

ARTICLES

Shifting Contexts of Faith: The Cult of Maitreya in Middle and Late Silla

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ALTHOUGH the eighth century is remembered as the golden age of Buddhism in the early Korean state of Silla 新羅 (57 BCE–935 CE)¹ due to such things as the construction of Pulguksa 佛國寺 monastery and Sōkkuram 石窟庵 grotto and the prominence of the Hwaōm jong 華嚴宗 (Ch. Huayan zong; Jp. Kegon shū), or school, it was also a transitional phase with the introduction of new forms of devotion and practice that would evolve over the course of several centuries. When Buddhism was adopted as a state religion in the sixth century, the cult of Maitreya was closely associated with the royalty and nobility. The cult supported an ideological position that asserted that the land of Silla was both a former and future buddha-land because Maitreya deigned to visit from time to time in the guise of a *hwarang* 花郎 (flower boy).² By the eighth century, however, the wider context of belief in Buddhism was changing.

Although worship of Maitreya was representative of what it meant to be Buddhist in the sixth century, the success of alternative forms of Buddhism in Silla was a significant factor that affected the fortune of the Maitreya cult. In the middle and late periods of Silla (654–780 and 780–935, respectively), recitation of the name of the Buddha Amitābha emerged as the dominant form of cultic Buddhist practice, and with the introduction of Sōn 禪 (Ch. Chan) Buddhism from Tang 唐 China (618–907), new buddhas,

¹ The date 57 BCE is usually given as the traditional founding of the Silla state, but this date is unsubstantiated.

² Lancaster 1988; McBride 2010; Choe 2015.

bodhisattvas, sutras, and ritual practices arrived due to the increasing number of Silla monks going there on pilgrimage. This paper analyzes three of the shifting contexts of faith in Maitreya in the middle and late Silla: (1) the assimilation of Maitreya worship and divination practices by Chinp'yo 眞表 (fl. 742–765) and his disciples; (2) Sōn monks' adoption of the allusion to Mahākāśyapa (K. Taegasōp 大迦葉; Ch. Dajiashe) entering into samādhi on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda (K. Kyegaksan 鷄脚山; Ch. Jijiaoshan) to wait for Maitreya; and (3) the appropriation of Maitreya's identity by Kungye 弓裔 (fl. 891–918). These cases show (1) that the prestige enjoyed by Maitreya and the Maitreya cult was appropriated to provide some degree of legitimacy to a divination practice associated with penance and the reception of the Bodhisattva precepts; (2) that Korean Sōn monks were figuratively linked to the archetypal meditation monk Mahākāśyapa; and (3) how political authority was bestowed on an upstart ruler of dubious paternity with ambitious aspirations.

THE INTEGRATION OF MAITREYA AND KṢITIGARBHA WORSHIP WITH DIVINATION

Chinp'yo's Worship of Maitreya

East Asian Buddhists typically did not differentiate too much between rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven (K. Tosolch'ōn 兜率天), Maitreya's present dwelling place, and rebirth in Sukhāvati, Amitābha's Western Paradise (K. *sōbang kūngnak* 西方極樂).³ The perceived similarity between Sukhāvati and Tuṣita is partially demonstrated by the fact that nobles in Silla conflated the veneration of Maitreya and Amitābha in inscriptions on images, and had images of both Maitreya and Amitābha created to adorn monasteries they commissioned as late as the early eighth century.⁴ These images suggest a desire on the part of these nobles to acquire merit for themselves and their deceased parents and ancestors.

Besides synthesis with the worship of Amitābha, the cult of Maitreya also expanded to combine with the cult of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (K. Chijang 地藏; Ch. Dizang), who assists Amitābha by entering hell to ferry the souls of the dead to Amitābha's Western Paradise. Worship of Kṣitigarbha

³ “World System of Extreme Bliss in the West” is another possible rendering of this phrase and is commonly found in Huayan materials as each of the places mentioned is conceptualized as a “world system” (世界). Another such example would be the “Lotus Storehouse World System” (*huazang shijie* 華藏世界).

⁴ McBride 2011.

began to flourish in Silla during the middle of the eighth century. Practitioners of the cult of Kṣitigarbha, as in the cult of Maitreya and all other cults of the time for that matter, became preoccupied with repentance rituals and with Buddhist divination ceremonies that predicted one's karmic status, often as a prerequisite to receiving the Buddhist precepts.⁵

The monk Chinp'yo hailed from the former territory of Paekche 百濟 (18 BCE–660 CE),⁶ in the southwestern part of the Korean Peninsula, and was recorded as a monk of Paekche in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Lives of Eminent Monks Compiled during the Song Dynasty; T no. 2061), which was first compiled in the tenth century. Chinp'yo's participation in the cult of Maitreya can be interpreted variously because there are essentially three different versions of the same basic story of him receiving a visitation from Maitreya and Kṣitigarbha as a result of his sincere repentance and desire to receive the Buddhist precepts.

In the first account preserved in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, Maitreya appeared to Chinp'yo, after he was sufficiently tested, in response to his sincere and extreme method of repenting and observing the precepts. According to the hagiographical narrative, Chinp'yo was raised as a hunter but had a life-transforming experience after he wantonly murdered frogs. This caused him to reject the householder life, cut off his hair, and seek the precepts in the mountains by performing intense repentance rituals such as knocking his head on the rocky ground for seven days and nights. At dawn on the seventh day he saw golden symbols dangling from the hand of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, who instructed him in the precepts. After being tested further by spirits and ghosts of the local area, Maitreya appeared and gave Chinp'yo two special divination sticks inscribed with the characters "nine" (K. *ku* 九) and "eight" (K. *p'al* 八) respectively. Maitreya commanded Chinp'yo to make 108 divination sticks and to inscribe the 108 defilements on these sticks. He then instructed Chinp'yo concerning the method of divining—whether someone is able to receive the precepts and what level of precepts might be appropriate for them to receive.

A postulant must perform penance for ninety days, forty days, or thirty-seven days, and then combine the two special divination sticks with the 108. Then the postulant casts them in the air before an image of the Buddha. The way in which the sticks fall to the earth in front of the image foretells

⁵ Ch'ae Inhwan 1975, pp. 505–629; Kim Yōngt'ae 1972, 1975; Chōng Pyōngjo 1982; Pak Kwangyōn 2006.

⁶ The date 18 BCE is usually given as the traditional founding of the Paekche state, but this date is unsubstantiated.

whether the person's sins have been eradicated or not. If only the special sticks inscribed with "nine" and "eight" remain on the altar, then he will receive the precepts of the highest order of the highest class. If there are other sticks touching the "nine" and "eight" sticks, these represent the postulant's defilements. After repenting of these he receives the precepts of the middle class. However, if the mass of sticks buries the two special sticks, it means that the postulant's sins have not been eradicated. In that case he must repent for at least ninety days, and he will then receive the precepts of the lowest class. This practice of divining whether one's repentance has been successful or if one has defilements for which repentance is necessary is presented without any scriptural support.

The two other accounts preserved in the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms; T no. 2039), which was first compiled in the thirteenth century and sporadically edited and added to until 1512, instead suggest that Chinp'yo received the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報經 (Book of Divining the Requital of Wholesome and Unwholesome Actions; T no. 839) along with the two special divination sticks. The context of these two versions of the story suggests that the divination sutra and the divination sticks go together. The problem with this combination is, however, that the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* does not teach the practice of casting sticks to divine one's karmic status, but instead teaches a method of spinning tops to predict one's possible karmic fate. The divination ritual taught in this sutra—from the mouth of Kṣitigarbha and not at all related to Maitreya—contains a list of 189 possible fates.⁷ In short, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* describes Chinp'yo's divination ritual as casting the two special divination sticks with 108 sticks representing the 108 defilements; but the versions of the story in the *Samguk yusa* conflate Maitreya's two special sticks with the divination practice of spinning 189 tops as explained by Kṣitigarbha in the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing*. Perhaps this explains the unusual appearance of Kṣitigarbha in the *Samguk yusa* accounts, where he seems to function merely as an attendant to Maitreya.

