

Beyond Printing

: Looking at the Use and East Asian Context
of Dhāraṇī Sūtras in Medieval Korea

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1. Introduction

As the title intends to convey, this article seeks to open a new perspective on two dhāraṇī sūtras²⁾ that have become very

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2) I use the term “dhāraṇī sūtras” for short sūtras that are usually aimed at explaining the importance of one or more specific dhāraṇīs. In Chinese they are often simply designated “tuoluoni jing” 陀羅尼經 (K. taranigyōng).

2 종교학 연구

famous in Korea. Like other categories of Buddhist texts, the dhāraṇī corpus is vast and complicated; all the more so because dhāraṇīs have been incorporated in many standard Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus sūtra* or *Diamond sūtra*. There are many debates about their origins, purported relation to esoteric Buddhism or Tantric Buddhism, their meaning and use, textual development and translation, etc. Above all, however, they have been studied as material evidence for the development of printing in Korea. In this paper, however, my main concern is simply this: how did these texts function in the religious lives of medieval Koreans (i.e., Unified Silla and Koryŏ)? In other words, how can they be used as a window into Buddhist practice? Every generation reads its own concerns back into texts, and thus ignores how previous generations have adapted them. Without external evidence of how they were used and interpreted, Buddhist texts tell us little about the faith and concerns of, in this case, medieval Koreans. Thus a key concern in this paper is how to use external evidence for interpreting these texts.

Hagiographies, miracle stories, diaries etc. of course do offer us a glimpse into the imaginaire of medieval China, Korea, and Japan. Yet these materials are also highly conventionalized, portraying the way things ought to be or what was thought to be worth recording. Archeology or anthropology, however, offer a way to look at people's values expressed in action, revealing a very different side of past mentalities, or at least a corrective of the written record.³⁾ Here is where the dhāraṇī sūtras can

On the concept of dhāraṇī, see Richard D. McBride, "Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* 28:1 (2005): 85-114.

3) Here Robert Herz's insight in using treatment of dead bodies as index of belief can serve as a model. Robert Herz, "A Contribution to the Study

play an important role: given the detailed instructions some of them contain regarding how they are to be venerated, looking at how and if these were actually put into practice can provide important new insights.

In Korea, two dhāraṇī texts in particular appear to have been prominent, the “Undeified Pure Light” and “Treasure Casket Seal” dhāraṇī sūtras (more information on their titles below). Although they were used in other East Asian countries as well, they are especially well attested in Unified Silla (for the former) and early Koryō (for the latter). Especially when we consider the material evidence related to them (as opposed to, for example, the mention of dhāraṇī sūtras in texts), their prominence is all the more striking. Yet they were also known and used in Tang/Song China, Japan, the Liao kingdom etc., but evidently in different ways, with different levels of prominence. This is where the problematic of this paper can be found: why were these two texts so prominent in Korea (and were they actually, or has our perception somehow been distorted)? How were they enshrined, how faithful was this enshrinement to the instruction of the text itself, how did the enshrinement differ among these countries and what does this reveal about religious belief and practice?

Since the Undeified Pure Light dhāraṇī sūtra contains specific instructions on how it is to be copied, inserted into small pagodas etc., and contains six different dhāraṇīs with different instructions, and since it is evident from Unified Silla and

of the Collective Representation of Death,” in Needham, Rodney, and Claudia Needham tr., *Death and the Right Hand* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960). On the hermeneutical problems inherent in this assumption see eg. Christian de Pee’s work on Song burials; “Till Death Do Us Unite: Texts, Tombs, and the Cultural History of Weddings in Middle-Period China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 65:4 (2006): 691–712.

other archeological sites that these instructions were put into practice, it is obvious that this text offers a unique case study of how people tried to put its—often ambiguous—instructions into practice, and hence a window into actual practice “on the ground.” Yet, as will become clear, the archeological evidence is still open to many interpretations. It is therefore useful to start by looking at previous research on the question of textual relics and their enshrinement, to see what kind of conclusions can be drawn from this, and also to discern some main trends and developments as well as potential pitfalls. Next, we will look at the case of the “Undeiled Pure Light,” its background and epistemic strategy, and its spread, reproduction and associated practices in East Asia. The third part of this paper is devoted to the “Treasure Casket Seal” *dhāraṇī sūtra*, more specifically the question whether or not it replaces the “Undeiled Pure Light” and why.

It should be emphasized that this is very much a preliminary survey. Although the “Undeiled Pure Light” *sūtra* in particular has been amply studied, there are a number of controversies that remain unresolved; in particular, the archeological data is contested, and moreover it is difficult to access key artifacts. This paper is based mainly on what can be found in published sources, but it is obvious that more careful study is needed of documents and artifacts.

2. Textual Relics and their Interpretation

Although the *dhāraṇī* corpus has many doctrinal, ritual, and symbolic meanings, here I would like to focus specifically on their role in the production of relics. As will become clear in the discussion of their contents and discourses, this was

obviously a key concern.

It is now almost commonplace to note the importance of the relic cult in Buddhism, including the veneration of both the “physical relics” (眞身舍利) of the Buddha and the “dharma relics” (法身舍利) or the textual relics of the Buddha’s dharma body.⁴⁾ Both are also connected to the so-called cult of the stūpa, the main repository for them. While the stūpa came to symbolize (or represent) the presence of the Buddha and his teachings,⁵⁾ this of course depended ultimately on the presence of relics inside. Originally the stūpa enshrined only physical relics, but in the course of time “dharma relics” also gained prominence—indeed, they could be seen as more “real” because they represent the timeless dharma body of the Buddha (*dharmakāya*), as opposed to the temporary transformation body (*nirmanakāya*) used by Śakyamuni.

