

*The Sudden Awakening/Gradual Cultivation Schema.
A Somaesthetic Approach to Jinul's Thought*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jinul (知訥, 1158-1210) is one of the most important Buddhist monks in Korean tradition. He lived during the Goryeo period (918-1392), a time in which Buddhism was riven by two rival schools: the doctrinal Gyo (教) school, which was focused on the scriptural teachings of the Buddhist canon, and the Seon (禪) school, which followed a special transmission of Buddhism regardless of those scriptural teachings. Jinul, who became a Seon monk at the age of fifteen, sought to establish a school that combined the study of the scholastic teachings with the direct practices of Seon. Therefore, in the late eleventh century he founded a new school, the Jogye order (曹溪宗), which defended that Seon and Doctrine were not so much conflicted as mutually complementary.

One of the most significant contributions of this school was the sudden awakening/gradual cultivation schema. Before Jinul, Seon Buddhism was divided into sudden enlightenment and gradual practice. The former advocated the sudden awakening, whereas the latter defended that wisdom matures slowly. In contrast, Jinul believed that the process begins with an initial sudden awakening, followed by a cultivation of that awakening, which concludes with a final enlightenment.

He noted that ordinary people generally assumed a dualistic view of their bodies and minds, resulting in a neglect of the body. Nevertheless, according to Jinul, our bodies are actually the true dharma-body of all Buddhas and their minds are the true mind. For that reason, we need to understand that we have always been endowed with the Buddha-nature, and that this discovery would be the sudden awakening, in which we would gain an initial understanding of our own true nature. However, this sudden awakening, this direct insight, does not imply achieving the enlightenment. For Jinul, only the most advanced adepts, whose spiritual faculties are matured, can reach it. Hence, the majority of practitioners need to continue training through gradual cultivation.

Jinul's main instructions on this training appeared in his early work *Encouragement to Practice, Secrets on Cultivating the Mind* and *Straight Talk on the True Mind*, where he focuses on the "concurrent cultivation of *samādhi* and *prajñā*" (定慧雙修) and the "balanced maintenance of alertness and calmness" (惺寂等持門). Both of these guidelines can be found in the *Pāli Canon* and *Yogācāra* materials; however, Jinul's proposal offers new insights into them.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to examine the sudden awakening/gradual cultivation schema from a somaesthetic approach to show Jinul's teachings as an embodied and highly conscious art of living. In order to do so, I will start by analyzing what Jinul defined as the true Buddha-nature in relation to Richard Shusterman's definition of soma; that is, an integrative view of body and mind. Then, I will consider Jinul's instructions for gradual cultivation through a comparative methodology that brings these guidelines into dialogue with perspectives from somaesthetics. This kind of interchange could help us to understand Jinul's thought as a way of life concerned with self-improvement. This paper concludes with a final reflection on Jinul's schema as a way of experiencing a meaningful life, as an art of living which connects Buddhism with issues of humanism, aesthetics and ethics.

2. RETURNING TO THE OCEAN OF WISDOM: ON THE TRUE BUDDHA-NATURE

Jinul was born in 1158 into an upper-class family in the Goryeo capital of Kaesong; however, he became a monk at the age of fifteen. The reasons why Jinul did not pursue a governmental career like his father are controversial. Some academics like Robert Buswell Jr. have argued that it was due to a promise made by his father. From birth, Jinul was weak and ill, so his father (registrar of the government of Goryeo) vowed that if his son healed, he would ordain him into the Buddhist order. Soon, Jinul regained his health and accessed monastic life through the Seon lineage of Sagulsan (闍嶺山). However, other specialists like H. S. Keel¹ have remarked that the story attached to Jinul shows that he became a monk by special destiny, what Buddhists call *inyeon*. He defended that Jinul seeks his identity in the Buddhist path of liberation from a world in which the tremendous sufferings of life were to be seen everywhere.

For Keel there is a significant difference between making a voluntary decision and joining the monastic life involuntarily, which suggests that a child was pushed by his parents into monastic life. In any case, the main point in these pages is that it is generally accepted that Jinul's access to Buddhism was between fifteen and twenty and that his first preceptor was Jonghwi (褒趨), the tenth-generation successor of Beomil — a monk who left Silla in 831 and studied under the Tang masters in China.² Nonetheless, Jinul was not a typical monk.³ He did not formally study under a master and never recognized a teacher or a transmission, neither did he make a pilgrimage to China.