Let us digress for a moment to discuss the significance of the two divining sticks named "nine" and "eight." These two numbers are specifically related to a male person's destiny in traditional Chinese divination practices associated with the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*). The number nine is a potent yang number, but it also enumerates the rites through which a man passes in his life. These rites are said to symbolize the five permutations of matter, such as the changes between the five elements (fire, water, wood, metal,

⁷ Lai 1990, pp. 179–82. See also the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing*, T no. 839, 17: 905b–906c.

and earth). Nine is also symbolic of heaven and earth: there are nine fields of heaven, nine regions in the earth, and so forth. The number eight is an important yin number and plays a vital role in mystical numerology connected with a male person's life. There are eight trigrams in the *Yijing*, and the life of a man is ruled by the number eight. At eight months he gets his milk teeth; at eight years he loses them; at two times eight years he becomes an adult man; and at eight times eight years he is said to be incapable of procreation, and so on. Eight here is also probably related to the "four pillars and eight characters" for the year, month, day, and hour of one's birth (K. *saju p'alcha* 四柱八字), which were believed to play a role in the fortune or destiny of a person.⁸

The previously mentioned *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* contains directions for making 189 tops to divine one's fortune with respect to the Buddha-dharma and the procedures for using them. Among these, according to Iryōn 一然 (1206–1289), the number eight top reveals whether the aspirant is able to receive the bodhisattva precepts in this lifetime, while the number nine top discloses whether the aspirant has the capacity to achieve buddhahood, supreme enlightenment, in this life.⁹ Because the worship of Maitreya possessed greater prestige in Silla society than the worship of Kṣitigarbha and was a basic constituent of Buddhist practice in the country, a divination ceremony linked to Maitreya would be able to draw upon a preexisting legitimacy. The promulgation of this divination practice contributed to the broadening of the social composition of Maitreya worshippers to include an increasing number of commoners.

Kūmsansa 金山寺, on Mt. Moak 母岳 (in present-day Kimje 金堤, North Chōlla 全羅 Province), was Chinp'yo's first center of Maitreya worship. The *Paryōnsu Chinp'yo yulsa changgolt'ap pi* 鉢淵藪眞表律師藏骨塔碑 (The Stele of the Pagoda Preserving the Bones of the Vinaya Master Chinp'yo in Paryōnsu), composed in 1199, and the *Samguk yusa* report that Chinp'yo founded Kūmsansa in 762 after receiving affirmation of his future buddhahood through the divination practice Maitreya revealed to him.¹⁰ Initially

⁸ McBride 2008, pp. 48–49. Kim Sanghyōn provides an alternative interpretation of "eight" and "nine" sticks based on the position that Chinp'yo's divination practice was originally associated with the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing*. Kim argues that top number eight says: "That which one desires to receive and obtain [in the present] are the sublime precepts"; and that top number nine says: "That which one would additionally receive and obtain are the precepts in full." See Kim Sanghyōn 1999, p. 393.

⁹ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1009b–c.

¹⁰ Kim Yōngt'ae 1992, pp. 98–99; *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1008b18–25; Han'guk Pulgyo Yōn'guwōn 1977, pp. 19–21.

an image of Maitreya was painted on the south wall of the Golden Hall, and later a sixteen-foot image of Maitreya was enshrined in 766. Chinp'yo's disciples then spread the divination practice to other locations, most notably to Mt. Songni 俗離 (in present-day North Ch'ungch'ōng 忠清 Province), in the central region of the Silla domain, and into Myōngju 溟洲, the north-eastern region of Silla. Kūmsansa was the place where Chinp'yo became a monk, and it was the place where he first spread his teaching. Chinp'yo considered the precepts to be important and was eventually called a "Vinaya master" (K. *yulsa* 律師). A precepts platform (K. *kyedan* 戒壇) was eventually constructed at Kūmsansa, and the first recorded ordination took place in 917. In this way, Kūmsansa combined Maitreya worship and the Vinaya.¹¹

The Maitreya Cult in Chinp'yo's Lineage

Chinp'yo's disciples include the monks Yōngsim 永深 (n.d.), Pojong 寶宗 (n.d.), Sinbang 信芳 (n.d.), Ch'ejin 體珍 (n.d.), Chinhae 珍海 (n.d.), Chinsōn 眞善 (n.d.), and Sōkch'ung 釋忠 (n.d.).¹² All of these disciples became founders of monasteries. Among these, Yōngsim of Mt. Songni came to Chinp'yo in search of the Dharma along with such monks as Yungjong 融宗 (n.d.) and Pult'a 佛陀 (n.d.) and attended him faithfully. Chinp'yo transmitted his teaching to them and consecrated them for future buddhahood. In addition, according to tradition, he gave them his robe and bowl, the *Kongyang ch'aje pibōp* 供養次第秘法 (Secret Method on the Order of Making Offerings; not extant) in one roll, the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* in two rolls, and the 189 divination tops that go along with this sutra. Furthermore, he gave them the two divination sticks, "nine" and "eight," which were reportedly made from the finger bones of Maitreya. Yōngsim and the other disciples followed the teachings of Chinp'yo, entered Mt. Songni, built Kilsangsa 吉祥寺 on a site where the "auspicious herb" (K. *kilsangch'o* 吉祥草; Ch. *jixiang cao*) grew, and held divination Dharma assemblies (K. *chōmch'al pōphoe* 占察法會).¹³ The divination Dharma assembly, in which

¹¹ According to the *Karyangsa hyegō kuksa pi* 葛陽寺惠居國師碑 (Stele Inscription of State Preceptor Hyegō at Karyangsa), Hyegō 惠居 (d. 974) received full ordination to the monastic precepts (K. *kujokkye* 具足戒) on the precepts platform of Vinaya master Ūijōng 義靜 at Kūmsansa in 917. See Yi Nūnghwa 1918; Hō Hūngsik 1986, pp. 582–83. Cho Insōng has advanced an argument that Ūijōng was also a monk in the Dharma lineage of Chinp'yo. See Cho Insōng 1996; 2007, pp. 246–53.

¹² *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1007c17–18.

¹³ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1007b19–1009a6.

aspirants cast the divination sticks, was the primary performance of the Maitreya cult practiced by Chinp'yo and his disciples.

Later, the divination sticks were passed on to Simji 心地 (n.d.), a son of Silla king Hōndōk 獻德 (r. 809–826). Simji became a monk and resided on Chungak 中岳, the name for Mt. P'algong 八公 in North Kyōngsang 慶尙 Province during the middle and late Silla period. Although he intended to participate in a Dharma assembly held by Yōngsim to commemorate Chinp'yo realizing the fruition level of buddhahood (K. *kwajūng pōphoe* 果證法會), and hoped to become Yōngsim's disciple, he missed the anniversary of Chinp'yo's death and was unable to attend. It is said that Simji performed ritual penance (K. *yech'am* 禮懺) so severely that blood issued from his forearms and forehead, and Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva came every day to comfort him. This was thought to have created a karmic connection between Simji and Chinp'yo, and Yōngsim therefore transmitted the divination sticks to him.¹⁴ Simji, who had returned to Chungak, then gave the precepts to the mountain spirit (K. *sansin* 山神) and a transcendent being (K. *sōnja* 仙子). Furthermore, he cast the divination sticks with these extraordinary beings and divined for a place worthy of enshrining the divination sticks. They built a Buddhist shrine on the site where the divination sticks fell and worshipped them there. This shrine became Tonghwasa 桐華寺.¹⁵

The *Samguk yusa* preserves a passage from the now-lost *Wangdae chongnok* 王代宗錄 (Record of the Core Teaching by Dynastic Period) in two rolls, which was compiled by the Koryō literatus Kim Kwanūi 金寬毅 (n.d.). It reports that the monk Sōkch'ung 釋冲 is said to have presented one set of Vinaya Master Chinp'yo's monastic robes and 189 divination sticks to the

¹⁴ The nature of the karmic connection between Simji and Chinp'yo is described in a narrative in the *Samguk yusa*. Even after the miraculous visits of Kṣitigarbha, Simji failed to see or use the divination sticks, so he decided to return to his home monastery. "On route he found that the two divination sticks were stuck in between the folds of his robes. He took them, returned, and informed Yōngsim. Yōngsim said, 'The divination sticks are in a chest, so how could this have happened?' He inspected it and the tag on the seal was just as it had been before. When he opened it, however, he saw that they were gone. Yōngsim thought it was really strange. He wrapped them up in cloth and stored them away. [Simji] set off again, but it was just as before. Once again he returned and reported what had happened. Yōngsim said, 'The will of the Buddha resides in you. You shall receive [the divination sticks] and take them with you.' He immediately gave him the divination sticks. Simji, bearing [the divination sticks] on the crown of his head, returned to his monastery" (*Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1009b12–17).

