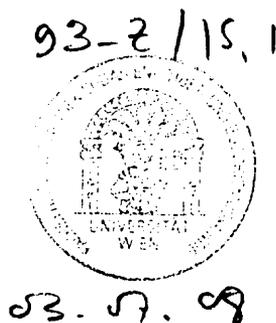


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Lost in China, Found in Tibet: How Wonch'uk Became the Author of the *Great Chinese Commentary*

by John Powers

I. Introduction: Wonch'uk's Life and Times

Wonch'uk (Chinese: Yüan-tse; Tibetan: Wen tshegs, 613-696),¹ author of the largest extant commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*,² was a monk from Hsin-lo in Korea who moved to Ch'ang-an, then the capital of T'ang China. According to his memorial inscription at Hsi-ming Monastery,³ he was born a prince of the Silla kingdom but renounced his royal heritage to become a monk. He travelled to Ch'ang-an, where he became one of the two main disciples of Hsüan-tsang (600-664),⁴ the other being K'uei-chi (632-682) of Tz'u-en Monastery.⁵ Wonch'uk later became the abbot of Hsi-ming Monastery.

He is described as being naturally astute, instantly apprehending the profound meaning of whatever texts he was taught, and he is said to have mastered the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma treatises, the *Abhidharmakośa*, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, as well as the main treatises of the Yogācāra school.⁶

He came into conflict with K'uei-chi, whose school was later recognized as the orthodox tradition of the Yogācāra (Fa-hsiang) school in China. According to the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks (Hsü kao-seng chüan)*, by Tao-hsüan, there was an ongoing rivalry between Wonch'uk and K'uei-chi, and on one occasion Wonch'uk is said to have bribed an attendant in order to overhear Hsüan-tsang's private instructions to K'uei-chi concerning the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun*. He later publicly expounded the explanations that he had overheard, which angered and disgusted K'uei-chi.⁷ Whatever the historical accuracy of the story, it

indicates that the rivalry between Wonch'uk and K'uei-chi was probably as much personal as philosophical and doctrinal.⁸

The rivalry continued after the deaths of Wonch'uk and K'uei-chi among their respective students, and the end result in China was that Wonch'uk's school came to be considered unorthodox and was superseded by that of K'uei-chi.⁹ As a result, Wonch'uk's *Samdhinirmocana* commentary is not widely studied in East Asia, although it became an important text for the study of the Mind-Only (*sems tsam, citta-mātra*) system in the Dge lugs pa School of Tibetan Buddhism, due to the fact that it is mentioned in several places in Tsong kha pa's *Essence of the Good Explanations* (*Legs bshad snying po*), in which he refers to it as "The Great Chinese Commentary" (*rgya nag gi 'grel chen*).¹⁰

Tsong kha pa, of course, had no way of knowing that Wonch'uk was actually Korean, since in the Tibetan translation his name is given as Wen tshegs, a Tibetan transliteration of the Chinese Yüan-tse. In the *Essence of the Good Explanations*, Tsong kha pa treats Wonch'uk's commentary as a text containing the Chinese approach to exegesis of the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, and in a number of places he presents Wonch'uk's view as an important rival view representing Chinese Yogācāra scholarship. The purpose of the present article is to trace the history of the transmission of this text into Tibet and to examine how a text that was largely forgotten in East Asia came to be seen in Tibet as the paradigmatic Chinese commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*.

II. The Chinese and Tibetan Versions of the Commentary

The Chinese title of Wonch'uk's work is *Commentary on the Sūtra Elucidating the Profound Secret* (*Chieh shen mi ching shu*). The only extant complete version of the text is found in the Tibetan *Bstan 'gyur*, where it is translated as *Ārya-gambhīra-samdhinirmocana-sūtra-ṭīkā* (Tibetan: 'Phags pa dgongs pa zab mo nges par 'grel pa'i mdo'i rgya cher 'grel pa).¹¹ An incomplete Chinese version is found in the *Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō*,¹² which is missing the beginning of the eighth section (*chüan*) and all of the tenth *chüan*. Originally consisting of ten *chüan*, and divided into

seventy-five smaller sections (called *bam po* in the Tibetan versions), in the *Chin ling k'o ching ch'u* edition¹³ there are only eight mostly complete *chüan* and an incomplete version of the eighth *chüan*. The missing portions have been reconstructed into Chinese, based on the Tibetan versions, by Inaba Shōju.¹⁴