Jinul was basically an autodidact who looked for wisdom in the Buddhist scriptures (*sūtras* and commentaries of Gyo, and the records of the Chan and Seon masters), with

¹ H. S. Keel (2012), *Chinul. The Founder of Korean Sōn Tradition*. Fremont (California): Jain Publishing Company, p. 13.

² J. H. Grayson (2002), *Korea. A Religious History*. New York: Routledge Curzon, p. 71.

³ This aspect seems to confirm Keel's argument about how Jinul took refuge in Seon Buddhism.

a natural inclination toward retreat. For this reason, as Robert Buswell Jr. said⁴, from early on, Jinul developed a natural eclecticism and did not hesitate to borrow passages from sources that he found helpful in his own religious development. By 1182, Jinul had travelled to Bojesa (普濟寺) in Pyongyang to take the Seon Samgha examinations. In spite of passing without problems, he was not really interested in joining the monastic life, but rather in renovating Buddhism and returning to the proper pursuits of the everyday life of monks. Th, he and his fellow monks decided to create a retreat society dedicated to the development of *samādhi* (concentration) and *prajñā* (wisdom). Jinul relates these events in his earliest work *Encouragement to Practice: The Compact of the Samādhi and Prajñā Society*:

One day I made a pact with more than ten fellow meditators that said: “After the close of this convocation we will renounce fame and profit and remain in seclusion in the mountain forests. There we will form a retreat society designed to foster constant training in *samādhi* balanced with *prajñā*. Through worship of the Buddha, recitation of sūtras, and even through our manual labor, we will each discharge the duties to which we are assigned and nourish the [self-]nature in all situations. [We vow to] pass our whole lives free of entanglements and to follow the higher pursuits of accomplished gentlemen and authentic adepts. Would this not be wonderful?”... All those venerables who heard these words agreed with what was said and vowed: “On another day we will consummate this agreement, live in seclusion deep in the forest, and be bound together as a community that should be named for *samādhi* and *prajñā*.”⁵

Therefore, Jinul was one of the first promoters of retreat societies in Korea. The antecedents of these kinds of communities can be traced back to the society of Mount Lushan (廬山) in the Eastern Jin dynasty, founded by the monk Huiyuan (慧遠), the First Patriarch of the Pure Land tradition. Despite his efforts to regenerate the corrupted Samgha, Jinul had many difficulties in finding a place to set up his community. It would be eight years before the *Samādhi* and *Prajñā* Society was finally established. During these eight years, Jinul travelled around Korea, arriving in the region of the ancient Baekje kingdom, in the southwest of the Korean peninsula. It was in 1182, while Jinul was staying at Cheongwonsa (淸源寺), that he had the first awakening experience that deeply affected his life. He was reading through the *Platform Sūtra* of the Sixth Patriarch when he coincidentally encountered the following passage about self-nature: “The self-nature of suchness gives rise to thoughts. But even though the six sense-faculties see, hear, sense, and know, [the self-nature] is not tainted by the myriads of images. The true nature is constantly free and self-reliant”.⁶

This text belongs to chapter four, where Huineng exposes how “meditation and wisdom are of one essence, not different. Meditation is the essence of wisdom and wisdom is the

⁴ R. Buswell Jr. (2012), “Introduction”, in *Chinul. Selected Works*. Chun-il Munhwasa, Paju (Korea): Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, p. 41.

⁵ Jinul (1190), *Gwonsu Jeonghye gyeolsa mun* (勸修定慧結社文). Translated by R. Buswell Jr. as “Encouragement to Practice: The Compact of the Samādhi and Prajñā Society”, in *Chinul. Selected Works cit.*, pp. 118-119.

⁶ Huineng, *Platform Sūtra* 353b. Quoted and translated by R. Buswell Jr. (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

function of meditation”.⁷ For the Sixth Patriarch, people must simply use their minds (which they already have) to achieve Buddhahood, and the way is the meditation and wisdom. Thus, thanks to this experience, Jinul became aware of the need for an initial awakening to the mind-nature to develop gradual cultivation. In fact, after this experience he reread *Platform Sūtra* several times, as well as Zongmi’s writings. Jinul was greatly influenced by Zongmi (宗密, 780-841), the Patriarch of the Heze school, because he proposed a balanced approach to the nature of reality and the processes of individual spiritual development.⁸ Particularly, he analyzed Zongmi’s thoughts in his work *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* (法集別行錄節要並入私記), where he considered the differences between sudden and gradual approaches to enlightenment and then exposed his schema:

Due to beginningless delusion and invented thinking, you consider the four great elements to the body, deluded, thoughts to be the mind, and these together to be the self. But if you come across a good friend who explains the significance of these concepts of immutability and adaptability, nature and characteristic, essence and function, you can abruptly awaken to the fact that the numinous, bright knowledge and vision are your own true mind. That mind is originally ever calm and devoid of nature or characteristic; it is indeed the *dharmakaya*. This nonduality of body and mind is the true I; there is not the slightest difference between it and all the Buddhas. Consequently, it is said that awakening is sudden.⁹

Following Zongmi’s view of a void and calm mind, Jinul asserts that the first step is a sudden awakening to the essence of mind. In this sense, this awareness will not be corrupted by the discriminatory intellect or sensory perception, nor limited by emotions or external objects. By contrast, this awakening implies harmony and calmness; as Robert Buswell Jr. asserts, it involves an understanding of two aspects of the mind: its immutable absolute essence and its adaptive relative faculties.¹⁰ In Jinul’s words:

First let us take sudden awakening. When the ordinary man is deluded, he assumes that the four great elements are his body and the false thought are his mind. He does not know that his own nature is the true dharma-body; he does not know that his own numinous awareness is the true Buddha. He looks for the Buddha outside his mind [...] If in one thought he then follows back the light [of his mind to its source] and sees his own original nature, he will discover that the ground of this nature is innately free of defilement, and that he himself is originally endowed with the non-outflow wisdom-nature which is not a hair’s breadth different from that of all the Buddhas.¹¹

⁷ Hui-neng (2001), *The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*. Burlingame (California): Buddhist Text Translation Society, pp. 41-42.

⁸ Unlike Zongmi and other monks, Jinul was not critical with the other schools, but he believed that every tradition offered different approaches and took the main points that could benefit his own development.

⁹ Jinul (1209), *Peochip pyeohaeng nok cheoryo pyeongip sagi* (集別行錄節要科目並入私記). Translated by R. Buswell Jr. as “Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes: Selections”, in *Tracing Back the Radiance. Chinul’s Korean Way of Zen*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1983, p. 167.

¹⁰ R. Buswell Jr. (2012), “Introduction”, in *Chinul. Selected Works cit.*, p. 45.

¹¹ Jinul (1205a), *Moguja Susim kyeol* (牧牛子修心訣). Translated by R. Buswell Jr. as “Secrets on Cultivating the Mind”, in *Tracing Back cit.*, p. 102.

Therefore, for Jinul, Buddhahood is present in all sentient beings. In his *Treatise on the Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood*, he analyses Li Tongxuan's Huayan thought and exposes how:

[...] ordinary persons of great aspiration (大心凡夫) in this degenerate age of the dharma would have a sudden awakening to the Immovable Wisdom of all the buddhas right here in this realm of birth and death; [this Immovable Wisdom would thus] serve as the source for arousing the *bodhicitta* at the moment of the initial awakening.¹²

Thus, through the sudden awakening (*haeo* 解悟), one gains the initial comprehension of one's own nature. Nonetheless, Jinul's explanation of this true nature seems difficult to understand. For that reason, I wish to examine this notion more closely through the new discipline of somaesthetics proposed by American philosopher Richard Shusterman. In the last decades, somaesthetics have been developed by many scholars from different perspectives, which have widened its scope and reoriented its original disciplinary domain. In this way, I think that reconsideration of Shusterman's notion of soma can help us to understand Jinul's conception of true nature.

Shusterman introduces the term "soma" to refer to "a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation".¹³ He prefers the term "soma" to "body", because the latter is often contrasted with mind and applied to insentient and lifeless things. "Soma" includes what is traditionally divided as mind and body. That is, it is capable of mental acts "such as discriminating perception, explicit awareness, and even self-monitoring, just as it is capable of intentional, physical movement".¹⁴

Thus, he uses the term "soma" to highlight how it is not merely "an object of consciousness but a conscious subjectivity that displays different levels of consciousness (and unconsciousness)".¹⁵ In a similar way, Jinul exposes how Buddhahood and sentient beings originally have the same essence, but due to afflictions and dualistic ideas they create a division between conventional states of mind and the Buddhahood mind. In Jinul's words:

[...] who contemplate the mind in order to access the path constantly to have faith that their own bodies, speech, and minds, as well as the characteristics of their sensory realms, all arise from the body, speech, mind, and sensory realms of the *tathāgatas*. These [phenomena] are all devoid of essence or nature, for originally they are nondual and their essences are indistinguishable. Since they are all conditionally generated by the uncreated self-nature of the *dharmadhātu*, the conditions and the characteristics of those conditions all arise from that nature. That nature itself is the *dharmadhātu*; there is no inside, outside, or in between. You should have this sort of understanding and engage in this sort of investigation. This then

¹² Jinul (1215), *Wondon seongbullon* (圓頓成佛論). Translated by R. Buswell Jr. as "Treatise on the Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood", in *Chinul. Selected Works cit.*, p. 253.