¹⁵ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1009b4–c23.

founder of Koryŏ, Wang Kŏn 王建 (T'aejo 太祖; r. 918–943). Iryŏn, the thirteenth-century compiler of the *Samguk yusa*, however, thought that no one could know for sure whether they were the same as the sticks that had been enshrined in Tonghwasa.¹⁶ Iryŏn may have held this position because the handing down of monastic robes and bowls was something that was usually done between monks, as was common in the Chan/Sŏn/Zen tradition. Sŏkch'ung was a representative practitioner of the Maitreya cult promoted by Chinp'yo's lineage in the late Silla period. However, Simji probably did not inherit Chinp'yo's monastic robes and the divination sticks from Yŏngsim, and Sŏkch'ung does not seem to have been a monk of Tonghwasa. Rather, Sŏkch'ung was either affiliated with Kilsangsa on Mt. Songni, which had been founded by Yŏngsim, or was a monk of Paryŏnsu 鉢淵菴 on Mt. Kūmgang 金剛 in present-day North Korea. This monastery founded by Chinp'yo became a monastic complex central to his teaching, and was where he passed away.

The Maitreya Cult in the Northeastern and Southwestern Frontiers of Silla

Records of the activities of most of Chinp'yo's disciples in the late eighth and early ninth centuries have been lost, but worship of Maitreya continued to flourish and evolve in Silla's frontier regions in the northeast and southwest. For instance, in the mid-ninth century, Chosin 調信 (n.d.) was a monk entrusted with the supervision of an agricultural estate possessed by Sedalsa 世達寺, a complex of the Hwaŏm school in Myŏngju, the northeastern region of Silla. According to a narrative in the *Samguk yusa*, Chosin went before the image of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara at Naksansa 洛山寺, on the eastern coast of Silla's northeastern Myŏngju region (in present-day Kangwŏn 江原 Province), and prayed that he might be able to marry the daughter of a noble. Chosin was full of resentment toward Avalokiteśvara because his love was about to marry another person, but then, exhausted, he fell asleep. Under the influence of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, he dreamed that he eloped with the girl and that they lived together for many years. Their joy was brief, however, and the two suffered great hardships for a long time and eventually separated after the deaths of some of their children. The monk then awoke from his dream. Chosin, who had awakened to the impermanence of human life, gazed upon the image of Avalokiteśvara with a shameful heart and was contrite, harboring no lingering resentment toward the bodhisattva. He went to Haehyŏn 蟹縣 Ridge in Myŏngju, dug up the place where he had buried his son in his dream, and discovered a stone Maitreya.

¹⁶ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1009c17–20.

He enshrined this image in a nearby monastery. Chosin then went to the royal capital (present-day Kyōngju 慶州), founded Chōngt'osa 淨土寺, and diligently engaged himself in wholesome activities to promote the Buddhadharma.¹⁷ This narrative can be interpreted to mean that Chosin met Maitreya after unfeigned penance. The story of Chinp'yo's encountering the Bodhisattvas Kṣitigarbha and Maitreya after intense penance practices is analogous in this respect.

Pōmil 梵日 (810–889) was the founder of the Mt. Sagul tradition 閣嶺山門 (also called the Kulsan tradition 嶺山門), one of the “Nine Mountain Traditions of Sōn.” In 858 he obtained an image of Ananya-gāmin Bodhisattva (K. Chōngch'wi Bosal 正趣菩薩) in a village in Ingnyoŋg 翼嶺 District in Myōngju (present-day Yangyang 襄陽 in Kangwōn Province). He made divination sticks, divined the site of a monastery, built a Buddha Hall above Naksan, and enshrined the image of the bodhisattva.¹⁸ This narrative is similar to the story about Simji divining for a place to enshrine the divination sticks.¹⁹ According to the *Pohyōnsa nangwōn taesat'ap pi* 普賢寺朗圖大師塔碑 (The Stele of the Funerary Pagoda of Great Master Nangwōn at Pohyōnsa), after Pōmil passed away in 889 his disciple Kaech'ōng 開清 (835–930) stayed at Kulsansa 掘山寺 and then moved to the monastery on Mt. Pohyōn 普賢 in Myōngju where he passed away.²⁰ Because the actual title of the stele inscription was *Pohyōnsan chijang sōnwōn* 普賢山地藏禪院 (Kṣitigarbha Sōn Cloister on Mt. Pohyōn), we know that the official title of the monastery on Mt. Pohyōn was the Chijang (Kṣitigarbha) Sōn Cloister. This means that Kaech'ōng probably considered Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva to be important. He appears to have been influenced by Chinp'yo's understanding of the cult of Maitreya, which recognized the importance of Kṣitigarbha.

Sedalsa, Naksansa, and Haehyōn Ridge were all located within the passes of Myōngju, the northeastern most prefecture of Silla, as were Ingnyoŋg District, Kulsansa, and even the Chijang Sōn Cloister. All of these sites were associated with Chinp'yo and his disciples, the worship of Maitreya, and divination practices. Thus, the influence of the cult of Maitreya in the lineage of Chinp'yo seems to have been widespread and influential in the Myōngju region.

The worship of Maitreya was closely associated with the Yogācāra school (K. Pōpsang jong 法相宗; Ch. Faxiang zong) and Mahayana precepts in medieval East Asia for the following reasons. First, Yogācāra texts were

¹⁷ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 997b2–c12.

¹⁸ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 997a8–11.

¹⁹ Kim Namch'ung 1984, p. 146.

²⁰ Chōsen Sōtokufu 1919, vol. 1, pp. 140–44; Cho Insōng 2002, 2007, pp. 164–70.

widely believed to have been revealed by Maitreya. Second, eminent Chinese Yogācāra scholar-monks such as Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 600–664) and Kuiji 窺基 (632–682) proclaimed the superiority of, and sought rebirth in, Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven. Third, the Silla exegete Taehyōn 大賢 (T'aehyōn 太賢 in Japanese sources; fl. 742–765), remembered as the founder of Sinitic Yogācāra in Silla, was a devotee of Maitreya and wrote extensively on precepts.²¹ In this context, the version of the cult of Maitreya practiced by Chinp'yo and his disciples in southwestern Korea may have helped shape Sōn traditions such as that of Toŭi 道義 (fl. 784–821) on Mt. Kaji 迦智 in present-day South Kyōngsang Province, of Hongch'ōk 洪陟 (fl. 809–826) on Mt. Silsang 實相 in North Chōlla Province, and of Hyech'ōl 慧徹 (785–861) on Mt. Tongni 桐裏 in South Chōlla Province. The idealistic Yogācāra tendencies that scholars have identified in the thought of these Sōn traditions are believed to have their origins in the perception of the characteristics of dharmas (K. *pōpsang* 法相). Because all three of these Sōn traditions are based in the Honam 湖南 region, the southwestern area of the peninsula, scholars suggest that these kinds of intellectual trends may have been made known through interactions with the cult of Maitreya in Chinp'yo's lineage, which was centered on Kūmsansa.²² The same can be said for the fact that Hyech'ōl and his Dharma heir Kyōngbo 慶甫 (869–947) considered the practice of the precepts to be important.²³ Thus, the nexus of Maitreya worship, Yogācāra thought, and precepts promoted by Chinp'yo, his Dharma heirs, and other proponents of Maitreya worship may have influenced the Sōn traditions in the mountain monasteries of southwestern Korea.

