

Korean Buddhist Practice as Seen in a Nineteenth-Century Rosary Print

BOUDEWIJN WALRAVEN

THE BUDDHISM of the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) has long been neglected by researchers, who assumed that its importance steeply declined due to the government’s policy of “honoring Confucianism and suppressing Buddhism” (*sungyu ōkpul* 崇儒抑佛).¹ Buddhism of this era has often been described as of little interest doctrinally and confined to women of high as well as low status and to men belonging to the lower strata socially, resulting in a flowering of magical or superstitious practices scarcely worth serious investigation. Only in the past two decades has the tide gradually started to turn.² In spite of government policies that curtailed Buddhist institutions and a Confucian discourse that disparaged Buddhism as a heterodoxy not deserving of respect, support for Buddhism remained strong, not least on the part of the royal family, and Buddhists found various ways to overcome discriminatory measures.³ Among those who are usually regarded as Confucian intellectuals, there were many who showed a genuine interest in Buddhism and maintained warm reciprocal relationships with Buddhist monks.⁴ The relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism

¹ Two early Korean researchers, Yi Nŭnghwa (1918) 2010 and Kim Yŏngsu (1939; English translation 2016), have been notable exceptions in the attention they paid to Chosŏn developments.

² O Kyŏnghu 2018, p. 285.

³ Cho Eunsu 2003; Nam Hŭisuk (Nam Hee-sook) 2004, 2012; Han Sanggil 2006; Jorgensen 2006; Walraven 2007; Kim Yongt’ae (Kim Yongtae) 2010, 2014; Yi Myŏnggho 2011; Ch’oe 2013; Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas 2014; O Kyŏnghu 2018.

⁴ Yu 2006; Lee, Younghee 2007a; Lee, Jong-su 2012; Kim Daeyeol 2012; Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas 2015.

was intricate and indisputably deserves greater attention.⁵ It has also been argued that the very concept of *sungyu ōkpul* is of doubtful validity or at least should be applied with greater nuance.⁶

While Chosŏn Buddhism in general has long been neglected, there has been even less attention to actual Buddhist practices (as opposed to doctrinal matters) of the late Chosŏn era (roughly 1600 to 1900), and to the beliefs of lay Buddhists in that era. This, however, is also changing. One sign of this is a growing interest in Buddhist vernacular songs of the didactic *kasa* 歌辭 genre, which functioned as an interface between Buddhist clergy and lay believers.⁷ Whereas until the beginning of this century scholars published some collections of such *kasa*, there were virtually no studies of this genre, in spite of the manifest relevance of the songs for an understanding of the propagation of Buddhism among various layers of the population. Since then, Buddhist *kasa* have become the topic of books and articles in both Korean and English.⁸

Another aspect that has been neglected is the role of the materiality of Buddhist objects of various kinds in shaping practices,⁹ in spite of what Winfield and Heine call the “trend in religious studies scholarship that recognizes the importance of visual and material culture to religious life and practice.”¹⁰ Here, again, change is on the way. An exhibition about the sponsorship of Buddhist institutions and rituals (“Devout Patrons of Buddhist Art”) at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul in 2015 included, for instance, considerable attention to the objects (*pokchang* 腹藏) placed inside Buddha images in order to consecrate them and obtain blessings for the donors. The objects that were exhibited included a coat of King Yŏngjo 英祖 (1694–1776), who more than any other monarch consciously strove to present himself as an exemplary Confucian.¹¹ Although we do not know to what extent Yŏngjo was personally involved in the decision to add his coat to the *pokchang*, it undoubtedly illustrates the elite sponsorship of Buddhism.¹²

⁵ Kim Chongmyŏng 2013.

⁶ Baker 2014; Son Sŏngp’il 2017.

⁷ Walraven and Lee, Younghee 2015.

⁸ For example, Kim Chongjin 2002, 2009; Lee, Younghee 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2012.

⁹ Cf. Rambelli 2007 for Japan, as well as Kendall 2010 for Korean religion in general.

¹⁰ Winfield and Heine 2017, p. xix.

¹¹ Haboush 2001.

¹² Kungnip Chungang Pangmulgwan 2015, pp. 118–19. *Pokchang* also were the focus of an international academic conference in 2017 (“Consecrating the Buddha: On the Practice of

Yet, various aspects of material culture remain unexplored and major questions regarding the practices of late Chosŏn Buddhism still need to be answered. Greater attention to material culture will be one of the ways more general questions may be addressed. One conundrum is the position of Buddhism in the nineteenth century. It has been argued that in this century the number of monks and temples sharply declined, which certain sources do seem to support,¹³ but at the same time there are indications that Buddhist pious enterprises not only continued to receive considerable support from the high and mighty (including the royal court and prominent Confucians), but also from the general population, and moreover, that Buddhism gained in prestige, and perhaps even enjoyed something of a revival.¹⁴ It is a moot point whether the figures suggesting decline should be trusted. In the absence of an alternative such as Christianity would offer in the twentieth century, it is unlikely that the demand for rituals for blessings in the hereafter, a major part of Buddhist ritual in the Chosŏn period, suddenly decreased. Also, nineteenth-century maps show great numbers of temples dotting the landscape around Seoul (“materiality” writ large), suggesting a continuing demand for Buddhist services among the citizens of the capital, who on average were definitely of a higher social status than most Koreans, even if they did not all belong to the *yangban* 兩班 elite.¹⁵ One alternative explanation for the apparent disjunction between the smaller number of temples and monks on the one hand and the respect for Buddhism manifested by kings, courtiers, literati, and city-dwellers on the other, might be that the growing urban population increasingly formed pious communities of lay believers, relying to a lesser degree on the clergy.¹⁶ The present paper cannot solve this puzzle, but by focusing upon a print representing a chaplet of prayer beads¹⁷ made in 1857 at the request of an upper-class

Interring Objects [*bokjang*] in Buddhist Statues,” Ewha Women’s University, August 11–12) and an exhibition in the Central Buddhist Museum, Seoul, in the spring of 2018.

¹³ Yi Pyŏnghŭi 1997, Kim, Hwansoo 2017.

¹⁴ Lee, Younghee 2012, pp. 98–99.

¹⁵ Walraven 2000.

¹⁶ Walraven 2000.

¹⁷ The print has been briefly introduced in a short article that aimed to show the many different uses of prayer beads, irrespective of period, by both Buddhists and shamans in Korea (Walraven 2010), without a discussion of its details and context as will be attempted here. A very similar print was also briefly described much earlier by Eli Barr Landis (1865–1898), an American medical doctor who came to Korea as a missionary for the Anglican Church (Rutt 1957). His focus, however, was the sutra that was cited (in part) in the central part of the print (Landis 1895).

upāsikā (*ch'ōngshinnyō* 清信女; a female lay devotee), it intends to add some perspective to Buddhist practices of the period and to demonstrate the role material objects might play in the interactions between clergy and lay believers (plate 1). Prayer beads are particularly suited to this purpose as they are some of the most ubiquitous objects in Buddhist practice and are used daily by both monks and lay believers.¹⁸ The temporal focus of this article has been intentionally limited to the nineteenth century as the call for greater nuance in studies of Chosŏn Buddhism characteristic of recent studies has also sensitized us to potential changes over time, making it problematic to generalize findings for the entire period.

THE PRINT

The woodblock used to produce the print was carved at one of the most prominent monasteries of Korea, Pongŭnsa 奉恩寺, the location of which is today part of the busy Seoul area of Gangnam-gu, south of the Han River, directly opposite the towering COEX complex, which comprises a huge convention and exhibition center and an underground mall that has been described as a shopping mecca for global brands in fashion, accessories, beauty, and lifestyle. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, Seoul had not yet expanded south of the river; the area was entirely rural and it would take a considerable time to reach Pongŭnsa from Seoul, including a ferry ride, as there were as yet no bridges spanning the Han River. Nonetheless, the temple was so frequently visited by male and female city dwellers that already in 1787 the Meditation Master Hwa'ak 華嶽 (1750–1839) decided he could no longer stay there and fled to a much more remote temple.¹⁹ Pongŭnsa also attracted many prominent donors, such as the Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun 興宣大院君 (1820–1898) who acted as regent for his son King Kojong 高宗 (1852–1919) while the latter was a minor. He donated land to the temple.²⁰ Other donors included four (former) Masters (Taesasŏng 大司成) of

¹⁸ Kieschnick 2003, pp. 116–38; Walraven 2010; Tanabe 2012; Mross 2017. Of these articles, only Walraven 2010 discusses Korea. These authors, who all point to the various uses of the rosaries, also provide a survey of the canonical basis for the use of rosaries in sutras such as the *Mu huanzi jing* 木樵子經 (Scripture of the Seeds of the Soapberry, translated into Chinese during the Eastern Jin [317–420]; T no. 786) and the *Manshushili Zhouzang Cang Zhongjiaoliang Shuzu Gongde Jing* 曼殊室利呪藏中校量數珠功德經 (Scripture on the Evaluation of Merits of the Rosary from the Spell Treasury of Mañjuśrī, translated by Yijing 義淨 [635–713]; T no. 787).