¹³ R. Shusterman (2008), *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

¹⁴ R. Shusterman (2011), "Soma, Self and Society", *Metaphilosophy* 42(3), p. 316.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

[means that] buddhas and sentient beings are originally conjured up from the ocean of the nature, which is the fundamental Wisdom of Universal Radiance. Therefore, the forms and functioning of sentient beings and buddhas may seem to be different, but they are entirely the form and functioning of this fundamental Wisdom of Universal Radiance.¹⁶

This long paragraph shows how Jinul does not develop a dualistic view of human beings. In a similar way to Shusterman's proposal, the Buddhist monk seems to consider body as the background to conscious mental life. As exposed by Shusterman, the main problem is that body is perceived as something that distracts, disturbs or makes us suffer.¹⁷ This does not imply a refusal of the body. As Jinul asserts in *Encouragement to Practice: The Compact of the Samādhi and Prajñā Society*, "we use our male body in vain, for we lack the will of a real man".¹⁸

However, "the body is the reflection of wisdom".¹⁹ For Jinul, human beings need to discover that their own nature is the true dharma-body and their own numinous awareness (*yeongji* 靈知) is the true Buddha.²⁰ In this sense, I consider that when the Buddhist monk introduces the idea of sudden awakening, he provides an embodied approach, that is, the (re)discovery of the sudden awakening (*haeo* 解悟). According to this approach, sentient beings that achieve an initial understanding of their own true nature can merge through their somas (mind-body) in their everyday lives.

Being awake, says Shusterman²¹, means being more aware than one normally is in one's waking hours, which shows similarities with Thoreau's idea of "the awakening hour". Awakening means waking up to a higher consciousness than we have in ordinary daily life, and this happens in non-dualistic human beings. In other words, Shusterman follows Thoreau in defending that this awakening is not a matter of chronological time, but that it should occur in every moment of our everyday life. Likewise, Jinul defends that if people have a sudden awakening and realize that their absolute mind is innate, mind of Buddhahood may merge. According to Jinul, this is the Immovable Wisdom (*pudong chi* 不動智), which can be achieved by everyone in their lifetime:

If you can suddenly forget the differences in the doctrinal principles posited in the verbal teachings and, while sitting quietly in a private room, empty your heart and cleanse your thoughts, trace back the radiance of your own mind, and return to its source, then you can consider the sublimity of that pure nature that appears in that immediate thought-moment to be either the original enlightenment that is involved in pollution, the original enlightenment of the nature's purity, the unimpeded *dharmadhātu*, the Buddha of Immovable Wisdom, or *Vairocana Buddha*.²²

¹⁶ Jinul (1215), *op. cit.*, pp. 265-266.

¹⁷ R. Shusterman (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Jinul (1190), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹⁹ Jinul (1207), *Hwaem non jeoryo* (華嚴論節要). Translated by R. Buswell Jr. as "Preface and Conclusion from Condensation of the Exposition of the Avataṃsakasūtra", in *Tracing Back cit.*, p. 358.

²⁰ Jinul (1205a), *op. cit.*, p. 245.

²¹ R. Shusterman (2012), *Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 293.

²² Jinul (1215), *op. cit.*, p. 293.

Nonetheless, although students might experience the initial sudden awakening and understand the Immovable Wisdom, they will not be able to act as buddhas, because they perform according to their embodied habits. As Shusterman defended in relation to somaesthetic awakenings, the first awakening is not the end, but rather the start of a deliberate way of life. In a similar way, Jinul points out that after the initial awakening, monks must learn to apply their understanding of the true Buddha-natures in the ordinary world. This involves a training through which they counter the arising of afflictions and develop the whole range of salutary spiritual qualities. In such a view, we can see how his considerations about phenomenal aspects of reality and his approach to practice are kept in harmony, they converge together.²³

Thus, after the first initial awakening Jinul focused on the need for the gradual cultivation of *samādhi* and *prajñā*. This approach can be located in his works *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind* (牧牛子修心訣) and *Encouragement to Practice* (勸修定慧結社文), in which he developed the main schema that we can also find in his last works, such as *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* (法集別行錄節要科目並入私記). This leads us to the next section, which deals with Jinul's techniques for cultivating one's true mind.