On the other hand, even rulers of the Later Three Kingdoms, such as the kings Kungye and Kyōnhwōn 甄萱 (fl. 892–936), were interested in the Maitreya cult perpetuated by Chinp'yo's lineage. We will treat King Kungye later; here we will look at King Kyōnhwōn. When Kyōnhwōn established his state in southwestern Korea in 900, he called it Later Paekche (900–936) to distinguish it from the earlier Paekche of the Three Kingdoms period, which he saw his state as succeeding, and he made Wansanju 完山州 (present-day Chōnju 全州 in North Chōlla Province) his capital. Kūmsansa, the monastic complex founded by Chinp'yo and closely affiliated with the Maitreya cult, is in Kimje,

²¹ See the *Da Tang Daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳, T no. 2053, 50: 233c13–234a1; *Guan Mile shangsheng Doushuaitian jing zan* 觀彌勒上生兜率天經贊, T no. 1772, 38: 272b–299a; Wang 1992, pp. 203–30; *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 1009c25–27; Ch'ae 1975, pp. 377–504.

²² Kim Tujin 1988, 2007.

²³ Kim Tujin 1988; 2007, pp. 338–42.

which is close to Wansanju. In 935, Kyōnhwōn's son Sin'gōm 神劍 (n.d.) executed a coup d'état and imprisoned his father in Kūmsansa. The king was confined there for three months, and then he escaped and took refuge with Wang Kōn in the Koryō capital.²⁴ Yi Kibaek, noted modern historian of Silla, holds that King Kyōnhwōn's detention in Kūmsansa suggests that the royal family of Later Paekche and Kūmsansa had some kind of relationship before this, and that Kyōnhwōn was probably interested in the cult of Maitreya centered on that site.²⁵ Although the foregoing assertion is circumstantial at best, and is based on the presumption that Sin'gōm would have confined his royal father in a location either of his choosing, or at least in one acceptable to his father's spiritual needs and desires, there is other evidence that reveals King Kyōnhwōn's interest in the Maitreya cult.

The *Karyangsa hyegō kuksa pi* 葛陽寺惠居國師碑 (Stele Inscription of State Preceptor Hyegō at Karyangsa) says that King Kyōnhwōn “opened a pagoda” (K. *kaet'ap* 開塔) at Mirūksa 彌勒寺. “Opening a pagoda,” or more colloquially, “holding a pagoda activity,” probably means either going in person to see the buddha jewel (K. *pulbo* 佛寶) enshrined in the pagoda or holding an event to enshrine a new buddha jewel inside the pagoda. By holding such an event associated with the pagoda at the monastery, King Kyōnhwōn reasserted the importance of the monastery and reaffirmed the symbolic link between Maitreya and the royal family of Paekche. Mirūksa was founded by the Paekche king Mu 武 (r. 600–641). According to the *Samguk yusa*, King Mu and his wife had discovered a Maitreya triad under Dragon Flower Mountain, commissioned a Maitreya triad in response, and constructed buddha halls and pagodas in three places.²⁶ Mirūksa was a monastic complex symbolizing that Paekche was a Pure Land in which Maitreya would descend and be reborn (K. *hasaeng* 下生).²⁷ One of the reasons for holding such a pagoda activity at Mirūksa may have been to promote the idea that Later Paekche was a Pure Land where Maitreya Buddha would descend and be reborn. However, the tradition of the Maitreya cult in Later Paekche seems to have been based on Chinp'yo's approach to Maitreya worship.²⁸ This event was probably the beginning of Kyōnhwōn's interest in the Maitreya cult in the lineage of Chinp'yo.

²⁴ Kim Pusik 1996, pp. 474–75.

²⁵ Yi Kibaek 1986, p. 274.

²⁶ *Samguk yusa*, T no. 2039, 49: 979c10–15.

²⁷ Best 2007, pp. 48–50; Choe 2015, pp. 16–22.

²⁸ Kim Samyong 1983, p. 90.

MONASTIC ANTICIPATION OF MAITREYA'S REBIRTH BELOW

Allusion to Mahākāśyapa and Mt. Kukkuṭapāda

In several sutras that treat Maitreya's descent and rebirth in the future, beginning with the *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* 佛說彌勒下生經 (Sutra on Maitreya's Descent and Rebirth Below, as Preached by the Buddha; T no. 453), it is said that when the Buddha Śākyamuni entered nirvana, Mahākāśyapa entered a stone chamber on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda to wait for Maitreya's descent and rebirth in the future, in order to transmit Śākyamuni's robe to him.²⁹ For instance, the *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 (Life of King Aśoka; T no. 2042) reports that although Mahākāśyapa sought to meet King Ajātaśatru to inform him that he would be entering nirvana, he was not admitted and thus requested that the gatekeeper let the king know this. Mahākāśyapa then waited for Maitreya's descent and rebirth on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda.³⁰

Similarly, the *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經 (Sutra on Maitreya's Descent and Attainment of Buddhahood, as Preached by the Buddha; T no. 454) says that after Maitreya attains buddhahood, he will go with the fourfold community and ascend the summit of Mt. Gṛdhra-kūṭa (K. Kisagulsan 耆闍崛山; Ch. Qichejueshan) to see Mahākāśyapa. There he will extol Mahākāśyapa, saying that the Buddha Śākyamuni praised him as "first in ascetic practices" (K. *tut'a cheil* 頭陀第一); he will celebrate "his thorough comprehension of the samadhi of liberation by means of *dhyāna*-meditation" (K. *t'ongdal sōnjōng haet'al sammae* 通達禪定解脫三昧) and his "possession of great spiritual powers" (K. *yu taesillyōk* 有大神力); and he will conclude by "praising the bones and flesh-body of Mahākāśyapa" (K. *ch'an taesōp kolsin* 讚大迦葉骨身).³¹ Although in this translation of the *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* by Kumārajīva (343–413) it says that Maitreya will see Mahākāśyapa on Mt. Gṛdhra-kūṭa (Vulture Peak) rather than on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda (Cock-foot Peak), the importance of Mahākāśyapa is unmistakable. The expression "bones and flesh-body," which may also be a rendering of *śarīra*, is curious, perhaps alluding to Mahākāśyapa's entering into a type of auto-mummification on the mountain.³² The intrepid Tang pilgrim

²⁹ *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing*, T no. 453, 14: 422b12–c7. See also the *Genbenshuo yiqieyou bu pinaiyē zashi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事 (Miscellaneous Items on *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*), T no. 1451, 24: 409a6–26.

³⁰ *Ayuwang zhuan*, T no. 2042, 50: 114a26–16b10.

³¹ *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing*, T no. 454, 14: 425b29–c18.

³² The Sanskrit version of the sutra says: "Surrounded by the crowd of converts, Maitreya will go to Mount Gurupādaka (var. Kukkuṭapāda), near Rajāgrha. The mountain will open, disclosing the skeleton of the *bhikṣu* Kāśyapa. Maitreya will place it in his left hand and

Xuanzang knew these stories well and visited the site.³³ Furthermore, because Mahākāśyapa is viewed as the premier disciple and true heir of Śākyamuni's mind-to-mind transmission by proponents of the Chan/Sōn/Zen tradition, the idea that Maitreya would seek him out after attaining buddhahood provides evidence of the authority and legitimacy of the meditation tradition.