The earliest development of the insertion of dharma relics is hard to trace: on the one hand, the cult of the book prepared the ground for this practice,⁶⁾ but the earliest firm evidence of the placement of texts in stūpas is the use of the so-called “Verse of Interdependent Origination” (aka. Buddhist Creed; 緣起法頌); this verse, often stamped in clay, “became a manifestation of the Buddha’s real presence at cultic centers—in the same way as relics were thought to infuse the living presence of the Buddha in *stūpas*.”⁷⁾ This practice is also

4) One of the best introductions to the terminology and issues in the study of relics in East Asian Buddhism is Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy. A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), especially chapter 7, “Metamorphoses of the Double (I): Relics.”

5) See Yael Bentor, “On the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and Dhāranīs in Stūpas and Images,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115:2 (1995), 250.

6) See Bentor, “On the Indian Origins,” 251 for examples.

attested in Silla, though the dating is uncertain.⁸⁾ Chinese pilgrims to India such as Xuanzang 玄藏 (600/602-664) and Yijing 義淨 (635-713) noted this practice in their records, though the Buddhist Creed itself was not frequently attested in China. That is probably because around the middle of the first millennium dhāraṇī sūtras emerged to take on the same role as the creed: many of these sūtras advocated the practice of depositing their text in stūpas, which would be the equivalent of putting the relics of all Tathāgatas in them.⁹⁾ This strategy will also be noted in the texts discussed in more detail below. Indeed, since many of the earliest dhāraṇī sūtras translated into Chinese incorporated the Buddhist Creed, it may well be that it was first properly introduced to China through such dhāraṇī sūtras.¹⁰⁾

While the basic program of these dhāraṇīs is thus well known, their emergence created new problems: what, then, was their relation with physical relics? Did they replace physical

7) Daniel Boucher, "The Pratītyasamutpādagātha and its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics," *Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* 14:1 (1991), 15. Boucher also argues convincingly that the term "Buddhist Creed" is a misnomer, since its purpose is not to confess the faith but to attest the presence of the Buddha. For the sake of convenience, however, I will continue to use the term "Buddhist Creed."

8) See *Pōp - sori ōmnūn karūch'im* (Pulgyo chungang pangmulgwan, 2008), p. 154. The dating of this clay-stamped version is uncertain. See also Jan Fontein, "Śarīra Reliquary from Pagoda of Powōn-sa Temple," *Misul charyo* 47 (1991), 107 for another example.

9) Bantor, "On the Indian Origins," 252.

10) The "creed" is first incorporated in the *Zaota gongde jing* (more on this text in section 3), translated in 680. Boucher has translated this text, which as far as I know is the first mention of the creed in Chinese sources: "The Pratītyasamutpādagātha," 8-10. However, the creed itself appears on the base of miniature stūpas in Dunhuang as early as the fifth century: *Ibid.*, 5, 19 n. 22.

relics or not? Which dhāraṇīs, among the many that appeared, should be used by the faithful, and how? Two interesting previous studies point to the complexity of these problems, and how they were resolved differently in two different contexts.

Eugene Wang, most notably, has argued for the continued relevance of the physical remains of the Buddha. In his analysis of the relic cache beneath the Famen Temple 法門寺, last closed in 874 before its discovery in 1987, he argues that in this context, an opposite trend took place: while the term true body (*zhenshen* 真身) previously referred to the dharma body (invisible essence), in China after Empress Wu (則天武后, 624-705) it came to refer to the physical, deceased body—hence the tomb-shaped reliquaries that were used. An interesting corollary of this was that it was also imbued with resurrection-rebirth beliefs: thus emperors buried hair or other “substitutes” of their own bodies in order to be reborn through the relics.¹¹⁾

By contrast, in the Khitan Liao empire, Shen Hsueh-man notes the consistent supremacy of dharma relics: since texts represent the dharma body, they were also seen as guarantors of the survival of the dharma, important at a time which many believed was the final days of the dharma. She notes especially the prominence of the “Precious Casket Seal” for its ability to maintain the law during the *mofa* period,¹²⁾ and the “Undefined

11) Eugene Y. Wang, “Of the True Body: The Famen Monastery Relics and Corporeal Transformation in Tang Imperial Culture, in *Body and Face in Chinese Traditional Culture*, ed. Wu Hung and Katherine T. Mino. (Harvard University Press, 2004).

12) Cf. also Kwak Sünghun, “Koryŏ chŏn’gi ‘Ich’e yŏraesim pimil chŏnsin sari pohyŏb’in taranigyŏng’ kanhaeng,” *Asia munhwa* 12 (1996), 127: according to him, this sūtra has the power to recall Buddhas even after disappearance of the dharma.

Pure Light” as “most favored sūtra among all Liao relic deposits”;¹³⁾ however, their specific role is not discussed in detail. Building on Jan Fontein’s insights, and basically complementary to Eugene Wang’s interpretation, she concludes that the Liao were better believers as they were not attached to the bodily remains, but to the dharma body alone;¹⁴⁾ it remains to be seen whether this can also apply to the Koreans.

While there is a huge body of literature that continues to refine our views of the role of dhāraṇī sūtras in the dharma relic cult, I think these two views can nicely frame the debate, in which we will now try to see first how the Unified Silla cult of the “Undefined Pure Light” fits into this story.

3. The Undefined Pure Light Dhāraṇī Sūtra and its Use

The *Mugu chōnggwang tae tarani kyōng* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼經, “Great Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Undefined Pure Light,”¹⁵⁾ is very well

13) Shen Hsueh-man, “Realizing the Buddha’s Dharma Body during the *Mofa* period: A Study of Liao Buddhist Relic Deposits.” *Artibus Asiae* 61, no 2 (2001), 272.

14) Shen Hsueh-man, “Realizing the Buddha’s Dharma Body during the *Mofa* period.” 296-7.