3. CONCLUSION: JINUL'S SCHEMA AS A WAY OF EXPERIENCING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Living in the middle of the Goryeo dynasty, Jinul was faced with a Buddhist church which was corrupted and divided into the doctrinal Gyo school and the Seon meditative school. Drawing inspiration from patriarchs of different traditions such as Li Tongxuan and Guifeng Zongmi, Jinul developed an approach to Buddhism in which the theoretical aids of the Gyo school and the approach of Seon tradition converged. This unique combination is one of the most distinct contributions of Jinul to Korean Buddhism, but also to East Asian Buddhist thought.

Bringing together a selection of textual sources, these pages have suggested a new way of reading Jinul's thought by means of a comparative study with the discipline of somaesthetics. Particularly, I have focused closely on his sudden awakening/gradual cultivation schema. Jinul's three major spiritual experiences —first when he read the *Platform Sūtra*; then when he studied the *Avataṃsakasūtra* and its *Exposition* by Li Tongxuan; and finally when he investigated Dahui's *Records* at Sangmujuam— appear in his works as three major approaches to Buddhist practice. As pointed out above, a sudden awakening is required to realize the true Buddha-nature, but then we need to develop an authentic cultivation.

In his work *Encouragement to Practice*, Jinul points out how many ordinary students in the Gyo school and in the Seon School do not develop an authentic cultivation despite imitating the practice of those who are free from constraints and who possess self-

²³ It is necessary to bear in mind that Jinul's thought is based on his conviction that the message of the *sūtras* and the Seon transmission were ultimately in complete conformity with one another.

mastery. Although they practice hard, “their bodies and mouths are corrupted, their mental activities are perverted”. For that reason, after an initial awareness of the true mind, he proposes a path of concurrent cultivation of *samādhi* and *prajñā*, which can be understood as a path of life.

Likewise, Shusterman’s insistence on the practical dimension of somaesthetics attempts to offer arguments for reintegrating aesthetic principles into a practical conduct of life. In short, he introduces this discipline as a way of experiencing a meaningful life, as a philosophy concerned with self-improvement. Therefore, the emphasis of these pages is placed not only on Jinul’s schema but also on possible similarities with the discipline of somaesthetics and its proposed art of living. Jinul’s main concern was to present a guide for beginners, because:

If we can in this manner develop *samādhi* and *prajñā* as a pair and cultivate concurrently the manifold practices [of the bodhisattva], then how can this approach be compared to the ignorant Seon of those who do nothing more than maintain silence or to the mad wisdom of those who merely follow the texts?²⁴

Jinul provides a lucid and accessible way of practicing Buddhism. In this regard, by bringing these two thinkers together, I have argued that they are mutually elucidating and that they reinforce each other’s views. Both authors introduce a path for developing a meaningful life in our everyday lives. They seem to share that ordinary people lose their presence of body-mind in agitation and confusion during their lives. However, their proposals try to provide a living road which leads people to “salvation” or a “higher life”, as Jinul and Shusterman respectively claim.

To conclude, I would like to briefly highlight the importance of this study. Firstly, my intention was not to develop a hybrid Buddhist-somaesthetic theory, but rather to pay attention to the relationship between these two approaches. I have exposed the real value of a potential conversation between both authors, not only because of the possible similarities in their positions, but because they are mutually illuminating. Particularly, Shusterman’s explanation of soma may offer new insights into some difficult aspects of Buddhist concepts; whereas Jinul’s instructions may provide a practical method to somaesthetics. Secondly, I have suggested that separating Jinul’s personal experience of life from his philosophy becomes impossible. In particular, I have sought to show that his practical guide is related to his three awakenings and cultivation. Thirdly, this study has attempted to address the contemporaneity of Jinul’s schema in two ways: first, by drawing attention to the contribution of this Korean monk to Buddhism; second, by exploring the possibilities of this approach both for ordinary people today and for the discipline of somaesthetics.

The advances that I have proposed do not exhaust the subject; instead, they open a number of doors for further research, like the consideration of *hwadu* and somaesthetics. Moreover, I make no pretense of offering a comprehensive account of Jinul’s thought.

²⁴ Jinul (1209), *op cit.*, p. 135.

Several issues that I have not considered have already been investigated by other scholars or might inspire future academic discussion. This study has engaged in an intercultural dialogue as a way of enriching both proposals without underestimating their differences. Both thinkers propose a way of leading a meaningful life, and this interpretation merits further attention not only from aestheticians, but also from thinkers in other fields such as ethics or education.