*, T. 51, 153ab) and a record on Nagarjua's life(*Longshu Busazhuan*, T.50, 184c, translated by *Kumārajīva*) tell us that Nāgārjuna entered the dragon palace in order to obtain the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* and spread it to the world. The legend relates that he looked over the three different versions of *Avatamsaka-Sūtras* in the palace, but was able to memorize only the shortest one, as the others were too long. This text became again abbreviated to the *Sixty-Volume* and the *Eighty-Volume*.

The Korean Buddhist prayer books also confirm the strong connection between  $N\bar{a}g\bar{a}rjuna$  and *Hua-yen* thought as explained above. His name is referred to the daily morning chanting practice in almost all Korean monasteries. When the monks/nuns practice awakening chanting, they chant the HY. And in iron gongs, there mentioned the distribution of *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, which begins as follows:

The supreme *gatha* of the *Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, The original single *Buddha* vehicle of ten billion ninety five thousand forty eight characters,

"If you want to realized the state of all *Buddhas* in the Three-fold world, Look and contemplate the nature of *dharma-dhātu* All things are nothing but the creation of your own mind" (SE, 99-100).

In "Worships" (Chapter 2 of SE) the *Avataŋsaka-Sūtra* is explained in detail and even revered as a *Dharma* Treasure. It instructs the practicers to genuflect and worship the  $S\overline{u}tra$  with all their heart. Each ten of the thirty worships are respectively performed for the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and *Sangha*. All the thirty worships are followed by long statements. Interestingly, sixteen of the thirty statements are related to *Hua-yen* Buddhism.

The 11th worship is conducted for the supreme gatha(Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gandavyūha-Sūtra, T.10, 102bc), three kinds of *Avatansaka-Sūtra*, and ten kinds of *Avatansaka-Sūtra*<sup>3</sup> which are believed to have been preached by *Vairocana Buddha*, the Lord of the Lotus World (SE, 142-144).

The 29<sup>th</sup> worship is designated for the 22 patriarchs of Buddhism in India, China, and Korea. Of the patriarchs, Nāgārjuna is named as that of the Hua-yen Buddhist order, with the statement "*Bodhisattva* Nāgārjuna, born under a tree and enlightened at the dragon palace."

<sup>3</sup> Qinglian Cheng-guan (清凉澄觀) mentioned ten different Avatamsaka-Sūtras in his Huayen Xuantan (華嚴玄談) Vol.8: 1a-5a, cited from Hwaeomgyeong (Bong-eun Temple [奉恩寺], vol.4)

(SE, 169-170) This statement of Nāgārjuna's enlightenment in the dragon palace corresponds to the legend that he memorized the short *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* in the dragon palace and circulated it to the world. It is the *HY* which epitomizes the entire system of 80 volumes of *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* delivered from the dragon palace by Nāgārjuna. The full title of the HY is *Daebanggwangbul Hwaeomgyeong Yongsubosal Yakchange* which means as Nāgārjuna's Songs for Key Passages of the *Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gandavyāha-Sūtra*.

### IV. Nāgārjuna and the Authorship of the HY

1. The Formation of the HY

The HY is a *gatha* describing the structure of the *Eighty-Volume Avatamsaka-Sūtra*. It consists of 110 verses with 770 Chinese characters. The number 110 reminds us of the following story in the last chapter of the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*. *Sudhana*, the hero in the *Sūtra*, passed through 110 castles and sought *Mañjuśrī* at the castle of *Somana* in the country of the Universal Gate. At that time, *Mañjuśrī* caressed *Sudhana*'s head with his right arm stretched out from a distance of 110 *yojanas*, and praised him. (*Mahāvaipulya Buddha Ganḍavyūha-Sūtra*, T.10, 439b)

The structure of the HY is as follows: <1> the title and the author, <2> the song for homage, <3> the causes and conditions for preaching of the  $S\bar{u}tra$ , <4> the congregation, <5> the location of the preaching, <6> the titles of the chapters, <7> the song of remarks on the circulation of the  $S\bar{u}tra$ . In the section titled "the congregation" the HY enumerates the names of the *Bodhisattvas* who lecture on the *Dharmas*, those of the gods (holy guardians) of the *Avatansaka-Sūtra*, and those of the teachers who guided *Sudhana*.