¹⁹ Hwa'ak 2012, pp. 226, 229.

²⁰ Sach'al Munhwa Yŏn'guwŏn 1997, p. 237.

the Confucian Academy (Sönggyun'gwan 成均館) who made contributions in 1856 to have a new edition of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Hwaömggyöng* 華嚴經) printed.²¹ The celebrated scholar Ch'usa Kim Chönghui 秋史金正喜 (1786–1856) provided the calligraphy for the sign board of the building of the monastery in which the woodblocks for the sutra were kept. A few days later he passed away while staying at Pongünsa. It was, in short, an important and popular monastery intimately associated with the social and intellectual elite of Chosön.

The woodblock for the print measures 78 by 36 centimeters, a size that suggests that prints made from it might have been mounted as scrolls, framed as paintings, or perhaps pasted on folding screens. The writing in the print is not in the vernacular, but like many Korean Buddhist texts, it is in *hanmun* 漢文, literary Sinitic. In a short 1895 paper that focused on the sutra that is quoted in the central section of this very print, Eli Barr Landis provides us with an intriguing clue, asserting that the print was “put on the wall of many of the Buddhist temples of Korea.”²² This suggests use of the print by a multitude of believers, but its origin (at least in this specific form) lay in a private act of devotion. At the bottom, there is a colophon that presents the date, the name of the donor, and a wish (*parwön* 發願) stating the purpose for which the woodblock was carved, with the name of the monk who did the carving at the very end. The text of the colophon reads in full as follows:

Engraved and stored at Pongünsa, at Mt. Sudo, in Kwangju, in the Left Circuit of Kyönggi Province, in the spring of the *Chöngsa* [丁巳] year, the seventh year of the Xianfeng [咸豐; 1851–1861] era [i.e., 1857]. The great benefactor who requested the engraving, the *upāsikā* (*ch'öngshinnyö*) Lady Pak Yöngsöhwa [朴靈瑞華],²³ humbly wishes that thanks to the merit of this, her deceased father, Pak Sail [朴士一], her deceased mother, Lady Ch'oe [崔], her deceased maternal grandfather, Sir Ch'oe, and her deceased maternal grandmother, Lady Mun [文], her deceased husband Yi Ikpae [李益培], and her deceased younger brother Pak Ch'angsun [朴昌淳], all together will go to “Supreme Bliss” (Küngnak 極樂 [the Western Pure Land of Amitābha]).

Carved by Söngjön [性典]

²¹ Lee, Younghee 2012, pp. 98–99.

²² Landis 1895.

²³ Yöngsöhwa 靈瑞華 (“Numinous Auspicious Flower”) is obviously a Buddhist name, a confirmation of this woman's long-standing dedication to Buddhism.

This type of wish, with its concern for the afterlife of deceased relatives, is typical for a majority of pious donations. A similar wish can be found, for instance, on a small bag that was hung on a painting of Amitābha made in 1876 (plate 2), a variant of the *pokchang* put inside three-dimensional Buddha images.²⁴

It should be noted that Pak Yōngsōhwa's wish concerned members of her own birth family (with the exception of her husband), who according to patrilineal Confucian principles would not be the regular recipients of ritual action on her part.

Pak Yōngsōhwa's status as a well-to-do member of the upper class is confirmed by the appearance of her name in the list of donors (among whom are quite a few court ladies, *sanggung* 尙宮) who made possible the building of a hall to house the woodblocks (P'anjōn 板殿) of the newly carved version of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* at Pongūnsa in 1856. She is mentioned as having contributed the considerable sum of one hundred *kūm* 金.²⁵ Moreover, she is also on record as having made a donation of the sum of five *yang* 兩 for another purpose related to the P'anjōn.²⁶

The reverse of the woodblock is also engraved, with a depiction of the markings on the feet of the Buddha (*Sōkka yōrae yujōkto* 釋迦如來遺迹圖; the oldest form of representing the Buddha), an engraving that according to a colophon was also commissioned by Pak Yōngsōhwa, but this time with a wish for herself: for longevity and happiness during her lifetime and rebirth in "Supreme Bliss" after death. In other words, her piety was for the benefit of the life in the hereafter of her consanguine kin (primarily) and husband, as well as for her own personal benefit in both this life and the hereafter.

CONTENTS

The Text on the Inside of the Rosary

The print depicts a string of 108 prayer beads, on the outside of which are identifications of individual beads with specific buddhas, bodhisattvas, guardians of Buddhism, and other entities; and on the inside of the rosary are quotes (in *hanmun*) from sutras about the use of prayer beads. The first

²⁴ Yi Yongyun 2016.

²⁵ Sach'al Munhwa Yōn'guwōn 1997, pp. 243, 244. *Kūm* is an alternative term for the more commonly used *yang*.

²⁶ Sach'al Munhwa Yōn'guwōn 1997, p. 246.

sutra quoted is the *Mu huanzi jing* 木樵子經 (Scripture of the Seeds of the Soapberry), which contains the instructions of the Buddha to King P'aryuri 波流利,²⁷ who has come to him to ask for advice on how to overcome all kinds of adversity that trouble him and his people. “My country is small and insignificant, but for years pestilence has raged and grain is scarce, and so the people are at the end of their tether, while I am never at ease.”²⁸ This is the oldest sutra mentioning the use of prayer beads, and it explains that they allow the user who always carries them and who, counting the beads constantly, pays homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha to reap great benefits, which increase exponentially the more often the user counts the beads. This is explained in the print as follows: “If you do it ten times, if you do it twenty times [again and again], then you can reach two-hundred-thousand rounds [of the beads] and your body and your mind will no longer be in turmoil, and you will eliminate all flattery and wrongdoing. When you are at the end of your life, you will be able to be reborn in the Heaven of Yama (Yamach'ōn 夜摩天).²⁹ If you reach a million rounds, you will eliminate the [bad] karma resulting from the passions and obtain the great fruition of permanent bliss.” Then another, unidentified, sutra is quoted, which assigns particular meanings corresponding to the 108 beads (which primarily represent the 108 “passions” or “afflictions” [Skt. *kleśas*; K. *pōnnoe* 煩惱] that stand in the way of enlightenment, but here are given additional meanings). Curiously, the meanings are not exactly the same as those given on the outside, and in spite of the claim that there are twelve sections, only eleven are given. The list as presented in the text on the inside of the rosary is as follows:

1. The Buddha Śākyamuni
2. Four bodhisattvas
3. Six *pāramitās*
4. Eight *vajra* guardians
5. Thirty-three heavens

²⁷ In the original text of the sutra his name is given as Virudhaka.

²⁸ The quoted text is not always exactly in accordance with the text in the Tripiṭaka (T no. 786), but the differences are of minor or no significance.

²⁹ Although a “heaven,” this is still part of the world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), which knows sexual intercourse, albeit that in the Heaven of Yama it is effected through a mere embrace. (In the highest of the *kāmadhātu* heavens, it is effected just by looking at each other).

6. Twenty-eight “animals” (*kūmsu* 禽獸, actually the names of stars associated with the lunar lodgings,³⁰ many of which include the name of an animal or are associated with an animal)
7. Five Heavenly Kings (*ch’ōnwang* 天王)³¹
8. Two earth deities
9. Eighteen hells
10. Four Graces (*sañ* 四恩, which will be discussed further, below)
11. Chiju Cheja 持珠弟子, “the disciple who holds the pearl/jewel”

This neatly adds up to 108, but it should be noted that the identifications on the outside of the rosary are actually 111 in number. This is the result of three additional identifications, smuggled in at the bottom of the rosary, where the extra space below the three larger-sized beads allowed for additions on the outer rim. It should also be noted that the categories largely, but not completely, match those on the outside of the chaplet; when the categories do match, the numbers given in the list above do not perfectly match the numbers of the identifications on the outside, as there are, for instance, fewer heavens and more hells.

The text on the inside also provides evidence of the agency of the beads themselves (rather than of the agency of their *use*)³² by quoting a scripture stating that the efficacy of using the beads depends on the material from which they are made. Irrespective of the practitioner, the beads have a power of their own:³³

If you use beads of the seeds of the lotus, you will receive thousand-fold bliss. If you use crystal beads, you will receive ten-thousand-fold bliss. If you use beads of the seeds of the bodhi tree, and always hold them in your hand, you will receive limitless bliss.

³⁰ “Lunar lodgings” refer to the positions in the sky through which the moon moves in the course of a twenty-eight-day lunar month.

³¹ These are presumably the five *vidyārājas*, or five deities with an angry visage, associated with the four directions of the compass and the center. This neatly matches the Sinitic concept of the five directions, which also includes the center.

³² Kieschnick 2003, p. 120: “Not only did the rosary count recitations; a recitation marked with a rosary somehow counted more.”

³³ The agency of the beads is also manifest in their widespread use as amulets that are carried to protect against dangers and to realize the fulfilment of wishes (Walraven 2010).