Funerary inscriptions of the late Silla and early Koryō period frequently liken eminent Sōn monks to Mahākāśyapa, suggesting that veneration and anticipation of Maitreya's future descent flourished in Sōn communities—or at least in the minds of the literati who composed the inscriptions. For instance, on the *Tansoksa Sinhaeng sōnsa pi* 斷俗寺神行禪師碑 (Funerary Stele of the Sōn Master Sinhaeng at Tansoksa), which was erected in 813, its author Kim Hōnjōng 金獻貞 (n.d.) described the place where the funerary pagoda (K. *sūngt'ap* 僧塔) of the Sōn missionary Sinhaeng 神行 (704–779) was located, in the following manner: “In the record, the stone chamber (K. *sōksil* 石室) of Mt. Kyejok 鷄足 (Mt. Kukkuṭapāda) is said to be the place where Mahākāśyapa (K. Mahagasōp 摩訶迦葉) preserves the Dharma robes (K. *pōbūi* 法衣) [of Śākyamuni] and where he waits for Maitreya.”³⁴ Around 890, Ch'oe Ch'iwōn 崔致遠 (857–after 908) composed the funerary stele inscription for Muyōm 無染 (800–888), who founded the Sōn tradition on Mt. Sōngju 聖住. Of the Sōn master's accomplishments, he said, “[He] waits for Maitreya Buddha on Mt. Kyejok; in the future Mt. Kukkuṭapāda of the Eastern Region will precisely be this place.”³⁵

According to the *Kwangjosa Chinch'ōl taesat'ap pi* 廣照寺眞澈大師塔碑 (Funerary Stele of Great Master Chinch'ōl at Kwangjosa), which was composed by Ch'oe Ōnhwi 崔彦擣 (868–944), Iōm 利嚴 (869–936), the founder of the Sōn tradition at Mt. Sumi 須彌, sought to meet Koryō king T'aejo (Wang Kōn) before he passed away, but he was unable to do so. Then, the Sōn master, alluding to Mahākāśyapa's regret that he did not meet King Ajātaśatru Vaidehiputra (K. Asasewang 阿闍世王) before entering nirvana, said, “I will enter Mt. Kyejok and promise to wait [for the descent and rebirth

explain that this minute skeleton is that of Kāśyapa, a disciple of Śākyamuni, who lived at a time when the human life span did not exceed one hundred years. That Kāśyapa was the foremost of those who were content with little and professed strict observance; after the decease of Śākyamuni, he had collated the doctrine. This revelation causes astonishment among those assembled, and they all attain Arhatship” (Lamotte 1988, p. 701).

³³ *Da tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (Record of a Journey to the West during the Great Tang), T no. 2087, 51: 919b24–c24; *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Further Lives of Eminent Monks [Compiled during the Tang]), T no. 2060, 50: 451a26–b1.

³⁴ Han'guk Kodae Sahoe Yōn'guso 1992, vol. 2, p. 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

of Maitreya].”³⁶ Kyōngbo, who was patronized by King Kyōnhwōn of Later Paekche, received an invitation from the Koryō king T’aejo around the end of Later Paekche and went to the Koryō capital at Kaegyōng 開京 (present-day Kaesōng 開城). Two years after he passed away, a funerary pagoda was erected, and Kim Chōngōn 金廷彦 wrote in the *Ongyongsa Tongjin taesat’ap pi* 玉龍寺洞真大師塔碑 (Stele of the Funerary Pagoda of Great Master Tongjin at Ongnyongsa) that “he entered Mt. Kukkuṭapāda and waited for Maitreya.”³⁷

Thus, the authors of the stele inscriptions compared Sōn masters to Mahākāśyapa, and we can see that anticipation of Maitreya’s descent and rebirth among Sōn masters and their followers was being spread by comparing the places where these monk’s funerary pagodas were to Mt. Kukkuṭapāda or the stone chamber on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda.³⁸

The Understanding of the Age of the Decline of the Dharma

Veneration of Maitreya is closely connected to the rhetoric of the decline of the Buddhadharmā in East Asia. Similar to their medieval Chinese colleagues, Korean monks in the late Silla period considered it important to document the number of years that had passed since the passing of Śākyamuni. For instance, Yōmgō 廉居, the second patriarch of the Sōn tradition of Mt. Kaji 迦智, passed away in 844. The record on the funerary pagoda said that 1,840 years had passed since the time Śākyamuni had attained final nirvana.³⁹ In 859, Kim Sujong 金遼宗 (n.d.), who was an official in the southwestern prefecture of Muju 武州, commissioned a seated iron image of Vairocana Buddha and enshrined it in Porimsa 寶林寺, which was the main monastery of the Mt. Kaji tradition. The record of the casting of this image says that this buddha image was made 1,808 years after Śākyamuni entered nirvana.⁴⁰

According to the most widespread versions of the theory of the three ages of the Dharma, the age of the true Dharma (K. *chōngbōp* 正法) lasted for five hundred years (or one thousand years) after the final nirvana of Śākyamuni, the age of the semblance Dharma (K. *sangbōp* 像法) lasted for a thousand years, and then the age of the final Dharma (K. *malbōp* 末法) arrived. The

³⁶ Yi Chigwan 1994, p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

³⁸ Ch’u 1992, pp. 214–37; Kim Hyewan 2007, pp. 143–46, 157–64.

³⁹ Kim Yōngt’ae 1992, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Han’guk Kodae Sahoe Yōn’guso 1992, vol. 3, pp. 312–13.

age of the final Dharma is commonly called the age of the decline of the Dharma or the degenerate age (K. *malse* 末世). However, as is seen in the foregoing examples of epigraphy, establishing how much time had passed since the year of the Buddha's passing was done to assert that the present time was the age of the decline of the Dharma. According to the *Zhou shu yi ji* 周書異記 (Record of Oddities in the Book of Zhou), the Buddha's nirvana occurred in the year 947 BCE.⁴¹ The funerary stele of Yōmgō's disciple Ch'ejing 體澄 (804–880) was erected in 884. Kim Yōng 金穎 (n.d.), who composed the inscription, hinted that the Sōn master had obtained awakening by saying, "Although the Buddhist teaching (K. *sanggyo* 像教) is scattered in the mundane world during the decline of the Dharma, it is rare to meet one well suited to the Buddha's teachings."⁴²

There are several theories regarding the timing of Maitreya's future descent and rebirth on earth. It is said that Maitreya will be reborn in fifty-six *koṭīs* (K. *ōk* 億) plus seven million years in the future. The decline of the Dharma will reach an extreme and then human beings will examine themselves and give rise to wholesome thoughts. When the life span of human beings increases to eighty-four thousand years, the time for Maitreya's descent will be at hand. However, Maitreya Buddha is the only buddha scheduled to come to the mundane world in the future and liberate living beings. Therefore, some scholars suggest that it was with respect to the ability to save living beings in the age of the decline of the Dharma, that the religious practice of focusing solely on belief in the descent of Maitreya came into being.⁴³ General recognition by Sōn monks of the late Silla period that they lived in the age of the decline of the dharma seems to have been an important factor encouraging people to anticipate the descent and rebirth of Maitreya.

Conceptualizing that time as being the age of the decline of the Dharma was not only found in the Sōn traditions. According to the *Dasheng daji Dizang shilun jing* 大乘大集地藏十輪經 (Sutra on the Ten Wheels of Kṣitigarbha; T no. 411), the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha received a commission from Śākyamuni and, after his passing, will appear in the mundane world devoid of a buddha (K. *mubul segye* 無佛世界) until the time when Maitreya is manifested to liberate all living beings from the heavens to the hells and, in particular, the living beings of the age of the decline of the Dharma. According to the

⁴¹ Cho Insōng 1991; Cho Insōng 2007, pp. 71–78; Nattier 1991.

⁴² Han'guk Kodae Sahoe Yōn'guso 1992, vol. 3, p. 49.

⁴³ Kim Samyong 1983, pp. 64–77.

Zhancha shan'e yebao jing, which Kṣitigarbha preached for the sake of living beings in the age of the final Dharma, people should perform divination to find out the extent to which their defilements and unwholesome karma hinder them from receiving the bodhisattva precepts. The central importance of Kṣitigarbha and divination Dharma assemblies to Chinp'yo suggests that he presumed that the final age of the Dharma had already begun. He encouraged living beings (viz. ordinary people) who, in the age of the decline of the Dharma, use penance practices and the observance of the precepts to look forward to liberation by Maitreya Buddha when he descends in the future.⁴⁴ Chinp'yo's disciples probably disseminated the idea that the current time was the final age of the Dharma and inspired people to anticipate Maitreya's descent. As we have seen above, the importance of Kṣitigarbha to the monk Kaech'ong is probably related to this.