The apparent reason for the propagation of Wonch'uk's commentary in Tibet is his indirect connection with the translator (*lo tsa ba*) Chos grub (Chinese: Fa-ch'eng), who was a major translator of Chinese Buddhist texts into Tibetan. He lived in the area of Tun-huang, in the Hsiu-to Monastery in Kan-chou Province during the early part of the ninth century,¹⁵ and the colophon to the Tibetan translation of Wonch'uk's work indicates that Chos grub was commissioned to undertake the task of translating it from Chinese into Tibetan by the King of Tibet,¹⁶ who at that time would have been Ral pa can (r. 815-841).¹⁷ This was during the eighty-six year period that Tibet controlled the area of Tun-huang.

Chos grub's translation is listed in the Tibetan *Lhan dkar* catalogue, which was compiled before 824,¹⁸ and so he must have completed it sometime between 815 and 824. As Inaba points out,¹⁹ Chos grub was named the Chief Translator (*shu chen gyi lo tsa ba*) of Buddhist Texts by Ral pa can, and the translation must have taken place during his reign, since his successor Glang dar ma (r. 841-846) vigorously persecuted Buddhism.²⁰

Chos grub was one of the major Buddhist figures of his time, and in addition to the office of Chief Translator he also held the title of Master of the Long Lineage (*ring lugs pa*). This lineage is associated with the transmission of the written works of Buddhism and is contrasted with the Near Lineage (*nye brgyud* or *nye lugs*), the transmission of Buddha's teachings that is not bound by space and time, that is transmitted through revelation and inspiration. The Long Lineage, by contrast, consists of a series of teachers and students who pass on the written and oral traditions in a continuous line of descent. A person such as Chos grub, who had been recognized as a master of the Long Lineage, would have been viewed as a successor to the line of textual transmission going back to the Buddha and, as such, would have great personal and religious authority due to his perceived connection with the orthodox lineage

of transmission. During Chos grub's lifetime, the title of Ring lugs pa (which was apparently a short form of Chos bcom ldan 'das kyi ring lugs kyi mdun sa)²¹ indicated that its holder was the primary authority on Buddhist doctrine. The holder was the administrative head of the regional order of monks and had as an emblem of office the "Large Golden Letter", and this marked him as one of the most important figures in the social and political hierarchy of the region of Central Asia controlled by Tibet.²²

But how did Wonch'uk's text arrive in Tun-huang in the first place, and why did Chos grub decide to include it in the Tibetan canon as one of the few Chinese texts to be recognized as being important enough to be translated? The answers to these questions go back to the year 735, when a pilgrim named T'an-k'uang (b. 700) from Ho-hsi, in the area of Tun-huang, travelled to Ch'ang-an to pursue studies in Buddhist philosophy.²³ While in Ch'ang-an he became acquainted with the texts of the Yogācāra school, and for much of his stay he lived in Hsi-ming Monastery, the monastery where Wonch'uk had been abbot, and this was presumably where he became acquainted with Wonch'uk's commentary.²⁴ According to Paul Demiéville, he remained in Ch'ang-an until 774, after which he returned to the area of Tun-huang.²⁵

After his return to Central Asia, T'an-k'uang came to be recognized as one of the major Buddhist teachers of his day, and his propagation of the teachings of Wonch'uk was the probable reason that Fa-ch'eng decided to translate Wonch'uk's commentary. During his stay at the Hsi-ming Monastery, T'an-k'uang apparently became interested in the writings of Wonch'uk. He later brought them back to Central Asia, and T'an-k'uang's prestige as a prominent Buddhist teacher probably led Fa-ch'eng to study and translate Wonch'uk's work.