At the end, a *gāthā* confirms the marvelous efficacy of the beads, promising the practitioner the contemplation of the Dharma realm and rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitābha. The string that holds the beads together is poetically compared to all-penetrating emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

Identifications Provided on the Outside of the Rosary

The big bead at the top, sometimes called the mother bead, is associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni and is the only one that has an inscribed *svastika* (plate 3). The character used for “buddha” here (as well as for the other two buddhas listed) consists of the character “man” (*in* 人), used as a radical, with the character for “heaven” (*ch’ōn* 天) on the right-hand side. This can hardly be regarded as an abbreviation, as it has only one stroke less than the full character that is ordinarily used, and a shorter abbreviation, 仏 (as currently used in Japan), was available. Yet, apparently it was commonly used in manuscripts,³⁴ and therefore no special significance might be attached to its use here. However, if one thinks of the dominance of Confucian discourse in Chosŏn, one wonders if readers may not have interpreted it as an accommodation to Confucianism, where both man and heaven are crucial concepts and the heavenly principle (*ch’ōlli* 天理) is regarded as capable of being fully realized in the heart/mind (*shim* 心) of human beings as a consequence of the fact that (human) nature is endowed by Heaven.³⁵ In other words, it may have suggested that a buddha is a fully realized sage according to Confucian standards, and also, more generally, that there is a parallelism between the innate buddha-nature of sentient beings and the Confucian concept of human nature in its original, unsullied state.

If after the first bead the rosary is followed clockwise, the next bead is devoted to Amitābha (with a larger bead than the following ones, but smaller than the one for Śākyamuni), and the next two beads (3, 4) denote the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara. Then, there are two *vajra* bodhisattvas (5, 6), and four *vajra* guardians (7–10). Next, there are three (11–13) of the six *pāramitās* (the “perfections” of the cultivation of bodhisattvas: generosity, enthusiastic perseverance, and wisdom). These are followed by the four “Heavenly Kings” (14–17: Torich’ōnwang 忉利天王 [Chesök 帝釋; Skt. Indra], Mahyech’ōnwang 摩醯天王 [Skt. Maheśvara], Chōnggōch’ōnwang 淨居天王 [the Śuddhāvāsa King, or the King of the

³⁴ I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers who alerted me to this fact.

³⁵ As stated in the first words of the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean).

Pure Abodes],³⁶ and Pömwangch'önwang 梵王天王 [Skt. Brahma], and twenty-eight stellar deities associated with the lunar lodgings (18–45). Next, there are two beads (46, 47) for the so-called Four Graces: first, the boons (“grace”) one receives from the monarch, teachers, and seniors; and second, the boons from parents and donors.³⁷ The next seven beads (48–54) are identified with various hells. Then, at the bottom of the rosary, there are again three larger beads (55–57), with the largest one in the middle representing the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (Ch. Dizang 地藏; K. Chijang; Jp. Jizō), the bodhisattva who has vowed to deliver all sentient beings from the tortures of hell.³⁸ The first larger bead belongs to Daoming Zunzhe 道明尊者 (K. Tomyōng Chonja), a Chinese monk who is said to have returned from a visit to the Underworld, afterwards becoming a companion of Chijang. The third larger bead is assigned to Mudok Kwiwang 無毒鬼王 (“Spirit King Without Poison”), another frequent companion of Kṣitigarbha in Korean paintings, who is reputed to eliminate people’s evil intentions.³⁹ These three can be said to be in the middle of hell because the next thirteen beads (58–70) again represent hells of various kinds. Their names generally present a fairly good idea of what goes on there (“Scalding Water Cauldron Hell,” “Cold Ice Hell,” “Tongue Extraction Hell,” “Flaying Hell,” etc.), but the last bead covers any hell that might not have been included: the “Hell Where One Is,” or perhaps, the “Hell Where One Happens to Find Oneself” (*sojae chiok* 所在地獄). Then, bead 71 stands for Chiju Cheja, literally “the disciple who holds the pearl/jewel,” who is a messenger of Kṣitigarbha and in

³⁶ This is actually an alternative form of Maheśvara, which supports the interpretation of the preceding Mahyech'önwang as Maheśvara's other form as the Prince of Demons, Piśāca-Maheśvara, who is depicted as riding on a white bull. As such, Piśāca-Maheśvara appears in a painting of divine protectors installed in the P'anjōn 板殿 of Pongūnsa in 1857, the very year the woodblock for the print was carved (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Pulgyo Chungang Pangmulgwan 2014, p. 137).

³⁷ The composition of the Four Graces is not always the same. The term may also refer to parents, the monarch, sentient beings, and the Three Treasures; or, to father and mother, the Tathāgata, and dharma masters. But here the content is explicitly given, in a manner that for three of the four, shows respect for Confucian values.

³⁸ See Teiser 1994, pp. 67–69.

³⁹ An example is the “Chijang posalto” from the collection of the Musée Guimet illustrated in Cambon 2001, p. 85. Mudok Kwiwang appears in the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 (Sutra of the Great Vows of the Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva; T no. 412): “There was a Spirit King. His name was Without Poison” (*yu il kwiwang myōng wal Mudōk* 有一鬼王名曰無毒), and he explains the terrors of the various hells to a Brahman girl who has descended to the underworld to look for her deceased mother. The girl is Kṣitigarbha in a previous existence, and Mudok is identified as a future bodhisattva (Kim Chōnghŭi 2004, pp. 177–81, 425).

charge of hungry ghosts.⁴⁰ Beads 72 to 99 are associated with a succession of increasingly rarefied heavens. These begin with the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings (Sach'ōnwang 四天王), followed by the Heaven of the Thirty-three Deities, presided over by Indra (the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, Torich'ōn 忉利天), the Heaven of Yama, the Tuṣita Heaven (Tosolch'ōn 兜率天), the Nirmānarati Heaven (Hwarakch'ōn 化樂天), and the Paranirmitavaśavarti Heaven (T'ahwajjaech'ōn 他化自在天). These are in ascending order, from the lowest to the highest, the six heavens of the *kāmadhātu*, the world of desire. Next are eighteen *dhyāna* heavens (*sōnch'ōn* 禪天; 78–95), comprised of four levels. The first three levels contain three *dhyāna* heavens each, and the fourth level contains nine such *dhyāna* heavens. The last nine are called Cloudless, Felicitous Birth, Large Fruitage, Without Thought, Without Vexation, Without Heat, Beautiful Appearing, Beautiful to See, and End of Form.⁴¹ Together these heavens belong to the world of form, *rūpadhātu*. The ascent then continues toward four states of the World without Form (*ārūpadhātu*), or the Four Immaterial Heavens: the State of Boundless Space, the State of Boundless Knowledge, the State of Non-existence, and the State of Neither Thinking nor Not-Thinking (96–99). With beads 100–102 there is in a sense a return to our world. Here, the three *pāramitās* are listed that should be cultivated in Jambudvīpa and that were not mentioned earlier: ethics, concentration, and patience. With this, there is a return to symmetry: beads 103–6 represent four *vajra* guardians, 107 and 108 two *vajra* bodhisattvas, and 109 and 110 the bodhisattvas Mahāsthāmaprapta and Samantabhadra. Mahāsthāmaprapta is the regular companion of Amitābha, situated to his right, with Avalokitesvara (bead

⁴⁰ Soothill and Hodous 1937, p. 208. As the character for “pearl” is also used to refer to the beads, there is a temptation to interpret this as referring to the practitioner who uses the rosary (as Landis does), but at this position in the chaplet that does not make much sense. On the other hand, a reference to the *pretas*, one of the three evil reincarnations, but one notch above the beings in hell, fits well in this place. “Pearl” may also refer to the wish-fulfilling jewel (Skt. *cintāmani*) that is an attribute of Kṣitigarbha and appears in quite a few of the depictions of him (e.g., Pulchisa 1997, pp. 168, 174; Kungnip Taegu Pangmulgwan 2009, p. 92; Yi Punhūi et al. 2010, pp. 32–33). It is instrumental in delivering sentient beings from hell.

⁴¹ This list comprises eighteen heavens. The number is not always the same. Sometimes it is said to be seventeen, with Without Thought mentioned as a characteristic of Large Fruitage. The position of Without Thought in this list is more or less in agreement with that. If the number is said to be eighteen, Without Thought is the highest heaven of the group, at the top of the list of eighteen. As it is mentioned in this list in this position, this may be regarded as a compromise between the two views.

4) situated on the left of Amitābha, while Samantabhadra accompanies Śākyamuni on the right, with Mañjuśrī (bead 3) on the left. The final bead, 111, is the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, with a larger bead, which is the same size as that for Amitābha but smaller than that for Śākyamuni.