The HY also displays some of the essential ideas of the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, including the following: The idea of the appearance of *Vairocana Buddha* which is expressed in the section on worshipping song, the idea of Ocean-Seal *samādhi* as the cause and condition for the preaching of the *Sūtra*, the idea that initial faith is none other than the

ultimate enlightenment, and the idea of the Lotus World as the ideal world of *Hua-yen* Buddhism in the section on the song of distribution.

The *HY*, regarded as a kind of  $Dh\bar{a}ran\bar{n}$  in Korea, shows another form of faith for the *Avatansaka-Sūtra* itself or for gods of *Avatansaka* handed down as Korean Buddhist tradition from the *Silla* dynasty. Today, thus, the HY is usually chanted as the awakening  $Dh\bar{a}ran\bar{n}$  and as the prayer for Buddhist gods in Korean temples.

#### 2. The Authorship of the HY

In his Jeoyeok Chongbo (著譯叢譜, the Complete Records of Writings and Translations, HPC, 12-436b), Bo-jeong (寶鼎) claimed that the HY4 was written by Nāgārjuna. However, this is doubtful for the following reasons: First, Nāgārjuna's life time (150-250 C.E.) is not correspondent to the time of the appearance of the *Eighty-Volume Avatansaka-Sātra*, on which the HY is based. This *Sātra* was translated into Chinese by *Ökṣānanda* between 695 and 699 C.E. Initially, the *Eighty-Volume Avatansaka-Sātra*, like the *Sixty*, was not published in its present form.

It appears that at first several parts of the book were separately published and were later combined into the immense volume as it exists today. According to the *Records of the Avatansaka-Sūtra* (*Huayen-jing Zhuanji*, T.51, 486-489), there existed thirty-six separate *Sūtras*, some of which were translated into Chinese in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. This implies that some of them were already known in India in Nāgārjuna's time.5 These are the *Dasahbūmika-Sūtra* and the *Gandavyūha*. The *Shi-zhu-pi-po-sha-lun* (十住毘婆沙論), which was translated by Kumārajīva (T.26, 20-122), is the extant part of Nāgārjuna's commentary on the *Dasabhūmika-Sūtra*.

However, the publication of the *Eighty-Volume Avatamsaka-Sūtra* appeared much later, somewhere in between 250 and 350 C.E.(Takamiwa, Ryoshu: 10; Tatsuyama, Hosin: 10). It is assumed that

<sup>4</sup> The HY is spelled '略贊偈', added chanting meaning, in Bo-jeong's, whereas '略纂偈'

or '畧纂偈', removed chanting meaning, in any other text contributed in Korea.

<sup>5</sup> It is generally assumed that a classical Buddhist scripture must have existed in India at least a century earlier than its Chinese translation.

the *Gandavyūha* was written in Southern India, but the full text of the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* was published at *Kotan* in Central Asia (Takamiwa, Ryoshu : 13 ; Ishii, Kyodo, 1964 : 153-155).

Considering the above, it is obvious that the *Eighty-Volume*  $Avatamsaka-S\overline{u}tra$  was written later than Nāgārjuna's time, and thus Nāgārjuna cannot be the author of the HY. Neither is the translator of the HY known.

The HY has been circulated in Korea only. Moreover, even in Korea it did not appear until the later 19th century. Its oldest printing is that which is included in *Hwaeom Beophwa Yakchan Chongji* (華嚴法華略纂摠持, *The Dhāraņīs for Key Passages of the Avatamsaka-Sūtra and the Lotus Sūtra*), which was edited by *Yongseong Cheon-o* (龍星天旿).<sup>6</sup> There also exist other versions entitled *Yakchangemun* (略纂偈文) and *Hwaeom Yakchange* (華嚴略纂偈). It was also later than this that the HY was published as a part of SE. The 1931 version of SE has a preface by *Toegyeong Sangno* (退耕相老), a modern Korean Buddhist scholar. All of these imply that the HY was written in Korea and its authorship was attributed to Nāgārjuna. This also shows how greatly Nāgārjuna was revered by the Korean Buddhists (Jeon, Hae-ju, 1997: 94-95).

# V. Conclusion

In the above I have described the way Nāgārjuna was viewed in Korean buddhist prayer books. In these books he was understood in various ways relating to the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*.