In 865, more than fifteen thousand aspirants in the northern region of Ch'orwŏn 鐵圓 (present-day Ch'orwŏn 鐵原 in Kangwŏn Province) made a seated image of Vairocana Buddha at Top'iansa 到彼岸寺. People apparently made the image out of sadness as the record carved on the back of it says, "Śākyamuni Buddha flows with the shadows and returns to the true source. . . . He does not shed his light in the trichiliocosm, and it has been 1,806 years since he passed away."⁴⁵ From this we can see that the aspirants who commissioned an image of the Buddha recognized that it was the age of the final Dharma. In the second half of the ninth century, the eminent monk Kyōrŏn 決言 (n.d.) and others of the Hwaōm school also commissioned an image of Vairocana. According to the record, the image was made about three hundred years after the beginning of the age of the final Dharma, and the future Buddha Maitreya would preach the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Ch. *Huayan jing* 華嚴經) in the place where it was enshrined. This example shows the synthesis of recognition of the age of the final Dharma and the cult of Maitreya's descent in the Hwaōm tradition.⁴⁶

The age of the decline of the Dharma is said to be a time of great confusion in which war, disease, famine, and other catastrophes arise, and it is also called the "evil world of the five impurities" (K. *ot'ak akse* 五濁惡世; Ch. *wuzhuo eshi*). It is said that during this time, several phenomena of the last days would appear.⁴⁷ At the end of the mid-Silla period, conflict over

⁴⁴ Ch'ae Inhwan 1986.

⁴⁵ Han'guk Kodae Sahoe Yŏn'guso 1992, vol. 3, pp. 314–15.

⁴⁶ Kwak 2002, pp. 234–38; McBride 2008, pp. 103–8.

⁴⁷ The "evil world of the five impurities" refers to the evils that fill the mundane world. The five impurities are: (1) the impurity of life span (K. *sut'ak* 壽濁; Ch. *shouzhuo* / K. *myōngt'ak* 命濁; Ch. *mīngzhuo*; Skt. *āyu-kaṣāya*), because life spans are cut short; (2) the impurity of

political power became widespread and severe between nobles who enjoyed hereditary privileges and social status. The whole country was caught up several times in a maelstrom of revolts and rebellions. As a result of this confusion, the state system of Silla stopped functioning properly. Local strongmen (K. *hojok* 豪族) who led powerful clans came on the scene in the provinces and continued to expand their sway over certain geographic regions. During times of famine, the common people left their farmland and rambled about from place to place. Some of these people became robbers and thieves and caused even more disorder.

In 889, opposition to the governmental demand for the payment of taxes led to a peasant revolt. The uprising spread everywhere in the country and continued into the following year. Several local strongmen who turned their backs on the central government of Silla appeared on the political stage. The whole country was sunk in confusion and chaos. Previously we mentioned that King Kyōnhwōn founded the state of Later Paekche in 900. He was able to break away from Silla because of these chaotic circumstances. In 901, King Kungye announced the restoration of Koguryō 高句麗 (it is called Later Koguryō to distinguish it from the ancient state of Koguryō [37 BCE–668 CE] and Wang Kōn's Koryō 高麗 [918–1392]). This ushered in the Later Three Kingdoms period. Because Wang Kōn deposed King Kungye and ascended the throne through a coup d'état, he is known as Koryō king T'aejo. Silla king Kyōngsun 敬順 (r. 927–935) surrendered to Koryō in 935, and in 936 Koryō king T'aejo defeated King Sin'gōm of Later Paekche. Although the Later Three Kingdoms were finally reunified by Wang Kōn, the common people became utterly impoverished as a result of the warfare.

The chaos and suffering stemming from the late mid-Silla period may well have made the people of Silla think that they were living in the degenerate

kalpas (K. *kōpt'ak* 劫濁; Ch. *jiezhuo*; Skt. *kalpa-kaṣāya*), because calamities arise during the period of the decline of the kalpa (K. *kamgōp* 減劫) and living beings suffer injuries and harm; (3) the impurity of defilements (K. *pōmoet'ak* 煩惱濁; Ch. *fannaozhuo*; Skt. *kleśa-kaṣāya*), because appetites and passions abound and therefore people accept unwholesome and heterodox dharmas and confuse their minds and bodies; (4) the impurity of views (K. *kyōnt'ak* 見濁; Ch. *jianzhuo*; Skt. *dṛṣṭi-kaṣāya*), because people's personal opinions abound and therefore they do not practice the way to wholesome behavior and do not practice in a wholesome manner; and (5) the impurity of sentient beings (K. *yuch'ōngta'k* 有情濁; Ch. *youqingzhuo* / K. *chungsaengt'ak* 衆生濁; Ch. *zhongshengzhuo*; Skt. *sattva-kaṣāya*), because there is much corruption and depravity. Accordingly, people do not show filial piety and respect, are not afraid of retribution for their deeds (K. *kwabo* 果報), and do not observe the prohibitions and precepts (K. *kāmgye* 禁戒, viz. vinaya). See *Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論, T no. 1558, 29: 64a21–22.

age. As the confusion continued and their suffering became more profound, the people's recognition of living through the age of the decline of the Dharma probably deepened. Accordingly, it is likely that an atmosphere of fervent anticipation prevailed, one that was greater than any merely theoretical hope for Maitreya's descent.

KUNGYE'S REPRESENTATION OF HIMSELF AS MAITREYA BUDDHA

Kungye as the Monk Sŏnjong

Here, we turn finally to the monk-king Kungye, who identified himself with Maitreya. When Kungye was about ten years old, he became a monk at Sedalsa, taking the Dharma name of Sŏnjong 善宗.⁴⁸ As mentioned before, Sedalsa was a monastic complex associated with the Hwaŏm tradition. We can infer that at this time Kungye probably would have acquired a detailed familiarity of Hwaŏm thought and, of course, of the cult of Maitreya. His being able to represent himself as Maitreya Buddha, compose sutras, and lecture on Maitreya's Buddhist teachings was surely based on his knowledge and experiences as a monk. We have already examined Chosin, who was a senior colleague of his at Sedalsa, and have recognized the importance of different strands of belief and practice associated with the cult of Maitreya among Chinp'yo's disciples and other monks in the region. There was a monk named Hŏwŏl 許越 (n.d.) in the palace chapel (K. *naewŏn* 內院) of King Kungye. He was the father of the great local strongman of Myŏngju, Kim Sunsik 金順式 (n.d.). (Later, he received the Wang 王 surname from Koryŏ king T'aejo and was called Wang Sunsik.)⁴⁹ He seems to have been a monk of the Kulsan tradition. When Kungye concentrated his power in Myŏngju in 894, Hŏwŏl participated in this process and it appears that he later resided in the palace chapel as a monk utterly devoted to King Kungye. As described above, Pŏmil, Kaech'ŏng, and other monks of the Kulsan tradition appear to have been influenced by the cult of Maitreya as practiced by Chinp'yo's followers. Kungye, as well, would have been similarly influenced.⁵⁰

Although Kungye originally appears to have been a dedicated monk, as he became older a darker and more sinister side of his personality manifested itself. According to extant records, Kungye was a prince, but as

⁴⁸ Kim Pusik 1996, p. 466.

⁴⁹ Chŏng Inji et al. 1972, roll 92, p. 16b3.