SIMILAR PRINTS

As Landis asserted, the Pongŭnsa woodblock (78 by 36 centimeters) is not unique. In Korea there are currently five known variants.⁴² A woodblock that is very similar, but undated, is kept at T'ongdosa 通度寺. A Haeinsa 海印寺 version, dated only according to the sexagenary cycle to a *Pyŏngjin* 丙辰 year (1796, 1856, or even 1916?), measures 59 by 38.5 centimeters. Another variant, extant as a damaged woodblock from the An'guk 安國Hermitage of Hwaŏmsa 華嚴寺 and now kept at the Museum of Chŏnbuk University,⁴³ is dated to 1812. It is somewhat larger (75 by 33 centimeters), and like the Pongŭnsa block, has a carving of the markings on the Buddha's feet on the reverse side. A fifth version, available as a print (59 by 38.5 centimeters), is thought to date back to the nineteenth century. On it is written "kept by Yŏndam 蓮潭." If this is the famous Sŏn 禪 (Jp. Zen) master Yŏndam Yuil 蓮潭有一 (1720–1799), and the inscription is correct, it should be dated a little earlier. The contents are simpler than those of the Pongŭnsa version, having for instance only one buddha, Śākyamuni, at the top, immediately flanked by *vajra* bodhisattvas, but the basic arrangement is roughly the same, again having a rendering of the sutra inside the rosary.

There are also comparable depictions of rosaries in Japan. In a chapter on Zen rosaries, Michaela Mross mentions five depictions of similar rosary arrangements among the initiation documents (*kirigami* 切紙) transmitted in some Sōtō lineages.⁴⁴ In spite of claims that the tradition for these arrangements goes back to Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), the earliest of these documents is dated only to 1609, and there is no clear evidence that the rosary tradition they describe predates the seventeenth century. In any case, this is earlier than the evidence we have for the Korean rosary depictions.

The Japanese rosary depictions of this kind were not limited to the Zen tradition, and can also be found in the Nichiren school, where they were

⁴² Landis 1895, p. 23. For a listing of the various variants see http://wongaksa.or.kr/g4/bbs/board.php?bo_table=junggak_09&wr_id=3266, accessed January 29, 2018.

⁴³ For an image see: http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?dataType=0201&contents_id=E0036313#modal, accessed February 25, 2018.

⁴⁴ Mross 2017.

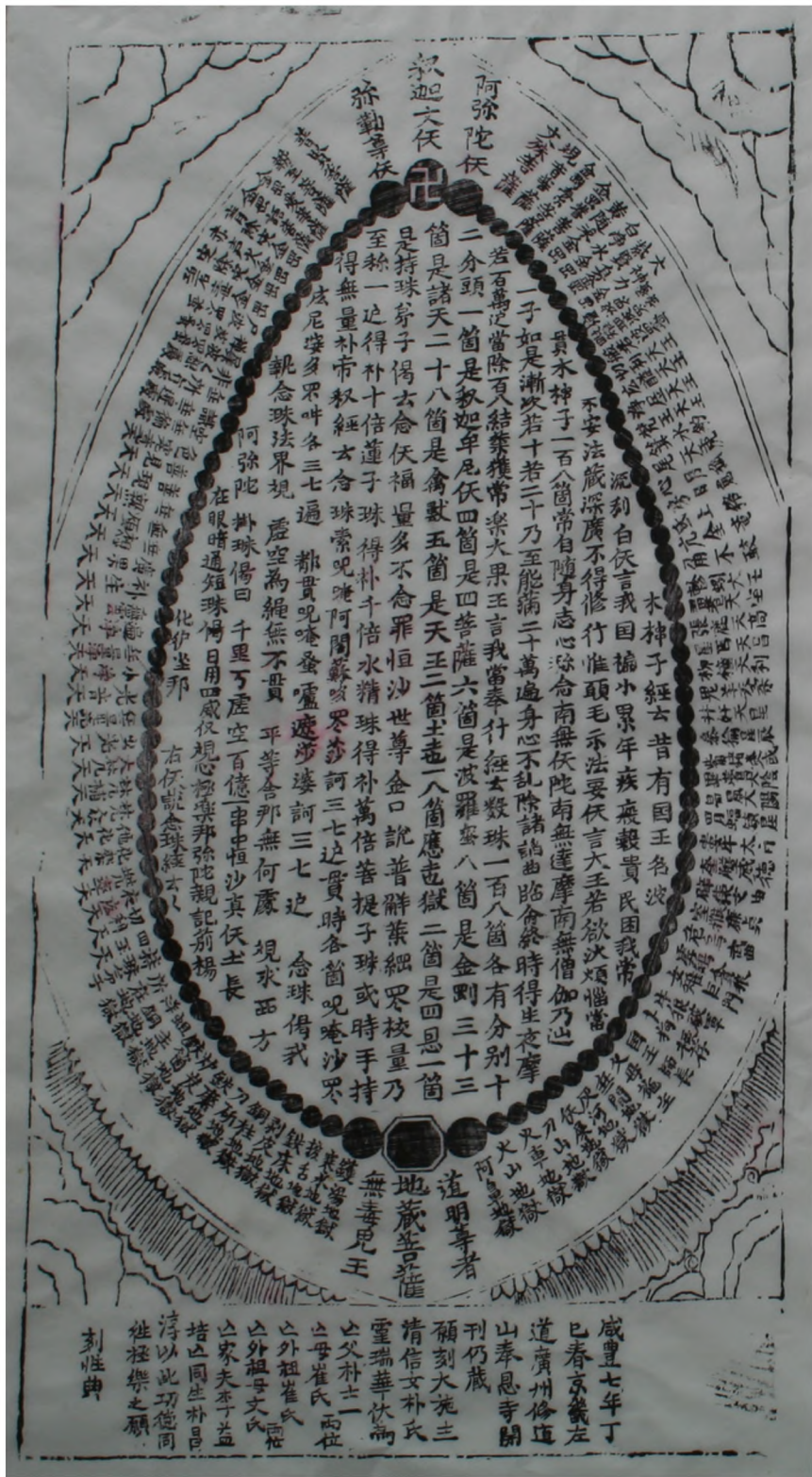


Plate 1. The Pongūnsa print.

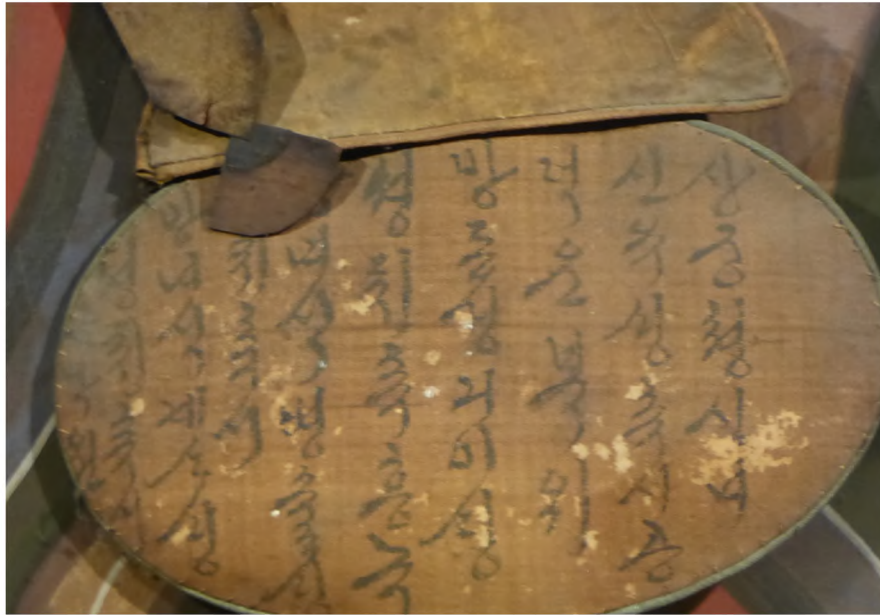


Plate 2. A bag with the wish of one of the sponsors of an 1876 Amitābha painting.

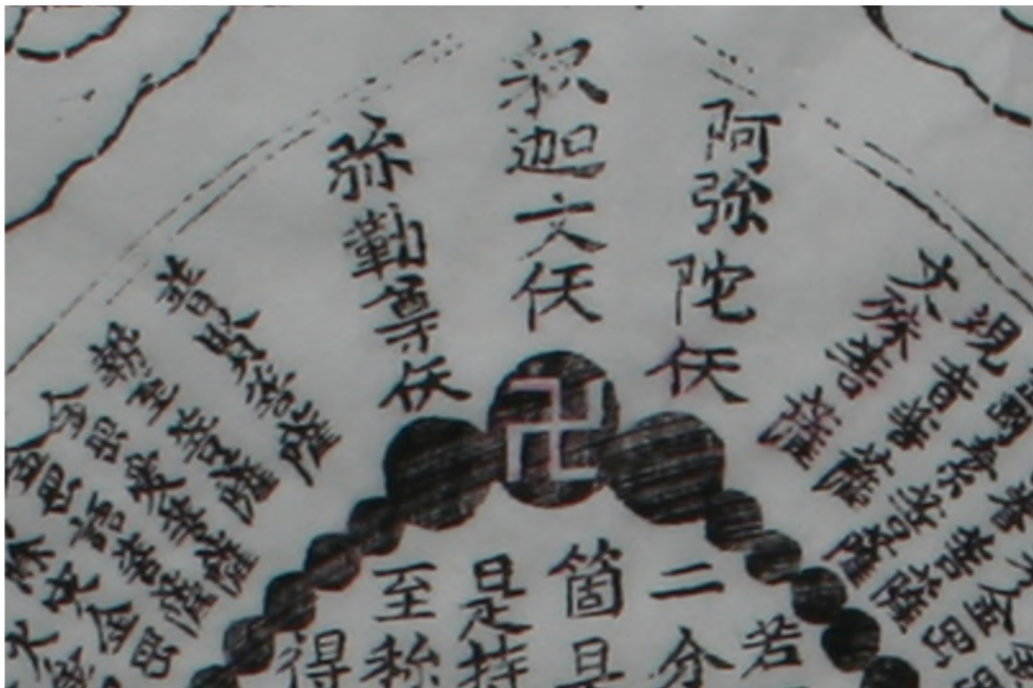


Plate 3. Detail of the mother bead.