15) Reconstructed Sanskrit title: *Raśmivimalaviśuddhaprabhā-dhāraṇī*, T 1024. See Richard D. McBride II, “Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy: The Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism,” *Journal of Korean Religions* 2:1 (2011): 33-73 for an introduction to the text. It was translated by Mitrasena (or Mitraśānta) in 704. See Timothy Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra in China, c.656-706 CE,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 18:1 (2001), 51 ff for inferences about how it came about. For a reproduction of the original scroll, see Pulgyo Chungang pangmulgwan, National Museum of Korea, *Kyōngjōn* (Pulgyo Chungang Pangmulgwan, 2009). (Pulguk-sa Sōkkat’ap yumul pogosō, v. 1). This original scroll uses many of the so-called “Empress Wu characters”,

known in South Korea ever since the discovery of a printed scroll of this text in the Sökka t'ap (Śakyamuni stūpa) of Pulguk-sa in 1966. However, most of the research devoted to it deals with the problem of when it was printed—though generally considered to have been printed in Korea before 751, there is no firm evidence for this; many Chinese scholars argue that what was discovered in the stūpa was a print imported from China. The recent decipherment of documents that were inserted together with the scroll in the stūpa casts further doubt on its date of production. The documents show that the pagoda was extensively repaired in 1024 and 1038 following damage by earthquakes. At this occasion, the relic hoard was taken out and later reinserted; although most scholars agree the original copy of the “Undefined Pure Light” sūtra was simply re-inserted after the repairs, and not newly manufactured at the time, there remains a lot of uncertainty regarding the composition of the relic hoard, and how far it reflects the original composition at the first construction of the stūpa ca. 751.¹⁶⁾

Recently there have also appeared a number of studies that look at the context of the scripture, asking for example why it was so popular¹⁷⁾ or what its effect was on the construction

created during her reign; the version later reprinted in the Haein-sa tripitaka however uses standard characters. Otherwise the contents appears to be identical.

- 16) Pulgyo Chungang pangmulgwan, National Museum of Korea, *Chungsu munsu* (Seoul: Pulgyo Chungang pangmulgwan, 2009) (Pulguk-sa Sökka t'ap yumul pogosŏ, v. 2); Ch'oe Yŏnsik, “Pulguksa Sŏsŏkt'ap chungsu hyŏngjigi ūi chaegusŏng ūl t'onghan Pulguksa sŏkt'ap chungsu kwallyŏn naeyong ūi chaegŏmt'o,” *Chindan hakpo* 105 (2008): 1-35. For a refutation of theories that the sūtra was made in Koryŏ, see Kim Sung-Soo, “Mugu *chŏnggwang tae tarani kyŏng* ūi kanhaeng sigi e taehan chaegŏmchŏng yŏn'gu,” *Sŏjihak yŏn'gu* 36 (2007): 39-79.

and typology of Silla stūpas.¹⁸⁾ Yet, by and large there has not yet been any systematic study as to how the text's instructions were put into practice in Korea, and how its practice in Korea differed from other countries. Another unique aspect of this text is that it is not only well documented in Unified Silla stūpa deposits, but also in Japan and Khitan Liao, and to a lesser extent in Tang and Song China.

Before looking at how it affected stūpa-centered devotion, it is useful to recount in brief the contents of the text. It starts with a desperate Brahmin who, having been told he has only one week to live, seeks out the Buddha, begging for a way to extend his life. The Buddha paints him a particularly grim picture of his future existences:

Great Brahmin, it has been decided that you will die in seven days, You will fall in the fearful Avici hell and from there again enter sixteen hells. After emerging you will again receive the body of a *kidhara. After its lifespan ends, you will again be reborn as a dog, and constantly dwell in foul mud and eat excrement. During that life you will receive many difficulties. Again you will attain the state of man [but] deprived and lowly; impure and filthy, with ugly appearance and dark emaciated complexion. Withered like wood and sick, it will be an unpleasant sight. His throat like a needle, always lacking drink and food, receiving kicks and beatings and all kinds of sufferings. (T. 1024.717c-718a)

However, he then points out a simple way to not only extend his life, but also to ensure happy rebirths and eventual

17) Wŏn Sŏnhŭi, "Silla hadae Mugu chŏngt'ap ŭi kŏllip kwa Mugu chŏnggwang tae taranigyŏng sinang," *Han'gukhak nonch'ong* 30 (2008): 125-168. Kwak Sŭnghun, "Chŏnsin sari pohyŏp taranigyŏng."

18) Ch'oe Minhŭi, "T'ongil silla samch'ŭng sŏkt'ap ŭi ch'ulhyŏn kwa *Chot'ap kongdŏk kyŏng* ŭi kwangye koch'al," *Pulgyo kogohak* 3 (2003): 63-79.

deliverance: repair a dilapidated pagoda, insert a dhāraṇī in its finial spire, and intone a spell seven times. Then apparently addressing the whole congregation, Buddha further urges everyone to restore old pagodas or make small mud pagodas, and write and copy dhāraṇī spells according to prescribed rules.

As the Brahmin goes away to repair the pagoda, the bodhisattva “remover of hindrances” (除蓋障菩薩, Sarvanīvaranaviskambhin) queries the Buddha as to what that dhāraṇī actually is. The rest of the sūtra is then taken up by the description of six dhāraṇī spells and explanations of their purpose and use. The first is called the “root dhāraṇī:” after reciting it, the Buddha explains that it can be practiced only on certain days (8th, 13th, 14th, 15th), by circumambulating a stūpa 77 times and chanting it 77 times (presumably once every circumambulation). Furthermore it should be copied 77 times, and copies placed in stūpas, or 77 small stūpas made and copies placed in them. However, it does not end here: various other instructions are given, eg. on preparing an altar for sick people,¹⁹⁾ on practices for the dead, for ordinary people—even animals will be reassured eventual enlightenment if passing in the shadow of such a stūpa; finally the Buddha also states that countries with such stūpas will be protected from evil.