After T'an-k'uang's death, his students continued to study Wonch'uk's commentary, and since Fa-ch'eng belonged to the lineage established by T'an-k'uang, it is not surprising that when asked to translate important Chinese texts for inclusion into the Tibetan canon, he chose Wonch'uk's text. As a result, this commentary, which was partially lost and mostly neglected in East Asia, came to be studied in Tibet. Due to its size, the breadth of

scholarship its author demonstrates, as well as the depth of understanding of Buddhist philosophy in general and the thought of the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* in particular, it commanded the attention of Tibetan Buddhist scholars.

Wonch'uk's work is by far the largest known commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, and in the Sde dge edition of the *Bstan 'gyur* it takes up all of two volumes and most of a third.²⁶ It begins with a lengthy introduction, in which the author discusses such topics as the meaning of the title of the *sūtra*, the *sūtra*'s system of hermeneutics (particularly the topics of the three wheels of doctrine and the three natures of phenomena), and the structure of consciousness, with a particular focus on the basis-consciousness (*kun gzhi nam par shes pa, ālaya-vijñāna*). After this the commentary begins with a line-by-line (and often word-by-word) commentary on the text. Wonch'uk's main text of the *sūtra* was probably Hsüan-tsang's translation, as is indicated by the many places where he comments on a term or phrase that is present in Hsüan-tsang's text but is not found in the Tibetan versions and the many places where he refers specifically to Hsüan-tsang's translations of this and other texts.

His commentary is an unusual work for a traditional scholar in that his citations of opinions and quotations generally refer not only to an author but also often cite the work from which it comes, and in many places he indicates the Chinese translation that he was using.²⁷ This commentary is a massive compendium of Buddhist scholarship, and it contains a wide range of opinions that reflects Wonch'uk's own encyclopedic knowledge of Buddhist literature.²⁸

In tracing the chain of events leading to the inclusion of Wonch'uk's work in the Tibetan canon, one finds a series of fortunate historical accidents that caused it to travel to Central Asia, to be propagated there because of the status of the monk who introduced it to that region, and later translated into Tibetan during the relatively brief time that Tibet controlled the area of Tun-huang. If not for this collection of circumstances, large parts of this valuable and encyclopedic work of Buddhist scholarship might have been lost.

NOTES

1. Regarding Wonch'uk's dates, see Nakamura Hajime, *Shin Bukkyō Jiten* (Tokyo: Seishin Shobō, 1961), p. 60. See also the "Enjiki" entry in the *Hōbōgirin* catalogue, ed., Paul Demiéville et al., Paris and Tokyo, 1978.

2. Entitled *Ārya-gambhīra-saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra-ūkā* ('phags pa dgongs pa zab mo nges par 'grel pa'i mdo'i rgya cher 'grel pa): (a) Peking #5517, vol. 106, pp. 1-345; (b) Tōhoku #4016.

3. Written by Sung-fu, entitled *Ta-chou Hsi-ming ssu ku ta-te Yūan-ts'e fa-shih fo she-li t'a-ming ping hsu*.

4. For information about his life, see: Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 24-31; Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 235-38; and Jan Yün-hua, *A Chronicle of Buddhism in China, 581-960 A.D.* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1966), pp. 20-21 and 33-4.

5. With respect to K'uei-chi, see: Stanley Weinstein, "A Biographical Study of Tz'u-en," in *Monumenta Nipponica* #15.1-2, 1959, pp. 119-49; Alan Sponberg, *The Vijñaptimātrā Buddhism of the Chinese Monk K'uei-chi* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia; University Microfilms, 1979); Kenneth Ch'en, op. cit., pp. 320-21; and Iida Shōtarō, "The Three Stūpas of Ch'ang-an," in *Papers of the First International Conference on Korean Studies* (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies, 1980), pp. 486-7.

6. Wonch'uk has been the subject of several articles by Iida Shōtarō, for example: "A Mukung-hwa in Ch'ang-an — A Study of the Life and Works of Wonch'uk (613-696)," in *Proceedings, International Symposium Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Korean Liberation*, Seoul, 1975, pp. 225-51; "The Three Stūpas of Ch'ang An," in *Papers of the First International Conference on Korean Studies*, Seoul, 1980, pp. 484-497; and "Who Can Best Re-turn the Dharma-cakra?" in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* #27.1, 1986, pp. 170-71.