Plate 4. Two vajra guardians.

三月小日月	壬寅年時憲合朔卯年	一庚奎初壁午	六芒星	土木火金水
二壬子	一奎九子醜	二庚寅	七十一	六芒星
三甲寅	三丙辰	三庚辰	八十一	七十一
四甲寅	四甲寅	四庚辰	九十一	八十一
五甲寅	五甲寅	五庚辰	十十一	九十一
六甲寅	六甲寅	六庚辰	十一	十
七甲寅	七甲寅	七庚辰	十二	十一
八甲寅	八甲寅	八庚辰	十三	十二
九甲寅	九甲寅	九庚辰	十四	十三
十甲寅	十甲寅	十庚辰	十五	十四
十一甲寅	十一甲寅	十一庚辰	十六	十五
十二甲寅	十二甲寅	十二庚辰	十七	十六
十三甲寅	十三甲寅	十三庚辰	十八	十七
十四甲寅	十四甲寅	十四庚辰	十九	十八
十五甲寅	十五甲寅	十五庚辰	二十	十九
十六甲寅	十六甲寅	十六庚辰	二十一	二十
十七甲寅	十七甲寅	十七庚辰	二十二	二十一
十八甲寅	十八甲寅	十八庚辰	二十三	二十二
十九甲寅	十九甲寅	十九庚辰	二十四	二十三
二十甲寅	二十甲寅	二十庚辰	二十五	二十四
廿一甲寅	廿一甲寅	廿一庚辰	二十六	二十五
廿二甲寅	廿二甲寅	廿二庚辰	二十七	二十六
廿三甲寅	廿三甲寅	廿三庚辰	二十八	二十七
廿四甲寅	廿四甲寅	廿四庚辰	二十九	二十八
廿五甲寅	廿五甲寅	廿五庚辰	三十	二十九
廿六甲寅	廿六甲寅	廿六庚辰	三十一	三十
廿七甲寅	廿七甲寅	廿七庚辰	三十二	三十一
廿八甲寅	廿八甲寅	廿八庚辰	三十三	三十二
廿九甲寅	廿九甲寅	廿九庚辰	三十四	三十三
三十甲寅	三十甲寅	三十庚辰	三十五	三十四
三十一甲寅	三十一甲寅	三十一庚辰	三十六	三十五
三十二甲寅	三十二甲寅	三十二庚辰	三十七	三十六
三十三甲寅	三十三甲寅	三十三庚辰	三十八	三十七
三十四甲寅	三十四甲寅	三十四庚辰	三十九	三十八
三十五甲寅	三十五甲寅	三十五庚辰	四十	三十九
三十六甲寅	三十六甲寅	三十六庚辰	四十一	四十
三十七甲寅	三十七甲寅	三十七庚辰	四十二	四十一
三十八甲寅	三十八甲寅	三十八庚辰	四十三	四十二
三十九甲寅	三十九甲寅	三十九庚辰	四十四	四十三
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四十一甲寅	四十一甲寅	四十一庚辰	四十六	四十五
四十二甲寅	四十二甲寅	四十二庚辰	四十七	四十六
四十三甲寅	四十三甲寅	四十三庚辰	四十八	四十七
四十四甲寅	四十四甲寅	四十四庚辰	四十九	四十八
四十五甲寅	四十五甲寅	四十五庚辰	五十	四十九
四十六甲寅	四十六甲寅	四十六庚辰	五十一	五十
四十七甲寅	四十七甲寅	四十七庚辰	五十二	五十一
四十八甲寅	四十八甲寅	四十八庚辰	五十三	五十二
四十九甲寅	四十九甲寅	四十九庚辰	五十四	五十三
五十甲寅	五十甲寅	五十庚辰	五十五	五十四
五十一甲寅	五十一甲寅	五十一庚辰	五十六	五十五
五十二甲寅	五十二甲寅	五十二庚辰	五十七	五十六
五十三甲寅	五十三甲寅	五十三庚辰	五十八	五十七
五十四甲寅	五十四甲寅	五十四庚辰	五十九	五十八
五十五甲寅	五十五甲寅	五十五庚辰	六十	五十九
五十六甲寅	五十六甲寅	五十六庚辰	六十一	六十
五十七甲寅	五十七甲寅	五十七庚辰	六十二	六十一
五十八甲寅	五十八甲寅	五十八庚辰	六十三	六十二
五十九甲寅	五十九甲寅	五十九庚辰	六十四	六十三
六十甲寅	六十甲寅	六十庚辰	六十五	六十四
六十一甲寅	六十一甲寅	六十一庚辰	六十六	六十五
六十二甲寅	六十二甲寅	六十二庚辰	六十七	六十六
六十三甲寅	六十三甲寅	六十三庚辰	六十八	六十七
六十四甲寅	六十四甲寅	六十四庚辰	六十九	六十八
六十五甲寅	六十五甲寅	六十五庚辰	七十	六十九
六十六甲寅	六十六甲寅	六十六庚辰	七十一	七十
六十七甲寅	六十七甲寅	六十七庚辰	七十二	七十一
六十八甲寅	六十八甲寅	六十八庚辰	七十三	七十二
六十九甲寅	六十九甲寅	六十九庚辰	七十四	七十三
七十甲寅	七十甲寅	七十庚辰	七十五	七十四
七十一甲寅	七十一甲寅	七十一庚辰	七十六	七十五
七十二甲寅	七十二甲寅	七十二庚辰	七十七	七十六
七十三甲寅	七十三甲寅	七十三庚辰	七十八	七十七
七十四甲寅	七十四甲寅	七十四庚辰	七十九	七十八
七十五甲寅	七十五甲寅	七十五庚辰	八十	七十九
七十六甲寅	七十六甲寅	七十六庚辰	八十一	八十
七十七甲寅	七十七甲寅	七十七庚辰	八十二	八十一
七十八甲寅	七十八甲寅	七十八庚辰	八十三	八十二
七十九甲寅	七十九甲寅	七十九庚辰	八十四	八十三
八十甲寅	八十甲寅	八十庚辰	八十五	八十四
八十一甲寅	八十一甲寅	八十一庚辰	八十六	八十五
八十二甲寅	八十二甲寅	八十二庚辰	八十七	八十六
八十三甲寅	八十三甲寅	八十三庚辰	八十八	八十七
八十四甲寅	八十四甲寅	八十四庚辰	八十九	八十八
八十五甲寅	八十五甲寅	八十五庚辰	九十	八十九
八十六甲寅	八十六甲寅	八十六庚辰	九十一	九十
八十七甲寅	八十七甲寅	八十七庚辰	九十二	九十一
八十八甲寅	八十八甲寅	八十八庚辰	九十三	九十二
八十九甲寅	八十九甲寅	八十九庚辰	九十四	九十三
九十甲寅	九十甲寅	九十庚辰	九十五	九十四
九十一甲寅	九十一甲寅	九十一庚辰	九十六	九十五
九十二甲寅	九十二甲寅	九十二庚辰	九十七	九十六
九十三甲寅	九十三甲寅	九十三庚辰	九十八	九十七
九十四甲寅	九十四甲寅	九十四庚辰	九十九	九十八
九十五甲寅	九十五甲寅	九十五庚辰	一百	九十九

Plate 5. Page from the *Ch'ilchöngp'yo* 七政表 (Charts of the [Movements of the] Seven Heavenly Bodies) almanac of 1842.



Plate 6. The *Diamond Sutra* written in the shape of a pagoda, together with tablets carrying names of the dead, in a temple in Seoul.

Plate 7. A rosary as an amulet for the driver of an intercity bus.



combined with the *daimoku* 題目, the mantra of homage to the *Lotus Sutra*,⁴⁵ which for the believers of this school is used as the centerpiece of a mandala.⁴⁶ One example is part of the Petzold Collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library,⁴⁷ but other versions offered on Japanese internet auction sites⁴⁸ suggest they were rather common. Irrespective of the tradition from which they stem, these depictions have some things in common with the Korean Pongŭnsa rosary such as the inclusion of lunar lodgings, but there are also significant differences. The Japanese rosaries have details, for instance, that connect them with esoteric mandalas,⁴⁹ and have tassels with added beads—as well as other associated deities—that are missing in the Korean chaplets.