As can be seen, there is a great variety of acts of worship, and it is not clear whether these are to be combined or whether these are options—the latter seems more likely. As more dhāraṇīs are introduced and explained, the program becomes even more complex. The second dhāraṇī is called “finial prop dhāraṇī” as it was evidently to be placed in this part of a

19) See McBride, “Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy,” 44; interestingly, the rite for the sick involves setting up an altar and creating an image of Vinayaka, the “hinderer” (represented often as Ganesha) – the alter ego of “remover of hindrances” Sarvanīvaranaviskambhin?

stūpa. This time the dhāraṇī should be copied 99 times, a figure said to equal 99,000 Buddha *śarīra*, among others. Stūpas containing it can offer great blessings to people worshiping it or even animals that pass in its shadow. The third dhāraṇī is called the “constructing or repairing Buddha stūpas dhāraṇī”—before constructing a stūpa, this spell is to be chanted 1,008 times. As before, it is also advocated for people about to die, who will witness an infinitely large number of Buddhas (99 million nayutas).

Here the Buddha also emphasizes its “impression method” (*yinpōp*, Ch. *yinfā* 印法), which is singled out for great praise from the assembled bodhisattvas and other worthies. In fact, “Remover of hindrances bodhisattva” is so impressed that he offers in reply the fourth dhāraṇī, the “self-mind impression dhāraṇī.” This “impression method” is usually interpreted as “the secret mudrā passed on by a teacher to a disciple who has not mastered the dhāraṇī practice well.”²⁰⁾ Thus, in a sense the dhāraṇī has to be “impressed on the mind of the chanter.” Yet in my reading this term is more ambiguous. The only explanation, given before the praise of this method, is as follows:

Thus, bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas and upāsikās, as for the method of copying this dhāraṇī according to the dharma, since his purity of mind and reverend offering is no different from a Buddha, the copyist should also be offered to (as if he were Buddha). If the above-mentioned written spell has been printed, it should be placed in the stūpa... ²¹⁾
(T.1024.719b26-29)

20) Ven. Yōngwan, Pulgyo chungang pangmulgwan, *Kyōngjōn*.

21) 若比丘比丘尼優婆塞優婆夷。如法書寫陀羅尼法。以清淨心尊重供養如佛無異。於書寫人亦增上供養。如前所說書呪印已。置於塔中及所修塔內并相輪椽中如法成就。

Of course, other readings may be possible; for example, the last sentence could also be translated “If the above-mentioned written spell has been impressed [on the mind],...” Thus, it may well be the concept of “impressing,” whether on paper or on the mind, that is important here. While not credited in the sūtra itself, we know from other sources that the famous Huayan patriarch Fazang 法藏 (643–712) was also involved in the creation/translation of this sūtra, and as Chen Jinhua has shown, the idea of multiplication and perfect, instantaneous reproduction greatly appealed to him, as they meshed with the core Huayan idea of perfect integration and reflection.²²⁾

Indeed, the fourth dhāraṇī is spoken by the bodhisattva “Remover of Hindrances” in response to the Buddha’s teaching of the “impression method.” It emphasizes the different kinds of practices that devotion to a stūpa with this sūtra can lead to; e.g. chanting it 11,000 times (while circumambulating a stūpa containing it, presumably) can lead to becoming a Tathāgatha.²³⁾ The fifth and sixth dhāraṇīs are also spoken by this bodhisattva, and concern similar themes as before (number five stipulates that pagodas should be made with the previous four dhāraṇīs in it), while also introducing the notion of the six pāramitās; dhāraṇī 6 seems to imply that it can defend the one who bears it but also allows him to spread its benefits to other people.²⁴⁾

22) Chen Jinhua, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician: The Many Lives of Fazang (643–712)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 216. Note that Fazang also uses the term *yinfa* 印法 in his writings, apparently in the meaning of “printing”. Ibid., 212.

23) See McBride, “Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy,” 46–47.

24) There is some debate as what the fifth and sixth dhāraṇī should be called. Here I follow Pak Sangguk, in Pulgyo chungang pangmulgwan,

Table 1: Six dhāraṇīs in the “Undefined Pure Light”

Chinese name	Translation	Spoken by
1. 根本陀羅尼	Root	Buddha
2. 相輪櫟陀羅尼	Finial prop	Buddha
3. 修造佛塔陀羅尼	Constructing or repairing Buddha stūpas	Buddha
4. 自心印陀羅尼	Self-mind impression	Remover of hindrances bodhisattva
5. [大功德聚陀羅尼]	Great merit gathering	Ibid.
6. [六波羅蜜陀羅尼]	Six perfections	Ibid.

Although the current version translated by Mitrāsena 彌陀山 in 704 purports to be a reworking of an earlier translation by Śikṣanānda, there is no record of such an earlier version, and it is very much possible that the sūtra was an apocryphal one,²⁵⁾ or a heavily edited one, made to suit the needs of Empress Wu. Thus the theme of a Brahmin seeking escape from certain death resonates with the aging empress.²⁶⁾ However, the basic purport of the text, creating dharma relic stūpas, is crucial in

Kyōngjōn, 101-102.

25) It is striking that the chief bodhisattva in this text, 除蓋障菩薩: Sarvanīvaranaviskambhin: “remover of hindrances bodhisattva” is chief object of veneration in the Removal of Hindrances group in the garbhadhātu mandala in esoteric Buddhism (DDB), and appears prominently in the *Ratnamegha sūtra*, where he poses 102 questions to the Buddha. The *Ratnamegha sūtra* (大雲經) was also manipulated by Empress Wu for legitimation purposes. See Antonino Forte. *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century* (Kyoto: Instituto Universitaria Orientale, 1976).

26) Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra,” 51; citing Osabe.

its popularity, and in this it echoes many other similar texts of the time. From ca. 680 there were in fact numerous (dhāraṇī) sūtras translated that have similar messages: e.g. the *Zaota gongde jing* 造塔功德經,²⁷⁾ the *Baiqian yin tuoluoni jing* 百千印陀羅尼經.²⁸⁾ But perhaps the “Undeified Pure Light” is unique in the broad offering of various ways of realizing dharma relic stūpas and their attending benefits.