7. This story is recounted in *Hsu Kao-seng chūan*, ch. 4, *Taishō* 50, p. 457c (reported in W. Pachow, *A Study of the Twenty-two Dialogues on Mahāyāna Buddhism*, in *Chinese Culture*, vol. XX.1, 1979, p. 22). See also Inaba Shōju, "On Chos-grub's Translation of the *Chich-shên-mi-ching-shu*," in *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization*, ed., Leslie S. Kawamura and Keith Scott (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1977), pp. 105-113.

8. The same story, from the *Biographies of Eminent Monks of Sung*, is translated by Iida Shōtarō in "The Three Stūpas of Ch'ang-an," p. 485. Iida thinks (pp. 486-8) that this story may have been untrue and that it may have been propagated by K'uei-chi or his followers in order to diminish the stature of Wonch'uk, but he provides no evidence for this contention.

9. See Iida, "Three Stūpas," pp. 484-6 and Inaba, "On Chos-grub's Translation," p. 105.

10. See, for instance, *Legs bshad snying po* (Samath: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Printing Press, 1973), p. 5. Wonch'uk's text is one of Tsong kha pa's main sources, and he frequently refers to it. Sometimes he accepts Wonch'uk's explanations, and at other times he refutes Wonch'uk and advances his own ideas. See Robert A. F. Thurman's translation of the *Legs bshad snying po* (*Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 204-8 for a passage in which Wonch'uk is cited and discussed at length.

Thurman's note 50, pp. 205-6, is worth mentioning for the serious errors that it contains. Firstly, he contends that Wonch'uk's commentary is lost in Chinese, which is untrue (in fact, only some portions are completely lost, and most of the text can still be found in the *Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō*; see note 12). He then indicates that he thinks that Wonch'uk quotes from a commentary on the *Samḍhinirmocana* by Paramārtha, which is mistaken. Wonch'uk often cites the translation of the *Samḍhinirmocana* by Paramārtha (just as he also often mentions Hsüan-tsang's translation). This is an example of his meticulous scholarship, which is unusual among traditional scholars. He often indicates which translation he is following and mentions differences between the Chinese versions of the *sūtra*. Thurman then makes an almost incomprehensible statement that the reason for the many citations and discussions of Wonch'uk's ideas by Tsong kha pa is that "Tsong Khapa perhaps wishes to clear the name of Chinese Buddhist scholarship from the popular stigma, by showing how the Chinese scholar's interpretations were in many ways preferable to the Indian master's." Thurman mentions the Tibetan version of a doctrinal debate that was purportedly held at Lhasa or Bsam yas between the Chinese Ho shang Ma ha ya na and the Indian master Kamalaśīla, which Tibetan sources agree was decisively won by Kamalaśīla. Thurman's contention that Tsong kha pa was trying to defend the honor of Chinese Buddhist scholarship is extremely improbable. As the present article shows, the more likely reason is that Tsong kha pa discusses Wonch'uk's work because it is the most extensive commentary on the *sūtra* in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, and since Tsong kha pa, like Wonch'uk, was a meticulous scholar, when writing his treatise on the thought of the *sūtra* he read this extensive commentary carefully, considered its ideas, and in his own work indicated which of Wonch'uk's ideas he agreed with and which he found unconvincing.

11. The main edition consulted in the present study is from the Karmapa Press edition of the Sde dge recension of the Tibetan canon (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1985, *mdo 'grel*, vol. *ii* [118]).

12. *Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō*, *Hsü tsang ching*, Hong Kong Reprint, 1922, vol. 106, 134d-35a.

13. Hong Kong, 1922; see above note.

14. Inaba Shōju, *Enjiki Gejinmikkyōsho Sanitsububan no kanbunyaku* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1949; *Restoration of Yüan-tse's Chieh-shên-mi-ching-shu Through Its Tibetan Counterpart* (Kyoto: Heirakuji, 1972); reviewed by Nagao Gadjin, in *Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan Kenkyū Nempō #9*, 1972, p. 95. Inaba discusses his methodology in his article "On Chos-grub's Translation of the *Chieh-shên-mi-ching-shu*," op. cit., pp. 105-113.