Such differences between variants from different societies are not surprising, and are a reminder that, as Laurel Kendall has said, “the sacred life of material goods (or the material life of sacred goods) [is] a dynamic, fluid, and intrinsically social phenomenon in much the same way that anthropologists from Marcel Mauss to Arjun Appadurai⁵⁰ have understood the material objects of exchange between living people and between people and gods.”⁵¹ It is therefore to be expected that rosaries from Japan and Korea show a degree of variation. The purpose of this article is, however, to interpret the messages and uses of the Pongŭnsa rosary in the Korean historical and social context, rather than trace the origin and development of such rosary arrangements through a comparative study of Korean and Japanese versions.⁵²

⁴⁵ Mross 2017, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Dolce 2002.

⁴⁷ Rosenfield and Cranston 2003, pp. 234–36. An image is also available online: <http://ids.lib.harvard.edu/ids/view/24624743?buttons=y>, accessed November 25, 2019. I thank Lucia Dolce for alerting me to this, and for providing feedback on a draft of this article.

⁴⁸ For example, <http://aucview.aucfan.com/yahoo/q96344013/>, accessed November 25, 2019.

⁴⁹ Rambelli 2006, p. 60.

⁵⁰ Appadurai 1986.

⁵¹ Kendall 2008, p. 108.

⁵² A comparative study would also require a thorough survey to establish if there are variants in China (of which to date I have not been able to find any trace). Kieschnick (2003) does not mention any, nor were examples known to some scholars with a lifelong acquaintance with Chinese Buddhism whom I asked.

READING THE PONGŬNSA PRINT

The top of the print, with Śākyamuni in the middle, Amitābha on the right, and Maitreya on the left, flanked left and right by bodhisattvas, *vajra* bodhisattvas, and *vajra* guardians of Buddhism can be read in the same way as a devotional painting of buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounded by a host of minor figures such as one often sees in temples (plate 4). This is one manner in which the print may have functioned. The inclusion of Maitreya, however, makes this an unusual combination. There do exist representations of three buddhas worshiped together in paintings or sculptures, rather than the more common triads of one buddha with two bodhisattvas, but in this case the buddhas are usually Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Bhaisajyaguru. This is, for instance, the arrangement in the main hall of Tonghwasā 桐華寺 in Daegu 大邱⁵³ or Chogyesa 曹溪寺 in Seoul. The unusual combination of the Buddhas Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Maitreya⁵⁴ is one indication that perhaps the arrangement in the rosary should be read in a different way, or in more than one way. While the top of the rosary can be seen as a largely symmetrical depiction such as one finds in devotional paintings, there is no such symmetry in the lower part. When this is taken into account and the meaning of the other beads considered, it makes more sense to read the rosary clockwise in its totality, as a pathway leading towards a particular goal. The switch from one reading to another is also marked graphically. While the characters identifying the beads in the symmetrical top part should be read inward toward the rosary, the characters assigned to the other beads are to be read starting from the character at the rim of the rosary outward toward the edges of the print.

An obvious question, however, is how the presence of the twenty-eight lunar lodgings or rather the stellar deities associated with these mansions, which take up a major part of the right side of the rosary, might fit in the discourse presented by the print. In Japanese mandalas, the twenty-eight lunar lodgings are sometimes associated with particular esoteric schemes,⁵⁵

⁵³ Kungnip Taegu Pangmulgwan 2009.

⁵⁴ There is an instance in which Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Maitreya are depicted together, but in combination with a fourth Buddha, Bhaisajyaguru. The iconographic scheme of that painting, the “Assembly of the Four Buddhas” (Sabulhoe 四佛會), dating back to 1562 and made for Sangwōnsa 上院寺, is, however, so different that it cannot have been the model for the arrangement of the rosary (Kim Seunghye 2009, pp. 136–37). For the origins of a Korean tradition of worshiping these four Buddhas together, which appears to have no canonical basis, see Kim Soyeon 2019.

⁵⁵ Tsuda 2006, pp. 152–53, 156–57.

and one might surmise that they are listed here as objects of worship.⁵⁶ A different, and in a sense more mundane, explanation may be more apt, though. Knowledge regarding the lodgings played an important role in forms of divination used to determine auspicious and inauspicious days for all kinds of human activity. As such, indications of the lunar lodgings were an important part of almanacs, which in the nineteenth century constituted the most widely distributed form of printed matter in Korea (plate 5).⁵⁷ The almanacs registered the place in the sky where the moon rested during its passage through the lunar month, but the different lodgings were also associated with different parts of the year, and in accordance with this, the order of the lodgings in the print progresses neatly from spring, to summer and autumn, concluding with winter, thus mapping out the progress of the year.

It makes sense, therefore, to interpret the enumeration of the lodgings, which would be repeated in the almanacs month after month and year after year, as a representation of the quotidian flow, marked by months and seasons, of earthly life as it was lived by everyman. The narrative that then unfolds in the non-symmetric part of the print is one of life on earth, ending in death, followed by the purgatory of a succession of gruesome hells, in the middle of which Kṣitigarbha and his two helpers hold out a promise of delivery from all torments. This is then followed by a reference to Chiju Cheja, suggesting the possibility of salvation if one is reincarnated as a hungry ghost and, at the end, there is an ascending range of heavenly abodes of an increasingly spiritual nature that can be reached through meditation. The final station is Maitreya with his promise of a future paradise on earth. This narrative is framed on both sides by the symmetric enumeration, three on the right and three on the left, of the six *pāramitās*, suggesting the need for spiritual practice. In other words, the print presents a complete map of the route for life and the afterlife. This map also outlines a journey that in a sense ends where it began, something that will be further discussed below.

Although the text of the sutra quoted inside the chaplet suggests a much wider use, mentioning the name of Amitābha of course primarily recalls the practice of *yōmbul* 念佛, the mindful invocation of his name for the purpose of rebirth in the Western Paradise. In fact, Amitābha is a towering figure in late Chosŏn Buddhism, with its concentration on the achievement of a rebirth after death in his Pure Land, which effectively would stop the interminable cycle of reincarnation in the world of ordinary mankind, or even

⁵⁶ Also see Kotyk 2017.

⁵⁷ Yi Yunsök 2016, ch. 9.

as lower forms, thanks to the beneficial effect of Amitābha's preaching on those who manage to make it to his Pure Land.⁵⁸ As has often been pointed out, the pious wish for happiness in the afterlife for deceased parents very well agreed with the filial piety required by the dominant discourse of Confucianism. But as the devotional wish (*parwŏn*) at the bottom of the print makes clear, concern for the deceased also extended to consanguineal kin, and equally to persons who were junior to the devotee, indirectly pointing to lacunae in Confucian practices for the dead.

Among the figures surrounding the buddhas in symmetrical fashion at the top of the rosary there are four *vajra* bodhisattvas (Kūmgang Kwŏn Posal 金剛眷菩薩, Skt. Vajrasamadhī; Kūmgang Sak Posal 金剛索菩薩, Skt. Vajrapāśa; Kūmgang Ae Posal 金剛愛菩薩, Skt. Vajrarāga; and Kūmgang Ŏ Posal 金剛語菩薩, Skt. Vajrabhāṣa), together with eight *vajra* guardians (Ch'ōngjejae Kūmgang 青除災金剛, Pyŏktok Kūmgang 碧毒金剛, Hwangsgugu Kūmgang 黃隨求金剛, Paekchōngsu Kūmgang 白淨水金剛, Chōksōnghwa Kūmgang 赤聲火金剛, Chōngjejae Kūmgang 定除災金剛, Chahyŏnshin Kūmgang 紫賢神金剛, and Taeshillyŏk Kūmgang 大神力金剛). It would be easy to explain their appearance here merely as members of the host of secondary divine figures often seen in Buddhist paintings, the *shinjung* 神衆, without assigning a particular meaning to them. In late Chosŏn paintings, the four bodhisattvas and eight protectors were also depicted together, the former as typical, dignified bodhisattvas, and the protectors as brawny, fearsome brutes with protruding eyes, all brandishing some kind of weapon.⁵⁹ But this combination of four *vajra* bodhisattvas and eight *vajra* guardians points to a particular connection with the *Jingang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (Skt. *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra*; hereafter, *Diamond Sutra*).⁶⁰ These twelve figures are regarded as protectors of the believers who "hold on" to the sutra, and as such are invoked at the beginning of Korean editions of this scripture, both in the past and at present. When considering their meaning in the context of this print, it should also be noted that in Korea, again in the past as well as at present, the *Diamond Sutra* has a strong connection with a concern for the dead. In 1457, in the early Chosŏn period, for example, the king personally copied the text of the sutra to serve as the basis for a printing of the text for the happiness in the hereafter of the

⁵⁸ Kim Yongtae 2015, Walraven 2015.

⁵⁹ Hūngsŏn et al. 2003, pp. 175–81.