Nāgārjuna is also worshipped as the patriarch of the *Hua-yen* school. In this context he has been believed to be the author of the HY, a *gatha* of brief comments on the formation of the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*.

However, it is difficult to say that Nāgārjuna is the author of the HY, because the *Eighty-Volume Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, the original source of the HY, was published much later than Nāgārjuna's time. Besides, we

<sup>6</sup> I cannot afford to find any older text than this and any other print of the HY in other country.

cannot find the Sanskrit text for the HY, and its Chinese translator is also unknown. The HY has been circulated in Korea only, and its oldest version is the *Hwaeom Beophwa Yakchan Chongji*, which is published in 1885. Therefore, we must conclude that the author of the HY is not Nāgārjuna but a Korean in the *Joseon* Dynasty.

Although we have concluded Nāgārjuna is not the real author of the HY, one of the most important texts in the practice of Hwaeom Buddhism in Korea, many Korean Buddhists still believe that he is the monks/nuns author. and the chant it everv dav. reciting "Daebanggwangbul Hwaeomgyeong Yongsu Bosal Yakchange(the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna's Song for Key Passages of the Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gandavyūha Sūtra)". This shows how much importance is given to Nāgārjuna in Korean Buddhist rituals, Korean Hua-yen Buddhism, and Korean Buddhism in general.

#### **Glossary of Chinese Terms**

\* Notes : S=Sanskrit C=Chinese K=Korean J=Japanese Amitā(S) 阿彌陀 Amitābha(S) 阿彌陀佛 Avalokitesvara(S) 觀世音菩薩 Avatamsaka Sūtra(S) 華嚴經 bhūmi(S) 地 Bodhisattva(S) 菩薩 Buddha(S) 佛 Buddhayasa(S) 佛陀耶舍 Dasahbūmika-Sūtra(S) 十地經 Dharma(S) 法 dharma-dhātu(S) 法界 dhāranī(S) 陀羅尼 gatha(S) 偈 Ksitigarbha(S) 地藏菩薩 Kumārajīva(S)鳩摩羅什 Mādhyamika(S) 中觀派 Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śastra(S) 大智度論 Mahāvaipulya Buddha Gaņdavyūha Sūtra(S) 大方廣佛華嚴經 Mahāyāna(S) 大乘 Maitreva(S) 彌勒 Mañjuśrī(S) 文殊菩薩 Mūlamadhvamakakārikā(S) 中論頌

Nāgārjuna(S) 龍樹 Ratnavali(S) 寶行王正論 Śakrodevandra(S) 帝釋天 Samādhi(S) 三昧 Sangha(S) 僧伽 Śikṣānanda(S) 實叉難陀 Sudhana(S) 善財 Śūnyatā(S) 空 Vairocana(S) 毘盧遮那 vojana(S) 由句 Bu-si-vi-jie-tuo-jing(C) 不思議解脫經 Fa-Zang(C) 法藏 Hua-yen(C) 華嚴 Huayen-jing-Zhuanji(C) 華嚴經傳記 Longshu-Busazhuan(C) 龍樹菩薩傳 Shi-zhu-pi-po-sha-lun(C) 十住毘婆沙論 Ahn, Jin-ho(K) 安震湖 Beopseongge(K) 法性偈 Bo-jeong(K) 寶鼎 Daebanggwangbul Hwaeomgyeong(K) 大方廣佛華嚴經 Hwadu(K) 話頭 Hwaeom Beophwa Yakchan Chongji(K) 華嚴法華略纂摠持 Hwaeom(K) 華嚴 Hwaeongyeong Yakchange(K) 華嚴經略纂偈 Jeoyeok Chongseo(K) 著譯叢譜 Joseon(K) 朝鮮 Kim, Dae-eun(K) 金大隱 Kwon, Sang-no(K) 權相老 Seokmun Euibeom(K) 釋門儀範 Silla(K) 新羅 Toegyeong Sangno(K) 退耕相老 Yakchangemun(K) 略纂偈文 Yongseong Cheon-o(K) 龍星天旿 Yongsu Bosal Yakchange(K) 龍樹菩薩略纂偈

# Abbreviation

Τ.	Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo
HPC.	Han-guk Pulgyo Chŏnsŏ(Korean Buddhism Collection)
HY	Hwaeomgyeong Yakchange
SE	Seokmun Euibeom

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