15. See Inaba, "On Chos-grub's Translation," p. 105. For a discussion of this author, see W. Pachow, *A Study of the Twenty-two Dialogues on Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 15-20.

16. This is found on p. 349.8 of Sde dge vol. 118.

17. See David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 408-9 and 424-5; and Inaba Shōju, "On Chos-grub's Translation," p. 106.

18. See Yamaguchi Zuihō's study of this catalogue in *Naritasan Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Kiyō* #9, 1985, pp. 1-61

19. See Inaba, "On Chos-grub's Translation," pp. 106-7, and see also Hadano Hakuyū, "A Note on the *Ārya-lankāvatāra-vṛtti*," *Acta Asiatica* #29, 1975, pp. 89-91.

20. See Paul Demiéville, "Récents Travaux sur Touen-Houang," *T'oung-pao*, vol. LVI, 1970, pp. 38-40, 44-5, and 47-63; Inaba, p. 106; and David Snellgrove, *A Cultural History of Tibet* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), pp. 23 and 73.

21. See Hadano, "A Note on the *Āryalankāvatāra-vṛtti*," pp. 75-94 and 89-90.

22. See Hadano, p. 89, Demiéville, "Récents Travaux," pp. 49-50, and Giuseppe Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts II* (Rome: IsMEO, 1958), p. 56, note 2.

The first Ring lugs pa was Ye shes dbang po (pronounced Ye-shay wang-bo) of the Ba (*rba*) family, a pioneer of Buddhism in Tibet, and the second was Dpal dbyangs (pronounced Bay-yang), also of the Ba family, who was appointed by King Khri srong lde brtsan (pronounced Tri-song-day-dzen). See also Ueyama Daishun, "Donkō to Tonkō Bukkyōgaku (T'an-kuang and Buddhist Studies at Tun-huang)," in *Tōhō Gakuhō* #35, 1964, pp. 141-214, where he contends that Chos-grub was of Chinese origin, and not Tibetan as is generally accepted. This is reviewed by Yamaguchi Zuihō in *Tōyō Gakuhō* 1965, pp. 47-44 (reported by Nagao Gadjin, "Reflections on Tibetan Studies in Japan," in *Acta Asiatica* #29, 1975, p. 121). Ueyama's arguments are summarized by Demiéville in "Récents Travaux," pp. 48-50 and 29-43, and Yamaguchi's article is summarized on pp. 43-44.

23. See Ueyama Daishun ("Donkō to Tonkō bukkyōgaku"), pp. 141-214.

24. See W. Pachow, *A Study of the Twenty-two Dialogues on Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 15-20.

25. See Demiéville, "Récents Travaux sur Touen-Houang," pp. 29-30. Both Pachow and Demiéville report (Pachow p. 21; Demiéville p. 29) that T'an-k'uang stayed in the Hsi-ming Monastery. Demiéville thinks that he was probably born in 700, and so he probably arrived in Ch'ang-an after Wonch'uk died.

26. Sde dge vols. 118-120; the Peking version begins in vol. 106.

27. Inaba ("On Chos-grub's Translation," p. 109) reports that in the Chinese text Wonch'uk even cites the volume number according to the Chinese canon of many of his sources, but these are omitted in the Tibetan translation since they would be unnecessary to Tibetan readers.

28. For example, in the opening section of his work (pp. 2-28), he quotes a total of thirty-one texts.

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Ch'ang-an	長安
<i>Chieh shen mi ching shu</i>	解深密經疏
<i>Chin ling k'o ching ch'u</i>	金陵刻經處
<i>Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō</i>	大日本續藏經
Fa-ch'eng	法成
Fa-hsiang	法相
Hsi-ming	西明
Hsin-lo	葺羅
Hsiu-to	修多
<i>Hsu kao seng chüan</i>	統高僧傳
Hsüan-tsang	玄奘
Kan-chou	甘州
K'uei-chi	窺基
T'an-k'uang	曇曠
Tao-hsüan	道宣
Tun-huang	敦煌
Tz'u-en	慈恩
Yüan-tse	円測