

An excerpt from *Samguk Yusa*

Anecdotes of Renowned Monks

104. Ŭisang Transmits the Hwaŏm Sutra to the Cardinal Temples

Ŭisang's father was Han-sin and his family name was Kim. At the age of twenty-nine he shaved his head and became a monk, residing at Hwangpok Temple. Soon afterward he decided to go to China to study Buddhist doctrine, and set out on his journey with Wonhyo. But when he reached Liaotung he was arrested by Koguryo border guards and detained for ten days, after which he was allowed to return home. (Ilyŏn says this account is found in Ch'oe Hu's Chronicles and in Wonhyo's Autobiography.)

In the first year of Ying-hui (650) he joined the party of a T'ang envoy returning to China and entered the Middle Kingdom. When he arrived at Yangchow, the Chinese military commander there gave him a luxurious reception and provided him with living quarters in the government headquarters. After a few days he visited the monk Chih-yen on the South Mountain of Changan. Chih-yen had had a dream the night before in which he had seen a great tree growing in Haedong (Silla) whose boughs and leaves covered the whole of Shenchow (Land of God, i.e. China) and in the top of which was a phoenix nest. He climbed the tree, and his eyes were dazzled by *Manipao* (jewels said to have been emitted from the brain of a king dragon) whose light radiated far and wide. Waking in wonder and surprise, he tidied his house and waited until Ŭisang knocked at his door. After receiving his guest with special ceremony he said, "In a dream last night I saw signs of your coming." The two sat facing each other and discussed the mysteries of the Hwaŏm Sutra to the profoundest depths. Chih-yen was glad to hear the intelligent words of Ŭisang, and declared that his visitor outshone him on many points of Buddhist scripture.

At this time the Silla ministers Kim Hŭm-sun (another book says Kim In-mun, Ilyŏn notes) and Yang-to were detained in Changan by Tang Emperor Kao-tsung, who was planning to attack Silla with a large army. Ŭisang was informed of this by Hŭm-sun, who urged him to return home at once and warn the court. Therefore, in the first year of Hsien-heng (670), Ŭisang returned to Silla and told King Munmu of the imminent danger. At the same time he ordered Myŏngnang, a clever monk, to improvise a secret Buddhist altar to deceive a Chinese envoy who had come to Kyongju for purposes of espionage. Thus the King was able to surmount the crisis.

Hsŭan-shou Fa-tsang, a Chinese monk and fellow student of Ŭisang at Chih-yen's monastery, sent Ŭisang a copy of his Selections from Sou-hsuan-shu and a personal letter in the most cordial terms which read as follows:

"Fa-tsang, a monk at Ch'ungfu Temple in the Western Capital (Changan) presents this letter to the attendant of Hwaŏm Pŏpsa in Silla. Since we two parted twenty years ago you have been ever in my mind, but the wide seas have kept us ten thousand *li* apart, separated by the sailing clouds and rolling waves. My longing to see you knows no bounds. By *Karma* (Sanskrit; the accumulation of merits and demerits by which future incarnations are determined) we have often been acquainted, and we studied under the same teacher who, by divine ordinance, transmitted to us his knowledge of the great mysteries of the Buddhist scriptures.

"I have learned with great joy that after your return you held seminars on the Hwaŏm Sutra in order to enhance the glories of Buddha. You have reflected the heavenly jewels of the Chesŏk Palace in your Buddhist nation to share the blessings of Buddha with all people. This news shows me that it is you who have brought Buddha's sunlight and turned the Wheel of the Law to propagate his gospel on earth since Sakyamuni entered the Lotus Paradise.

"I, Fa-tsang, have made few achievements in my studies. I am ashamed when with my inward eye I see you and our textbook, the Hwaŏm Sutra. The statements of Hwasang (a Buddhist priest) in the Sou-hsŭan-shu have rich meanings, but are too brief, so that the younger generation will find it difficult to understand their full significance. I have therefore recorded his dark sayings and added commentaries for novices to read. Sŭngchŏn Pŏpsa will soon finish copying my manuscript and deliver it to you. I will be fortunate if you will read it and correct the errors I have made.

"In our next incarnations, when together we receive the supreme, inexhaustible law of Buddha in the universally illumined kingdom of Nosana and perform the precepts of Pohyŏn, my sins will be redeemed. Please do not forget our long acquaintance and continue to lead me on the righteous path. Hoping to hear from you through messengers or correspondence from time to time. . . ."

(Ilyŏn says this letter is included in the *Taemun-nyu*, the *Collection of Great Men's Letters*.)

Ŭisang ordered the ten cardinal temples, including Pusŏk-sa on Mt. T'aebaek, Pimara-sa in Wonju, Haein-sa on Mt. Kaya, Okch'ŏn-sa in Pisŭl, Pŏmŏ-sa in Kŭmjŏng and Hwaŏm-sa in Namak, to propagate Buddhism on the principles of the Hwaŏm Sutra. In addition, he made a schematic chart of Buddhist doctrine (Mandala) for the temples to keep for the instruction of monks for a thousand years. He left no other writings, but one piece of meat is enough to flavor the soup. This chart and explanation, his only literary work, were made in the first year of Tsung-chang (668, the year that Chih-yen died), just as Confucius wrote the final chapter of his book after receiving the gift of a Kirin. (Confucius is said to have composed the final chapter of the Ch'unchiu (Spring and Autumn Annals) after receiving the gift of a Kirin (Giraffe), a fabulous monster said to symbolize benevolence.)

Legend says that Ŭisang was an incarnation of the Bodhisattva on the Jeweled Throne. His ten disciples were Ochin, Chit'ong, P'yohun, Chinjŏng, Chinjang, Toyung, Yangto, Sangwon, Nŭngin and Ŭijŏk. They are all known as sages of the second rank and each has a biography.

Ochin lived at Koram Temple on Mt. Haga, from which he stretched his arm each night to light the lamp at Pusŏk Temple. Chit'ong wrote the book Ch'udong-gi (The Village of Gimlets) in which he told many interesting stories in clever phrases. P'yohun lived at Pulguk Temple and traveled to and from the heavenly palace.

When Ŭisang was at Hwangpok Temple he used to mount the pagoda and turn around in the air, without touching the steps. When the other monks followed him, all floating three feet off the ground, he looked back and said, "If the commoners should see us flying this way they would think us monsters, so we had better not teach them this heavenly art."

Song of Praise to Ŭisang

He pushed through brambles and war-dust,
Sailing on and on till the Chihshang Temple door opened;
When he planted Hwaŏm's flowering trees in his own garden,
Nanshan (China) and Mt. T'aebaek (Silla) sang the same spring.

Quoted from *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* by Ilyon, translated by Ha Tae-Hung and Grafton K. Mintz. (Seoul: Yeonsei University Press) 1972 pp. 308-12.