Thus when the text was first introduced to Korea, likely the authority of its official Chinese bestowal played an important role,²⁹⁾ but certainly its contents and programs also resonated with ongoing developments. It is first attested in an inscription for Hwangbok-sa pagoda dated 706. The pagoda was made for several deceased royals, and the inscription lists the “Undeified Pure Light” as one of the items that were deposited together with the relics; the text itself has not been preserved (presumably decayed), but the outer case for the relics is embossed with 99 small pagodas, clearly in accordance with the “Undeified Pure Light.” The “imprint” of the pagodas recalls the practice of stamping small pagodas together with the “Buddhist Creed” on clay tiles, while the idea itself of enshrining dhāraṇī as textual relics was likely also already established.³⁰⁾ Thus while the text was presumably accepted, its program was initially only partly accepted (i.e. images were made of stūpas rather than the full stūpas), as can be expected—the wholesale acceptance of new practices is usually not something that happens in the space of less than two years.

The next dated occurrence of its practice is for the

27) T. 699; Ch’oe Minhŭi, “T’ongil silla samch’ŭng sŏkt’ap.”

28) T. 1369; Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra,” 50.

29) McBride, “Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy,” 50, citing Chen Jinhua.

30) Ch’oe Minhŭi, “T’ongil silla samch’ŭng sŏkt’ap.”

Śakyamuni pagoda of Pulguk-sa. This is the only case in which the complete text itself has been preserved, but in this case the deposit does not follow the sūtra's instructions. The text itself was placed simply inside the gilt-bronze casket containing the relic case and other objects,³¹⁾ while other texts (including the "Precious casket seal;" see below) were placed simply underneath the relic casket. Remnants of small wooden pagodas were also found around the relic casket. While this could thus serve as a perfect example of how the sūtra's program was put into practice in Korea, unfortunately it is now clear that what was discovered in 1966 was not the deposit in its original state from the eighth century. A reconstruction record recently deciphered indicates that the stūpa, together with its sister pagoda known as the Tabot'ap (Prabhutaratna, many treasures), had been repaired in 1024 and 1038. The reconstruction record details how copies were stored in both pagodas at the time, but it is unclear whether these were copies from the original deposit that were simply re-inserted or newly made prints.³²⁾

In any case, the relic deposit is now certain to be not the one originally conceived. Probably as a result of that, there are some striking deviations from the "Undefined Pure Light" prescriptions: for example, in the repair record mention is made of "nine pieces" of the sūtra inserted in the Tabot'ap pagoda and fifteen wooden pagodas stored in the West pagoda (Śakyamuni pagoda), none of which corresponds to the original program.³³⁾

31) See e.g. the pictures in Ri Songjae, "Pulguk-sa Sōkkat'ap palgyōn toen 'Pohyōb'in taranigyōng' sagyōng ūi sōp'ung," *Sōjihakpo* 36 (2010), 320.

32) Most scholars assert that they were simply reinserted; however, much depends on how the reconstruction document is reconstructed; see Ch'oe Yōnsik, "Pulguksa Sōsōkt'ap chungsu hyōngjigi" for a more nuanced view.

33) Park Sangguk, in *Pulgyo chungang pangmulgwan* 2009.

There is archeological evidence for at least nine other Silla pagodas that contained the text, but the information is derived from inscriptions; additionally, a number of pagoda's have been found to contain the number of small stūpas prescribed by the sūtra, either 99 or 77.³⁴⁾ Unfortunately no texts have been found inside the small stūpas, although they all had a hollowed space in which the text could have been inserted. However, in general the small stūpas recovered from Silla pagodas are very small and roughly made out of stone or clay; for example, the 99 stūpas recovered from the Sōdong-ri stūpa in Ponghwa are just 7.5 cm high, and shaped roughly in the form of a three-story pagoda with finial.³⁵⁾ They would have been just big enough to accommodate one of the six dhāraṇīs, not the whole sūtra.

Fragments of the dhāraṇīs have been recovered from a stūpa at Hwaōm-sa; however, only the sixth has been identified, and moreover no small stūpas were found; instead a sheet of paper was found on which stūpas had been stamped. Altogether, we can thus see that the program of the sutra was fairly faithfully followed in Unified Silla, but that there was no unified way of implementing its program.

This contrasts with the situation in Japan, where a huge number of small wooden stupas remain, many with dhāraṇīs still inside.³⁶⁾ These so-called Hyakumantō 百萬塔 stūpas were

34) There is no agreement on the exact number of stupas where the "Undeified Pure Light" sutra was stored; one of the highest counts, 16 (including both inscriptions attesting the sutra was once stored there, miniature stupas, or actual remains of the text) can be found in Wōn Sōnhūi, "Silla hadae Mugu chōngt'ap," 138. However, this list does not contain the fragments of the text recovered from Hwaōm-sa; see below.

35) Joo Kyeongmi, "8-11 segi Tongasia t'apnae tarani pong'an ū pyōnch'ōn," *Misulsa wa sigak munhwa* (2011), 273.

36) Peter Kornicki, "The Hyakumantō Darani and the Origins of Printing in

made between 764 and 770. According to historical records, 1 million of them were made by Empress Shōtoku and 100,000 each distributed to ten temples; only a portion of the ones donated to Hōryūji have survived.³⁷⁾ Rather than the whole dhāraṇī sūtra, individual dhāraṇīs were inserted; four different ones have been recovered, namely the root dhāraṇī, finial prop dhāraṇī, mind impression dhāraṇī, and the six perfections dhāraṇī (nos. 1,2,4,6 in table 1). Although it is usually pointed out that two dhāraṇīs “are missing,” this is not necessarily the case: for example, the “constructing Buddha stūpas dhāraṇī” specifies that it should be read before making a stūpa; although it also says that copies can be placed in the stūpa, no mention is made of small stūpas (for the four dhāraṇīs that have been found among the Hyakuman-tō hoard, the sūtra explicitly states that small stūpas can be made).

