Wŏnhyo's Essentials of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra: Translation of Chapters 1-2 with Annotated Notes

Yong-pyo Kim

This article is an English translation of the Essentials of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra, Chapters 1-2 with Annotated Notes. The Taehyedogyonchongyo (TDC) is a thematic essentials on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra. In the TDC, Wŏnhyo deals with the most essential and important content of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra. Wŏnhyo often uses the two hermeneutical conception to explicate the text: explications based on “analysis” and “synthesis.” Wŏnhyo explores the text’s main themes though this multi-approach. Judging from the content of the Taehyedogyonchongyo, it is certain that its original text was Hsüan-tsang’s version of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra.

Key Words: Wŏnhyo, Prajñā, Paramita, Taehyedogyonchongyo, Three kinds of prajñā.

Yong-pyo Kim is a Professor of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University and the President of the Korean Association of Religious Education, Korea.

International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture February 2006, Vol.6, pp.53-75. © 2006 International Association for Buddhist Thought & Culture
Part One: Introduction

This article is an English translation of the Essentials of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra, Chapters 1-2 with Annotated Notes.¹ The Taehyedogyonchongyo (TDC, 大慧度經宗要; C. Ta-hui-tu-ching-tzung-yao) is a thematic essentials (宗要, K. chongyo, C. tzung-yao) on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra (MPPS, 大般若波羅蜜多經; Sūtra of Perfection of Great Wisdom). In the TDC, Wŏnhyo (617-686 C.E.) deals with the most essential and important content of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra.

According to Pak Chonghong, Wŏnhyo often uses the two hermeneutical conception to explicate the text: explications based on “analysis” (開, K. kae; ‘to open up for analysis’) and “synthesis” (合, K. hap; ‘to bring together in a synthesis’) (Pak, 1966:59-88). Robert Buswell interprets: “In analytical mode, Wŏnhyo seeks to unpack for the reader the vast array of teachings and doctrines appearing in a text, as a way of illustrating the diversity and originality of Buddhist doctrinal teachings. In synthetic mode, Wŏnhyo adopts a synthetic perspective that explains how the variant ideas described in a text can actually be viewed as complementing one another. Both of these hermeneutical devices applied together then yield a description of the principal topic and insight of the text: the ‘thematic essentials (Buswell, 2002:128).’” Wŏnhyo explores the text’s main themes though this multi-approach.

Judging from the content of the Taehyedogyonchongyo, it is certain that its original text was Hsüan-tsang’s version of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra.² Since it was not recorded in Uich’on (1055-1101)’s New General Catalogue of All the Scriptures of Doctrinal Schools (新編諸宗敎藏總錄, T.55. No.2184) which was written in 1090 (the 7th year of King Sonjong’s reign, Koryo), the Taehyedogyonchongyo


² Before Hsüan-tsang’s translation, the Prajñā scriptures were partially translated in the period from the late Han Dynasty. There were about 30 sections and 150 volumes of various Prajñā sūtra before Hsüan-tsang’s. The second part of this sūtra corresponds to 27 volumes of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra translated by Kumārajiva, The 4th part corresponds to 10 volumes of Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra translated by Kumārajiva.