⁶⁰ Hūngsŏn et al. 2003, p. 174.

deceased crown prince.⁶¹ Much later, in 1883, the sutra was reprinted at the expense of the lay believer Sōwōl for the souls of his deceased parents.⁶² Nowadays the text of the sutra arranged in the shape of a pagoda is used in rituals immediately after death and when commemorating the dead, by both monks and shamans (plate 6).

Printed copies of this pagoda are easily available today in the Buddhist shops in front of Chogyesa in Seoul, but—more relevant in this context—in Courant's *Bibliographie coréenne*, a nineteenth-century version is mentioned that was printed in 1871.⁶³ The indirect connection, through the four bodhisattvas and eight protectors, with the *Diamond Sutra* as a sutra for the dead of course fits the purpose for which the rosary print was made according to its colophon.

The connection of the *Diamond Sutra* with death is confirmed by another addition to the introductory part of Korean editions of the sutra that expresses a wish for what holding on to the sutra might effect: that the believers may requite the Four Graces (which is typical of Chosŏn Buddhism's respect of the secular Confucian order) and overcome the hardships of the three evil reincarnations (in hell, as hungry ghosts, or as an animal). It is also hoped that if people read or hear the sutra, they will develop the aspiration for enlightenment (*pori sim* 菩提心; Skt. *bodhicitta*), and will be reborn together in the Land of Supreme Bliss (Kŭngnakkuk 極樂國).⁶⁴

One might raise the question whether, beyond the conventional association with death that is abundantly present in the parts of the rosary that outline the succession of hells (beads 48–71, including the beads for Chijang and his three helpers), and apart from the presence of the *vajra* bodhisattvas and *vajra* guardians, a more textual connection with the *Diamond Sutra* can be detected in the other parts of the rosary. At first this may seem unlikely in view of the baffling *via negativa* through which the emptiness of all conditioned phenomena is asserted in the sutra. Yet, the progression through the heavens of ever increasing abstruseness ends with a double negation that is reminiscent of the logic of the *Diamond Sutra*: the state of neither thinking

⁶¹ Yi Nŭnghwa 1918 (2010), pp. 138–39. The connection continues. Thus after the death of ex-president Roh Moo-hyun, monks recited the *Diamond Sutra* for his happiness in the afterlife; see http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/05/26/2009052601035.html?rsMobile=false, accessed January 28, 2018.

⁶² Courant 1997, no. 2629.

⁶³ Courant 1997, no. 2630–2.

⁶⁴ Chosŏn editions of the *Diamond Sutra* with such additions intended for ritual use can, for instance, be found in the Kyujanggak 奎章閣 collection at *gyujung* 奎中 381 and 382.

nor not-thinking (*pisangbibisangch'ō* 非想非非想處). The circular progression of the beads, ending at the same point where the counting started, is also in agreement with the content of the sutra. The highest state, perfect enlightenment, is not a remote destination, but potentially already present from the outset. The practitioner only needs to realize this.

In the late seventeenth century, a novel was written in Chosŏn that outlined the process of reaching this realization that is implicit in the *Diamond Sutra*.⁶⁵ This is *Kuunmong* 九雲夢 (A Nine Cloud Dream) by Kim Manjung 金萬重 (1637–1692), the most popular novel of the entire period among women, who loved painted or embroidered screens depicting scenes from the novel. It was still popular in the mid-nineteenth century. The story is about a promising young monk who, when sent on an errand on a beautiful spring day, meets eight fairies to whom he is strongly attracted and with whom he exchanges some pleasantries. Back in his monastery his master, who holds the *Diamond Sutra* in the highest regard, knows what happened and announces that the young man will die and be reincarnated as punishment. He is reborn as a talented young man who during his life meets the equally reincarnated fairies, marrying them all, and achieves fame and high office. At the end of his life, while he enjoys the autumn with his wives, he suddenly realizes the emptiness of it all, and is instantaneously transported to the monastery again. “He looked down at himself and saw a rosary of a hundred and eight beads around his wrist. He felt his head; it was freshly shaven.”⁶⁶ Then the Master preaches the *Diamond Sutra* and recites a famous verse from the concluding passage of the sutra:

All is dharma, illusion
A dream, a phantasm, bubble, shadow,
Evanescent as dew, transient as lightning;
And must be seen as such.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Chŏng 1976, pp. 231–45, 342–47; Bantly 1996.

⁶⁶ Rutt and Kim 1974, p. 175; Kim Manjung 1973, pp. 416–17.

⁶⁷ Rutt and Kim 1974, p. 176; Kim Manjung 1973, pp. 421–23. The first three lines are interpreted as referring to “all conditioned phenomena.” Paul Harrison renders the verse as:

A shooting star, a clouding of the sight, a lamp,
An illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble,
A dream, a lightning’s flash, a thunder cloud—
This is the way one should see the conditioned.

See University of Oslo, Faculty of Humanities, Biblioteca Polyglotta, at <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=record&vid=22&mid=115269>, accessed November 25, 2019.

The protagonist of the story and the eight fairies, who have turned into nuns, then at the same time achieve enlightenment, the true fruition *that neither arises nor perishes*. The young monk has come full circle, arriving eventually, after a long and exhilarating journey, at the place from which he had departed, but is now fully aware of his buddha-nature.⁶⁸

Thus, it is possible to regard the rosary and the *Kuunmong* both as popularizations of the *Diamond Sutra*, which in Korea is not only an extremely important philosophical text for Sōn Buddhism,⁶⁹ but also a prominent part of popular Buddhism. Whereas *Kuunmong* presents the teaching of the sutra in a beguilingly attractive, easily understood form,⁷⁰ the rosary with its progression from *kāmadhātu* to *rūpadhātu* and *ārūpadhātu* encapsulates both the sophistication of the sutra's teaching and the popular connection with its use in death rituals. The connections implicit in the rosary print with the *Diamond Sutra* and *Kuunmong* add potential layers of meaning to it that are relevant for its significance in practice and will be further discussed below.

The appearance of Maitreya with the last bead may be unexpected, because the preceding beads do not prepare for this, but it is in a way easy to understand as Maitreya represents what is coming in the future to our world, establishing an alternative heaven on earth. Because of this, the Chosōn period saw some rebellious millenarian movements that claimed the age of Maitreya had come. Maitreya was also materially present in the Korean landscape, where his name was attached to huge Buddha images that were the object of popular devotion.⁷¹ Devotion to Maitreya was often aimed at obtaining this-worldly benefits, and might merge with shamanic practices.⁷² The inclusion of Maitreya may be regarded as catering to the immediate worldly needs and desires of the believers. It also brings the reader of the glosses to the beads back to the world we live in, the world where Maitreya is due to appear, in other words, to the point of departure.

While it is possible to read the print in various ways, a crucial question that remains is to what extent people actually perceived the various meanings

⁶⁸ Chōng 1976, p. 242.

⁶⁹ Muller 2006, p. 44.

⁷⁰ See Bantly 1996, p. 162: "The threefold structure of *Kuunmong* details a progression of spiritual understanding that is parallel to the *Diamond Sutra*'s negation and final affirmation of form."

⁷¹ Such images were not necessarily created to represent Maitreya from the outset. An example is the image of Kwanch'ok-sa 灌燭寺 in Ŭnjin 恩津, which probably was intended as a representation of Avalokiteśvara.

⁷² Kim Yongt'ae 2014, p. 129.

suggested above. The basic meaning, that of a route map for life and death, is quite evident and will have been clear to most who saw the print or received a simple explanation of the meanings of the beads; but to what extent would the other aspects of the print have been detected? One might conjecture that because of the language in which the messages were couched, the print could not be read by the majority of people. However, the number of those who had some knowledge of *hanmun* should not be underestimated. Literacy in Chosŏn is notoriously difficult to measure, but according to the *Veritable Records* (*Chosŏn wangjo shillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄; Chŏngjo 正祖 24 [1800], third month, twenty-first day), there were no fewer than 118,838 applicants for the literary examinations (which of course required mastery of *hanmun*), of whom 38,614 actually handed in examination essays.⁷³ This suggests that there were quite a few people around who might understand the text of the print or could at least grasp its basic meaning, and they in turn would be able to explain what was written to those who could not read at all.

POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE ROSARY PRINT

One source of the performativity of the rosary print is of course the way the rosary itself functions: in the first instance, to count expressions of devotion, but, more importantly, also as an object with sacred and symbolic power. On the one hand, rosaries are symbols of spiritual authority and clerical identity, as in the portraits of important masters, who are nearly always depicted holding one.⁷⁴ In *Kuunmong* we have seen that the rosary was first mentioned among the characteristics of a monk when the protagonist returned to his original, more spiritual identity. On the other hand, as an accessory that was essential for the extremely widely practiced popular devotion of the mindful invocation of Amitābha, *yŏmbul*,⁷⁵ the rosary was part of the daily life of lay believers.⁷⁶ Thus, at the same time it was a sign and symbol of their faith and of their association with the professional handlers of the rosary, the clergy. It was the only attribute they shared with the monks, who were exclusively entitled to the other material signs of their identity, the monk's staff and the clerical robes. In this way the rosary mediates the space between professional practitioners and ordinary believers. For both, carry-

⁷³ Yi Yunsök 2016, pp. 35–36.