In the case of the Japanese printing of the “Undefined Pure Light” Dharanis, a number of interesting differences with the case of Unified Silla are evident. First of all, while the sūtra prescribes making small stūpas of “mud, tile, or stone” the Hyakumantō stūpas from Hōryūji are 13.5 cm high, and beautifully carved in wood: the finial part is detachable, to allow the dhāraṇī to be inserted.³⁸⁾ By contrast, the Korean examples are smaller, much more roughly made, square rather than round, and made of clay or stone. Second, the figure of one million: while the sūtra prescribes various sets of numbered practices, this particular figure is not mentioned. Various

Eighth-Century Japan,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 9:1 (2012), 45 estimates that about 50,000 pagodas remain and 20,000 dharanis.

37) See *Ibid.* for the historical background of the project and for a detailed analysis of the project’s significance and the reasons motivating it.

38) Brian Hickmann, “A Note on the Hyakumantō dhāraṇī,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 30:1 (1975).

theories have been proposed to explain this, but the bottom line is that in this project, there seems to have been little concern to follow the instructions of the sūtra. This brings us to the third point: while the Korean cases are very individualized but based on the sūtra, what we have in Japan is a centralized distribution of texts: moreover, the small stūpas were apparently not to be placed in larger ones, thus making individual devotion impossible: the sūtra describes, for example, how even animals walking in the shadow of a pagoda with the sūtra inside, would benefit.

An explanation for this brings us back to China. At present, it is not known whether any archeological evidence has been found attesting to the production and placement in stūpas of the “Undefined Pure Light” in China: all we have are manuscript copies of the text from Dunhuang as well as a few scattered references to the construction of stūpas that bear the title “Undefined Pure Light Precious Pagoda” (Wugou jingguang baota 無垢淨光寶塔).³⁹⁾ But we do know something about the creation of the original sūtra, which was intimately connected with the needs of Empress Wu in the final year of her reign: Timothy Barrett conjectures that it was meant to extend her life and to rapidly spread proof of her religious power.⁴⁰⁾ Many have noted the similarities with Empress Shōtoku in Japan, who found herself in a similar situation: a female ruler in a male world, trying to justify her power in the twilight of her

39) See McBride, “Practical Buddhist Thaumaturgy,” 53. One example not mentioned by him is the Undefined Pure Light Pagoda at Foguang temple on Wutaishan (dated 752), see Derek Gillman, “General Munthe’s Chinese Buddhist Sculpture: An Embarrassment of Riches?” in Skorupski, *The Buddhist Forum* 4 (London: SOAS, 1996), p. 107. This is also mentioned by Joo Kyeongmi, “8-11 segi Tongasia t’apnae tarani,” 286 n. 35.

40) Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra,” 59-62.

life. Thus it is likely no coincidence that Empress Shōtoku resorted to the printing project to shore up relations with the Buddhist community following the ousting of an influential monk from court, and was aware of its original purpose, namely to achieve legitimation to the efficacious distribution of the dharma.⁴¹⁾

Although in Korea too the sūtra played an important part in dynastic politics, especially the death rites for royals (more on this in the conclusion), it should not be forgotten that it forms part of a pan-Asian religious trend, and despite the important local manifestations it spurned, is ultimately concerned with religious efficacy, especially in harnessing the influence of relics. Remarkably, given the fact that it seems to advertise itself as superior to bodily relics, in fact it seems to have always been enshrined with Buddha relics, thus confirming again Jan Fontein's observation that Korean relic deposits are characterized by the joint occurrence of dharma and corporeal relics.⁴²⁾

4. The Precious Casket Seal Dhāraṇī Sūtra and its Use

In the Śakyamuni stūpa deposit of Pulguk-sa, the "Undeified Pure Light" has always received the most attention, but underneath the relic case was found a handwritten copy of another dhāraṇī sūtra that has received much less attention: The *Ilch'è yōraesim pimil chōnsin sari pohyōbin taranigyōng* 一切

41) See Kornicki, "The Hyakumantō Darani," 57-63. See Chen, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician*, 211 for evidence of connections between the monks who produced the Hyakuman-tō and Fazang.

42) Fontein, "Śarīra Reliquary."

如來心秘密全身舍利寶髻印陀羅尼經 (T. 1022, T. 1023), or “secret śarīra precious casket seal of the entire corpse relics of all Tathāgatas.”⁴³⁾ It is not known whether this text was in the original hoard or was added after 1024 when the Śākyamuni pagoda was repaired. A graphological analysis of the manuscript fragments appears inconclusive.⁴⁴⁾

Somewhat shorter than the “Undefined Pure Light,” this sūtra is also much simpler in content; it also starts with a Brahmin, but a much less desperate one. He simply wants to invite the Buddha to his house to offer to him, but on the road the retinue passes the remains of an old stūpa, at the sight of which the Buddha bursts into tears, and explains:

This is the great precious Tathāgatha stūpa which gathers the full body śarīras; among it are the secretly imprinted dharma essentials of the mind-dhāranī of innumerable⁴⁵⁾ Tathāgathas. Because there is this dharma essential amongst it, Vajrapāṇi, the pagoda changes into many layers without space like sesame seeds; the innumerable bodies of the Tathāgata, you should know, are also like sesame seed; the gathering of the innumerable true body relics of the Tathāgata and the 84,000 dharma skandhas are also present. Because of

43) *Arvatathāgata-adhiṣṭāna-hṛdaya-guhyadhātu-karaṇḍamudrā-dhāraṇī-sūtra*. Interestingly, there are several editions of this text included in the Taishō canon: T 1022A is the Koryō tripitaka edition, while T 1022B is a Japanese temple edition. There are some marked differences in the text, but I have not yet had the chance to systematically study the differences; also, comparison should be made with the extant Koryō (notably the 1007 Ch'ongji-sa edition) and Wu-Yue editions.

44) See Ri Songjae, “Pulguk-sa Sōkkat'ap palgyōn.” Despite the painstaking analysis, the author is evidently reluctant to formulate even a hypothesis for its date. Others seem to assume it was produced in the eleventh century. See Joo Kyeongmi, “Koryō sidae Wōlchōng-sa sōkt'ap ch'ult'o sari changōmgu chaeron,” *Chindan hakpo* 113 (2011), 72.