⁵⁰ Cho Insŏng 1991; Cho Insŏng 2002; Cho Insŏng 2007, pp. 42–53, 58–64.

soon as he was born he was abandoned by his royal father, and he narrowly escaped death.⁵¹ These aspects of the traditional account are difficult to believe, though, as Kungye probably fabricated them in later times to dramatize his birth and childhood. For the present we can theorize that he was a person that sought refuge in the countryside, having been a victim of the political conflict as a scion of the nobility.⁵² In any case, Kungye took advantage of the chaos at the end of the Silla period to establish a new state. He left Sedalsa in 891 to participate in one of the rebel armies, and in 894 he secured sole power over Myōngju, the area where Chinp'yo and his disciples had been active. Kungye advanced from Ch'ōrwōn, which he made his base of operations, and went on to occupy the central region of the Korean Peninsula. He established the Later Koguryō in 901.⁵³

In the eleventh lunar month of 898, Kungye held an Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions (K. *p'alghanhoe* 八關會), and subsequently would hold this assembly with great splendor every year in the same month. The Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions was originally a Buddhist ceremony in which lay people observed the eight precepts for one day and one night. The Silla court first held this assembly in 572, and may have held it regularly thereafter. The *Foshuo guan Mile pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經 (Sutra on the Visualization of Maitreya's Rebirth Above in Tuṣita Heaven, as Preached by the Buddha; T no. 452) says that if one observes the precepts of the Abstinence Ceremony of the Eight Prohibitions (K. *p'alghanjae kye* 八關齋戒), or receives the precepts of the eight prohibitions (K. *p'alghan'gye* 八關戒), one will be able to be reborn in the Tuṣita Heaven, where Maitreya presides. According to the *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* and the *Foshuo Mile dachengfo jing* 佛說彌勒大成佛經 (Sutra on Maitreya's Great Attainment of Buddhahood, as Preached by the Buddha; T no. 456), one should receive the dharma of the Abstinence Ceremony of the Eight Prohibitions or observe the precepts of the eight abstinences (K. *p'alchaegye* 八齋戒) in order to meet Maitreya Buddha when he descends and is reborn on the earth (Skt. Ketumati) in the distant future.⁵⁴ Thus, we can say that the Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions is related to the cult of Maitreya. Later, Kungye

⁵¹ Kim Pusik 1996, p. 466.

⁵² Cho Insōng 1991; Cho Insōng 2002; Cho Insōng 2007, pp. 37–42.

⁵³ Kim Pusik 1996, pp. 466–70.

⁵⁴ *Foshuo guan Mile pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing*, T no. 452, 14: 420a15; *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing*, T no. 453, 14: 422c27; *Foshuo Mile dachengfo jing*, T no. 456, 14: 432a8–9.

declared himself to be Maitreya Buddha. One of the reasons that Kungye held these assemblies is probably that he sought to receive the dharma of the eight prohibitions or observe the precepts of the eight abstinences in order to meet Maitreya Buddha when he is reborn.⁵⁵ When Kungye held these assemblies, the implication was that Maitreya's descent was imminent. The motivation for presenting these rituals was presumably to draw the common people into his own ideological orbit.

King Kungye as Maitreya Buddha

King Kungye changed the name of his country to Majin 摩震 in 904 and organized an administrative system. In 911, he changed the name again to T'aebong 泰封.⁵⁶ Seeking to develop autocratic royal power on a grand scale from this time forward, it was probably about this time that he declared himself to be Maitreya Buddha. It is widely held in Buddhist literature that Maitreya will descend and be reborn when a sage king who promotes the Buddhist teaching (K. *chōllyun sōngwang* 轉輪聖王; Skt. *cakravartin*) reigns in the world.⁵⁷ King Kungye seems to have presented himself simultaneously as a sage king who promoted the Buddhist teaching and as Maitreya Buddha. Kungye was by no means the first ruler in East Asia to claim to be Maitreya. The leaders of several short-lived rebellions in early seventh-century China had claimed to be Maitreya, and even the powerful Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (Wu Zhao 武曩; 624–705) claimed to be Maitreya for a few months in 694 and 695.⁵⁸ The historian Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075–1151) depicts King Kungye (formerly the monk Sōnjong) as follows:

Sōnjong proclaimed himself to be Maitreya Buddha, wearing a peaked gold hood on his head and a square robe on his body like a monk. He had his eldest son become Green Light Bodhisattva (K. Ch'ōnggwang posal 青光菩薩) and his last son become Divine Light Bodhisattva (K. Sin'gwang Posal 神光菩薩). When he went out he always rode a white horse whose mane was decorated with silk. He had young boys and girls lead the way, carrying banners and parasols with incense and flowers. He also commanded more than two hundred monks to follow, chanting Buddhist hymns in

⁵⁵ An Kyehyōn 1956; An Kyehyōn 1993, pp. 206–8.

⁵⁶ On the significance of the names Majin and T'aebong and their relation to Kungye's appropriation of the cult of Maitreya, see McBride 2004, pp. 49–53.

⁵⁷ Watanabe 1983, pp. 70–71.

⁵⁸ Shigematsu 1931; Kegasawa 1981; Forte 1976.

Sanskrit (K. *pōmp'ae* 梵唄). Once he wrote more than twenty rolls of Buddhist scriptures, but their language was frivolous and incorrect. Sometimes, sitting upright, he expounded on them, but the monk Sōkch'ong 釋聰 denounced this and said, "All these explanations are heresy, deviant, and unreliable for instruction." Sōnjong on hearing this was angry and taking an iron mallet, bludgeoned him to death.⁵⁹

If Kim Pusik's account is accurate, King Kungye sought to establish theocratic despotism on the basis of the cult of Maitreya. While declaring himself to be Maitreya, Kungye called two of his sons bodhisattvas, and this arrangement can be taken as the manifestation of a Maitreya triad. When he went on parade he displayed himself with the solemn majesty of Maitreya Buddha. No direct documentation of Kungye's teachings has been preserved. Did he, in effect, create a new sect of Buddhism? No conclusive evidence remains to support this assertion. Nevertheless, if this could be considered a local form of Buddhism promoted by Kungye, his sutras and lectures were probably the doctrines of this order, and the monks who sung the hymns probably comprised it. Monks who were his supporters, like Hōwōl, probably held positions of leadership.

From the standpoint of mainstream Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia, King Kungye's pretensions to being Maitreya Buddha were heretical. As mentioned above, the monk Sōkch'ong criticized King Kungye's lectures and suffered a miserable death. It is also apparent that opposition to King Kungye in the Buddhist world was considerable.

In the first year of the Zhenming 貞明 reign (915), because the king had perpetrated many outrages, his consort Lady Kang 康 put on a grave countenance and remonstrated with him. The king despised her and said, "You have had illicit intercourse with other men. Why have you done this?" Lady Kang replied, "How could I have done such a thing?" The king said, "I have seen it by means of my supernormal powers." He heated an iron cudgel in a hot fire and thrust it into her genitals, and he killed her and her two sons. After that, because he was consumed by mistrust and intense bouts of anger, there were many faultless people who were executed, from several aides, generals, and officials, to common people below; and the people of Pugang 斧壤 (present-day P'yōnggang 平康 in

⁵⁹ Kim Pusik 1996, p. 468; Lee and de Bary 1997, p. 149.

Kangwŏn Province) and Ch'ŏrwŏn were unable to overcome the cankerous effects.⁶⁰

The outrages of King Kungye that Lady Kang criticized presumably refer to deeds that he performed after declaring himself to be Maitreya, because this is the sequence of events as described by Kim Pusik. Even those close to King Kungye seem to have been opposed to his theocratic despotism. In response to this, Kungye claimed that he knew of the queen's adultery through his "supernormal powers" and he murdered the queen and even the two sons he had previously deified and called bodhisattvas.

The compilers of the *Koryŏsa* 高麗史 (History of Koryŏ) wrote that King Kungye always said, "I comprehend [all things] through Maitreya's method of observing the mind (K. *Mirŭk kwansim pŏp* 彌勒觀心法) and was able to find out the intimate secrets of my consorts. If there is someone who draws the observation of my mind, I will precisely move against them with the severe power of law."⁶¹ "Observing the mind" (K. *kwansim*) was originally a method of cultivation for perceiving the original purity of one's own nature, and it was important in the Ch'ŏnt'ae 天台 (Ch. Tiantai) and Sŏn traditions. Kungye's "observing the mind," however, is different. "Supernormal powers" (K. *sint'ong* 神通) refer to superhuman abilities that are obtained through religious cultivation. Among these are included such powers as the "power of the divine eye" (K. *ch'ŏnant'ong* 天眼通), which enables one to see everything in the world regardless of whether it is near or far, and the "power of knowing the thoughts of others" (K. *t'asimt'ong* 他心通), which enables one to know the good and evil in the hearts and minds of others. Kungye's "method of observing the mind" was more like this, and it was a means to manifest his omniscience and omnipotence as Maitreya Buddha.

