Jinul’s View of Practice

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Abstract

Bojo Guksa Jinul has been known in the modern Korean Buddhist community as the ‘revival patriarch’ of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism and one of the most respected eminent monks of history. Especially, Jinul’s Jeonghye Ssangsu and Dono Jeomsu are very important doctrinal works and represent the characteristic Korean Buddhism practice-method.

But since Master Seongcheol criticized in the late 20th century that Jinul’s Dono Jeomsu was a wrong method and emphasized that Dono Donsu was the only true enlightenment, the controversy over the practice-method has been continuing until now. This treatise describes the life of Jinul and his enlightenments and explains that many people do not fully understand Jinul’s thought; in particular that his Dono Jeomsu is an embracing methodology which is so flexible that it is not interrupted by Donmun and Jeommun, so that Dono Jeomsu is the practice method for many sentient beings with various faculties, in other words, superior faculties or lesser faculties.

Key Words: Jinul, Dono Jeomsu, Dono Donsu, Jeonghye Gyeolsa, Jeonghye Ssangsu, Methodology of Seon practice.
I. Introduction

During the lifetime of Jinul (知訥, 1158-1210) who has been better known as Bojo Guksa (普照國師, National Master Bojo), Korean Buddhism was influenced by overly-close associations with political power struggles and divided into the Seon School (禪宗) and the Scholastic School (敎宗). These two federations of sects were locked in ideological confrontation and had ceaseless conflicts with each other over the true nature and proper practice of Buddhism.

Looking at the distorted reality of the Buddhism of the Goryeo (高麗, 918-1392) Dynasty, Jinul intended to reform Korean Buddhism by establishment of the Jeonghye Gyeolsa (定慧結社, the Society for the Practice of Meditation [samādhi] and Wisdom [prajñā]) early in his monastic life. He devoted his remaining years to the accomplishment of this purpose (Gang 2001, 15-16).

The characteristics of Jinul’s thought on Seon are Dono Jeomsu (頓悟漸修, sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation), Seongyo Ilchi (禪敎一致, the fundamental unity of Seon and the scholastic approaches), Ganwha Seon (看話禪, meditational practice of observing the hwadu [話頭, meditation topic]); and also the “Three Gates” which are the Seongjeok Deungji Mun (惺寂等持門, Gate of Equal Maintenance of Quiescence and Alertness), the Wondon Sinhae Mun (圓頓信解門, Gate of Faith in and Understanding of the Perfect and Sudden Teaching) and the Gyeongjeol Mun (徑截門, Gate of Direct Cutting).

Among these, Dono Jeomsu is the representative characteristic of Jinul’s thought on Seon. Dono (頓悟) means sudden enlightenment and Jeomsu (漸修) means gradual cultivation, and he advocated achieving them in harmonious sequential combination. This kind of practice needs to begin with and maintain the confidence that our own mind equals Buddha’s mind and we can become a Buddha in this lifetime. Following the correct methods of awakening and cultivation is its most necessary basic point. In his essay Susim gyeol (修心訣,