45) 俱胝 koti: a very large number – ten million, hundred million etc.

this excellent affair, where the pagoda stands, there is great authority, which can fulfill all worldly blessings. (T. 1022A.710b28-c7)

The “dharma essential” refers to this scripture, which the Buddha then proceeds to explain, indicating both benefits and practices. Although the text was first “translated” by Amoghavajra (不空, 705-774) in the latter half of the eighth century, it seems to have gained traction only after the end of the Tang dynasty. Under the Wu-Yue 吳越 kingdom (907-978) in particular, it was printed on a vast scale. The most famous expression of its devotion to this text can be found in the Leifeng Pagoda 雷峰塔: constructed of hollowed out bricks, each brick contained a print of the “Precious Casket Seal” dated 975. When the pagoda collapsed at the beginning of the twentieth century, prints became a sought-after collectors’ item. In analogy with the text just quoted above, the pagoda is said to have contained 84,000 bricks and thus 84,000 sūtras, thus representing all the bodies of the Tathāgata.⁴⁶⁾

A Koryō-era print of this sūtra exists, and the colophon dates it to 1007; it was published at Ch’ongji-sa, a temple in the capital of Koryō which is believed to have belonged to the esoteric Ch’ongji-jong 攄持宗. Since it appeared at a time when practices related to the “Undeclared Pure Light” appear to decline, it is tempting to see it as superseding the former. And there is some support for this—not least in the text itself, where Buddha is residing in the “undeclared” garden (無垢園) of Magadha, and the Brahman’s name is “Undeclared excellent light”

46) See Joo Kyeongmi, “Chungguk Chōlgang-sōng Hangju Noebongt’ap ū Pulsari changōm,” *Pulgyo misul sahak* 4 (2006), 350; Sören Edgren, “The Printed Dhāraṇī-sūtra of A.D. 956,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 44 (1972): 141-146.

(無垢妙光)—the names are almost too coincidental not to be a pun on the “Undeified Pure Light”! In a sense, it seems to “up the ante” compared to its predecessor: it is both simpler in the praxis, and more effective, producing not just “relic stūpas of all Buddhas” but “the full body relics 全身舍利 of all the Tathāgatas of the present and the future, as well as those who entered parinirvana, are all in this dhāraṇī sūtra. The three bodies of all the Tathāgatas are also in there.”⁴⁷⁾ In Liao stūpa deposits in particular, there was a strong emphasis on representing the three bodies of all Tathāgatas, not just through the “Precious Casket Seal,” but through other texts that were reinterpreted in this way as well. This was apparently done in preparation for the impending end of the dharma.⁴⁸⁾

Coupled with its preceding popularity in the Wu-Yue kingdom from whence it entered Koryŏ,⁴⁹⁾ it is indeed tempting to see this as a more powerful dhāraṇī sūtra replacing an “outmoded” one.⁵⁰⁾ Unfortunately, however, evidence for its use in Koryŏ stūpa deposits is nonextant; although several printed copies have been found, the most recently discovered one was actually found within a twelfth-century Koryŏ statue, and the provenance of the other copies is uncertain.⁵¹⁾ In Liao, moreover, both texts have been found side by side, where they

47) T. 1022A.711b27-29.

48) Shen “Realizing the Buddha’s Dharma Body,” 272.

49) See Joo Kyeongmi, “Owŏl wang Ch’ong Hongduk ū pulsari sinang kwa changŏm,” *Yŏksa wa kyŏnggye* 61 (2006) for the background to its production and veneration in Wu-Yue. See also Edgren “The Printed Dhāraṇī-sūtra of A.D. 956.” for the earliest Wu-Yue edition of the text.

50) As argued by Kwak Sŭnghun, “Chŏnsin sari pohyŏp taranigyŏng.”

51) The most recent copy was recovered from Pogwang-sa near Andong. One copy was found in Wŏlchŏng-sa but has not been disentangled yet, and one is in a Japanese collection. Joo Kyeongmi, “Koryŏ sidae Wŏlchŏng-sa,” 71-72.

were clearly seen to reinforce each others' function. Finally, besides stūpas, the scripture also allows for it to be placed in images, which was evidently followed in Koryŏ, from which period numerous statues filled with sūtras and other objects have been found. In this it again mirrors a pan-Asian tradition: apparently the sūtra also exists in Tibetan (as did the "Undefined Pure Light"), where it is used to justify the exact same practices.⁵²⁾ While the "Precious Casket seal" appears later in Korean history, from the eleventh century we see a veritable boom of dhāraṇīs: dozens of printed dhāraṇīs have been found, some in amulets,⁵³⁾ indicating that the period of near-exclusive dominance of one dhāraṇī had come to an end, and that it was not replaced by a new dhāraṇī text that was exclusively devoted to stūpas. In short, practices related to the emplacement of dhāraṇī sūtras became more simplified, more diversified, and hence less "special" than in the Unified Silla Period.

5. Conclusion

While the scope of this article does not suffice to cover all the debates surrounding the dhāraṇīs nor to analyze all the relevant data, at least it is now possible to take a more synoptic perspective of their place in the Buddhist religion.

First of all, even though we now value them especially as the oldest Korean printed books, and in the case of the

52) Bendor, "On the Indian Origins," 252-253; however, it is not explained when the Tibetan translations were made, and from which language they were translated.

53) Nam Kwŏnhŭi, "Han'guk kirok munhwa e nat'an'an chinŏn ūi yut'ong," *Milgyo hakpo* 7 (2005): 51-122.