⁷⁴ Hŭngsŏn et al. 2003, pp. 257–313.

⁷⁵ Kim Yongt'ae 2015.

⁷⁶ Its popularity is also reflected in the wide use of the rosary by shamans and their clients (Walraven 2010).

ing a rosary was a means to identify their status as Buddhist practitioners. Additionally, even the mere act of piously carrying one was supposed to contribute to the achievement of salvation. In popular practice the rosary was and is also carried as an amulet (plate 7) that protects and brings the fulfilment of wishes. By explaining and exalting the uses of the rosary, the print also served these functions.

The ways to mentally consecrate the rosary and make it more meaningful than a counting tool are manifold. By their very number, the 108 beads of the most common rosaries are of course a reminder of the 108 passions or defilements that stand in the way of enlightenment, the foremost instance of charging the beads with meaning. But there are numerous efforts to further charge the beads, and also the thread that joins them, with a particular significance, some of which have been described in the literature about rosaries in China and Japan.⁷⁷ In Japan, interpretations of the significance of the beads frequently link the rosaries to esoteric mandalas. The Korean variant of the attempt to charge the rosary with meaning in the print that is the focus here does not have connections with esoteric mandalas, but may very well be considered a mandala according to the definition given by Elisabeth Ten Grotenhuis: “The mandala, a kind of cosmic ground plan or map, lays out a sacred territory or realm in microcosm, showing the relations among the various powers active in that realm and offering devotees a sacred precinct where enlightenment takes place.”⁷⁸ The goal of enlightenment is clearly present both in the text from the sutras in the middle, as well as in the succession of heavens at the end of the circle; it should be noted, though, that short of enlightenment, the print also emphasizes the possibility of deliverance from the purgatorial torture chambers and rebirth in the Pure Land.

Many elements of the print are also present in the *Kamno t'aeng* 甘露幀, the Sweet-Dew paintings, which from the mid-sixteenth century form a characteristic feature of Chosŏn Buddhism. In the *Kamno t'aeng*, one sees depictions of daily life in this world, juxtaposed with scenes from hell and the realm of the hungry spirits, together with indications of the means that allow an escape from samsara, with the help of the clergy and, above all, the buddhas and bodhisattvas represented in the upper portions of the paintings. The Sweet-Dew paintings in turn share many characteristics with the Japanese depictions of the *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* 熊野觀心十界

⁷⁷ Kieschnick 2003, Mross 2017.

⁷⁸ Ten Grotenhuis 1999, p. 2.

曼荼羅, which depict life, death, and rebirth.⁷⁹ It is intriguing that the latter show a clearer representation of the course of human life than the Sweet-Dew paintings, making them even more similar conceptually to the Korean rosary print. Seen from another angle, as a completely verbal, aniconic mandala, the rosary print relates to the Sweet-Dew paintings in the same way that in Japan the purely verbal Nichiren-shū *daimoku mandara*⁸⁰ relates to the more vivid visualization of the *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara*.

The print further contributes to the sacralization of the use of the rosary by its invocation of scriptures that emphasize the miraculous efficacy of its use, which going far beyond its usefulness as a tool to count devotions, promises a shortcut to salvation; it also does so by supercharging the beads with meanings that suggest more than one pathway to redemption. The quotation from the *Mu huanzi jing* describes the constant and concentrated invocation of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha as a practice of mindfulness that eventually will guarantee nirvana. Those who doubt their ability to practice this are encouraged by other quotations that assure the devotee that particular materials of which the rosary can be made will also enhance its efficacy. Pure Land practices closely associated with the rosary and the Buddha Amitābha, extremely popular in the Chosŏn period where sectarian differences as found in Japan were nonexistent, suggested an alternative that focused on rebirth in paradise rather than on nirvana. In this way, the association with the Pure Land linked the print with life after death, which in the Chosŏn period was one of the main concerns of Buddhism. It matches the colophon stating the wishes of Pak Yŏngsŏhwa, the donor of the carving of the print, for her deceased relatives. The relationship with life after death is reinforced by the implicit association of the print I have suggested with the *Diamond Sutra*, with its strong link to Korean death rituals.

Rebirth in paradise might be conceived as a literal transfer to the realm of Amitābha, but although that will have been how a majority of believers imagined it, among learned monks a different interpretation existed, which did not view rebirth in the Pure Land as involving coming or going to a remote realm in a literal sense, but as the realization that salvation is already present or can be realized in the here and now.⁸¹ The idea that enlightenment involves a journey of growing awareness, which if successful will bring the

⁷⁹ Kaminishi 2006.

⁸⁰ Dolce 2002.

⁸¹ Chang 1996, p. 639. The idea was taken up by the early twentieth-century reformer Han Yongun 韓龍雲 (1879–1944). See Han [1910] 2016, pp. 130–32.

practitioner to the point of departure is, as outlined above, a concept that also can be read in the rosary, as in the similar circular structure of the novel *Kuunmong*. In this way, the rosary print lends itself to a quite sophisticated interpretation. An understanding of the nature of the abstruse heavens enumerated at the end of the circle would reinforce such an interpretation.

The beads representing the Four Graces emphasize the debt one has to the monarch, teachers, seniors, and one's parents, bringing the rosary in agreement with the Confucian sacred order. A suggestion of this agreement can also be seen in the peculiar character mentioned above that is used to write "buddha," which is not found in any dictionary but can nonetheless readily be understood as such because it immediately follows the names of Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Maitreya. Such things, however, do not mean that Buddhism submitted fully to Confucian norms, but rather constitute a defensive strategy, arguing that Buddhism, while maintaining its own truths and aims, does not fall short of Confucian standards, which was a common apologetic stance.⁸²

While every believer could identify with the basic life and afterlife trajectory outlined in the identifications of the beads in the print, and in this way make it personal, the print more specifically personalized the devotion, and thereby the merit, of the donor, Pak Yōngsōhwa. Put in this way, this fully accords with the karmic logic formulated within Buddhism itself. But we may assume that donating funds for such a purpose also served a psychological purpose, reassuring the donor in a concrete, material form that her act would benefit her and those she cared for, thus providing mental peace and serenity. This, in turn, would serve to strengthen her relations with the clergy. In this way, too, the print served as a medium in the interactions between Pak Yōngsōhwa and the monks.

On the other hand, the single line Landis devotes to the ubiquity of the print suggests that it was also of importance for the practice of the great mass of devotees who had not increased their merit by directly investing in its carving. They may have received a smaller dose of merit by buying a print made from the woodblock, the meaning of which the clergy will have explained to them to a certain extent. Alternatively, it may also have been explained by the monks to those who could neither sponsor a carving nor make a donation to obtain a print.

⁸² A striking example of this strategy is the lengthy petition that the monk Ch'ōnūng (1617–1680) sent to the government at a time when policies against Buddhism were unusually harsh (Paekkok 2015, pp. 326–73).

It can be confidently averred that few people will have understood all the meanings of the print suggested above. This does not, however, make the meanings that were not understood, or only partly understood, insignificant. The increasingly subtle heavens enumerated at the end will have had but little significance for a majority of believers. But that does not imply that they did not serve a purpose. They constituted a surplus of meaning, difficult to penetrate for the average person, which protected the authority of the learned clergy. In this sense, too, the print had the potential to lend direction and form to the relations between the Buddhism institutionalized in the monkhood and monasteries and the believers of different social classes.

In its totality the rosary print potentially contains references to a wide array of Buddhist concepts and practices, which is typical of the eclectic, non-sectarian nature of Chosŏn Buddhism. Of course, the rosary is most closely linked to the invocation of Amitābha to be reborn in the Pure Land, but that itself might be understood in two ways, as a rebirth in a paradise in an actual location, remote from our world, or as a spiritual rebirth in the here and now that involves neither coming nor going. The use of the rosary and the making of the print are also a way to save loved ones from the torments of the many hells and ensure their rebirth in the Pure Land. In the text in the central part of the print it is also suggested that the invocation can become a spiritual, or even magical, practice that will bring happiness or bliss. But Amitābha is not the only goal of the journey outlined in the print, but only one of the three buddhas at the top. If the final goal is Maitreya, it may be understood as (rebirth in) the paradise on earth that will be realized when Maitreya descends from the Tuṣita heaven. If it is Śakyamuni, the final goal may be understood as achieving buddhahood itself, through one's own efforts. The way towards that is implied in the succession of *dhyāna* heavens, the heavens one may reach if one practices meditation. The allusions to the *Diamond Sutra* are linked to the popular Korean use of the sutra for happiness in the hereafter (*myŏngbok* 冥福) for the deceased, but on the other hand may also point to the sophisticated Buddhist ontology and logic of the sutra, which would rather appeal to the highly educated. In short, the potential of the print is such that it provides something for believers of whatever background and ability. In this way it is a prime manifestation of *upāya*.

Abbreviation

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次朗 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.

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