King Kungye pressed Wang Kŏn on suspicion of treason, and when the latter denied this, the king responded by stating, "Chief Minister, don't try to deceive me. Because I am able to observe your mind, I know. Since I have entered into *dhyāna*-meditation (K. *sŏnjŏng* 禪定) and seen it, you will tell me everything."⁶² Furthermore, it is said that he would clasp his hands behind his back with his eyes closed and gaze up into heaven for a length of time.⁶³ Maitreya's method of observing the mind was not only used to find out the secrets of his consorts, but it was also employed as a means of ascertaining

⁶⁰ Kim Pusik 1996, p. 468.

⁶¹ Chŏng Inji et al. 1972, roll 1, p. 5a6–8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 5b2–6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

forces in opposition to him. Kungye's theocratic despotism brought together the opposition of the Buddhist world and several political forces that had been alienated from power. In the end, Kungye was driven from power in a coup d'état which occurred in 918 led by Wang Kōn.

As stated above, the monk Sōkch'ung is said to have presented Chinp'yo's robes and divination sticks to Koryō king T'aejo (Wang Kōn). At the same time, Kungye's cult of Maitreya obviously diverged greatly from the cult of Maitreya in Chinp'yo's line. From T'aejo's perspective, it was therefore presumably necessary to emphasize his orthodoxy and Kungye's heterodoxy with respect to Maitreya worship. T'aejo seems to have been more passive in utilizing the cult of Maitreya, probably due to his recognition of the strong monastic opposition to Kungye proclaiming himself to be Maitreya Buddha.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In the mid-eighth century the monk Chinp'yo introduced a divination practice to accompany sincere repentance which used either 108 divination sticks or 189 divination tops, claiming that he had received it from Maitreya and Kṣitigarbha, the bodhisattva who descends into the hells to save living beings and ferry them to the Pure Land of Amitābha. The divination practice revealed a person's fortune with respect to the Buddhadharmā and, for monks at least, foretold whether a monk would be able to receive the bodhisattva precepts and had the capacity to achieve buddhahood in this life. Narratives regarding the transmission of the divination sticks over several generations to a stream of disciples were preserved, indicating that Chinp'yo's divination practice and its accompanying penance rites were more widespread than other types of devotional practices.

Sōn Buddhism was introduced to Silla in the eighth and ninth centuries. In inscriptions carved on funerary steles, several Sōn masters were compared to Mahākāśyapa, one of the greatest disciples of the Buddha who, according to old Buddhist traditions, waits in meditative cryostasis on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda for the coming of Maitreya so that he can transmit Śākyamuni's robe to him. This suggests something of the Sōn understanding, and appropriation, of the Maitreya cult. The Buddhist laity believed that they were living in the age of the decline of the Buddhadharmā, and many epigraphic sources suggest that Buddhists awaited the coming of Maitreya.

⁶⁴ Cho Insōng 2007, pp. 259–60; McBride 2004, pp. 53–55.

By the early tenth century, King Kungye, founder of the short-lived state of Later Koguryō, declared himself to be Maitreya and two sons to be bodhisattvas, adorned himself like an eminent Buddhist monk, lectured on his own sutras, and proclaimed that he possessed “Maitreya’s method of observing the mind.” Nevertheless, historical documents report that he committed atrocities in his quest to develop autocratic rule, and that this caused later Korean rulers to participate in the cult of Maitreya in more passive ways. The cult of Maitreya was both pervasive and adaptive in Silla society and continually evolved to suit the needs of Buddhist monks, laity, and royalty. Chinp’yo’s penance and divination practices, along with his belief in the future Buddha, flourished in the southwestern sections of Silla, helped the Maitreya cult spread to the northeastern regions of Silla, and may have contributed to the widespread hope for Maitreya’s descent in the late Silla period. This popularity of Maitreya seems to have set the stage for Kungye declaring himself to be Maitreya. Although no other Korean ruler would claim to be Maitreya, the cult of Maitreya continues to be a core characteristic of Korean Buddhism.⁶⁵

ABBREVIATIONS

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (Taishō Edition of the Buddhist Canon). 85 vols. Ed. Takakasu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–32.
- T no. 411 *Dasheng daji Dizang shilun jing* 大乘大集地藏十輪經 (Sutra on the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha). 10 rolls. Trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 600–664) in 651–652. T no. 411, 13: 721a–777c.
- T no. 452 *Foshuo guan Mile pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經 (Sutra on the Visualization of Maitreya’s Rebirth Above in Tuṣita Heaven, as Preached by the Buddha). 1 roll. Trans. Juqu Jingsheng 沮渠京聲 (d. 464) in 455. T no. 452, 14: 418b–420c.
- T no. 453 *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* 佛說彌勒下生經 (Sutra on Maitreya’s Descent and Rebirth Below, as Preached by the Buddha). 1 roll. Trans. Dharmarakṣa (Ch. Zhu Fahu 竺法護; ca. 265–313) in 303. T no. 453, 14: 421a–423c.
- T no. 454 *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經 (Sutra on Maitreya’s Descent and Attainment of Buddhahood, as Preached by the Buddha). 1 roll. Trans. Kumārajīva (Ch. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什; 343–413) between 402 and 412. T no. 454, 14: 423c–425c.
- T no. 456 *Foshuo Mile dachengfo jing* 佛說彌勒大成佛經 (Sutra on Maitreya’s Great Attainment of Buddhahood, as Preached by the Buddha). 1 roll. Trans. Kumārajīva in 402. T no. 456, 14: 428b–434b.

⁶⁵ Kim Samyong 1983; Lancaster 1988.

- T no. 839 *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報經 (Book of Divining the Requit of Wholesome and Unwholesome Actions). 2 rolls. Trans. Putideng 菩提燈 (Skt. *Bodhidīpa; active late sixth and early seventh centuries) in 595. T no. 839, 17: 901c–910c.
- T no. 1451 *Genbenshuo yiqieyou bu pinaiye zashi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事 (Miscellaneous Items on *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*). 40 rolls. Trans. Yijing 義淨 (635–713). T no. 1451, 24: 207a–414b.
- T no. 1558 *Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論 (Skt. *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya*; Treatise on the Abhidharma). 30 rolls. By Vasubandhu (Ch. Shiqin 世親; ca. 400–480). Trans. Xuanzang 玄奘. T no. 1558, 29: 1a–159b.
- T no. 1772 *Guan Mile shangsheng Doushuaitian jing zan* 觀彌勒上生兜率天經贊 (Commentary on the Sutra on the Visualization of Maitreya's Rebirth above in Tusita Heaven). 2 rolls. By Kuiji 窺基 (632–682). T no. 1772, 38: 272b–299a.
- T no. 2039 *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). 5 rolls. Comp. initially by Iryōn 一然 (1206–1289) and emended further by later editors. T no. 2039, 49: 953c–1019a.
- T no. 2042 *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 (Life of King Aśoka). 7 rolls. Trans. An Faqin 安法欽 (fl. 281–306) in 306. T no. 2042, 50: 99a–131a.
- T no. 2053 *Da Tang Daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (Life of the Tripitaka Dharma Master of Daciensi of the Great Tang Dynasty). 10 rolls. By Yancong 彦棕 (n.d.) in the seventh century. T no. 2053, 50: 220c–280a.
- T no. 2060 *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Further Lives of Eminent Monks [Compiled during the Tang]). 30 rolls. Comp. Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667); completed in 649. T no. 2060, 50: 425a–707a.
- T no. 2061 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Lives of Eminent Monks Compiled during the Song Dynasty). 30 rolls. Comp. Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001); completed in 988. T no. 2061, 50: 709a–900a.
- T no. 2087 *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (Record of a Journey to the West during the Great Tang). 12 rolls. By Xuanzang and comp. Bianji 辨機 (n.d.) in 646. T no. 2087, 51: 867b–947c.

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