“Undefined Pure Light” perhaps the oldest printed “book” in the world, it should be clear also that they are a milestone in religious history. They come at the tail end of a long history of development in relics as the chief object of worship in Buddhism. Perhaps due to fear of the impending disappearance of the dharma, they emphasize the power to recall or reproduce Buddhas. While the “Undefined Pure Light” claims the power to turn one into a Tathāgata, its main purpose is to avert tragic death and obtain good rebirth. The “Precious Casket Seal” on the other hand, which appeared in China about 50–70 years later, claims to enable the presence of all Buddha-bodies in the universe.

Second, we need to reconsider their relationship to printing. As has been argued by Timothy Barrett, the “Undefined Pure Light” may well have played an important role in the breakthrough of printing in China; not merely because of the large reproduction it demanded, but also because of the covert agendas of Empress Wu’s period, from safeguarding the dharma in its final years⁵⁴) to shoring up her authority through mass reproduction of the text.⁵⁵) The scripture does seem to sneak in a reference to its printing (see above, on 印法), so that this may well have been regarded as a kind of sublime ‘skilful means’ for its rapid reproduction in times of crisis.

Then why was it not used in this way in Silla, where, in nearly all contexts where we can infer the purpose of the enshrinement, it was to create merit for the deceased? I do not have a ready answer to this, but two things are worth mentioning to elucidate this: First, When King Sōngdōk had this scripture enshrined in 706, it is striking that he does so to

54) Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra,” 33.

55) Barrett, “Stūpa, Sūtra and Śarīra,” 53.

the memory of not one, but several recently deceased relatives, so he may have been much more embattled than we know from the sparse historical records. Also, research by Wŏn Sŏnhŭi has concluded that its usage was especially prominent in the later part of Unified Silla (ninth century), when many branches of the royal clan vied for supremacy. And finally, although the “Undeified Pure Light” is usually discussed in terms of its use by the royal Silla clan, it was used by ordinary monks and laypeople as well: this is evident from the inscription on a jar retrieved from Sŏngnam-sa dated 766. In this respect, we may tentatively conclude that the “Undeified Pure Light” was popular simply for what it promised: a good rebirth, and ultimately attainment of Buddhahood for the deceased relative.

Third, as already mentioned, the scripture found very fertile ground in Silla as it helped to consolidate a trend toward stūpa construction that had already started before. To construct or repair many Buddha stūpas, as the text enjoins to do, smaller stūpas as they were built in Silla since the second half of the seventh century were much more conducive. It is surely no coincidence that the miniature pagodas are miniature images of the larger structures in which they were placed: it is almost as if a model for mass production was established!

Finally, although it has been speculated that the “Precious Casket Seal” was published for political reasons—more specifically, to rally support against an usurper to the throne⁵⁶⁾—this seems unlikely. Whereas the printing and manufacturing of the two dhāraṇī sūtras discussed here clearly had such implications in China, Wu-Yue, Liao and Japan, where the scale of the projects was such that it could only be undertaken by a central power concerned with its authority, in Korea

56) Kwak Sŭnghun, “Koryŏ chŏn’gi ‘Ilch’e yŏraesim,” 134–135.

however the dhāraṇī sūtras were used creatively on a small scale in a variety of ways. This has been discussed for the “Undefined Pure Light” sūtra: for the “Precious Casket Seal” evidence is insufficient, but the fact that the copy found in the statue at Pogwang-sa had not even been cut to make the dhāraṇī scroll betrays a casualness towards the text, as if it had become a mere commodity rather than a venerable text. It was only with the printing of the First Koryo tripitaka under King Hyōnjong (1009-1031) that we see a state-level project that uses Buddhist printing on a vast scale to reassert its authority.⁵⁷⁾

Key words: Undefined Pure Light Dhāraṇī Sūtra, Precious Casket Seal, Dhāraṇī Sūtra, Buddha relics, Dharma (body) relics, stūpas, printing, relic worship

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57) Sem Vermeersch, “Royal Ancestor Worship and Buddhist Politics: The Hyōnhwa-sa Stele and the Origins of the First Koryō Tripitaka,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 18:1 (2013): 115-146.

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〈Abstract〉

Beyond Printing

: Looking at the Use and East Asian Context
of Dhāraṇī Sūtras in Medieval Korea

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Two dhāraṇī texts are very famous in Korea: The “Undeiled Pure Light” (무구정광대다라니경) and the “Precious Casket Seal” (보협인다라니경) dhāraṇī sūtras. However, they are chiefly famous not as texts or for their religious significance, but merely as prints: printed copies of these texts dated 751 (conjectured date) for the former and 1007 for the latter are famous as the earliest examples of printing on the Korean peninsula, and the former even as the earliest example of woodblock printing in the world. But this focus on printing history has somehow obscured the fact that these texts also played very important roles in the cult of the stūpa, and devotional practice in general. The “Undeiled Pure Light” sūtra in particular was popular both in China, Korea, and Japan, yet the way it was treated (ie. its reproduction methods and number, its emplacement etc.) show interesting differences. Since its core practices (the text advocates its own reproduction and worship) reflect practices that were current across Asia since at least the seventh century, we have to question first of all its place in the Asian Buddhist tradition before evaluating how peculiar (or not) its Korean acculturation was. The “Precious Casket Seal” has often been seen as the “Koryŏ” continuation of the “Silla” “Undeiled Pure

Light” sūtra, but again we have to question what is really new here, and also whether the focus on only these two dhāraṇī texts is justified or not.

<국문초록>

인쇄술을 넘어서

: 중세 한국 다라니경의 활용과 그 동아시아적 맥락에 대한 재조명

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『무구정광대다라니경』과 『보협인다라니경』은 한국에서 아주 잘 알려진 다라니경이다. 그 주된 이유는 종교적으로 중요한 문헌들이어서가 아니라 이들이 인쇄물이라는 사실 때문이다. 『무구정광다라니경』은 (대략) 751년, 그리고 『보협인다라니경』은 1007년에 인쇄된 것으로 이들은 한반도 최초의 인쇄물들로 꼽힌다. 또한 무구정광대다라니경은 세계에서 가장 오래된 목판 인쇄물이기도 하다. 그러나 이러한 ‘인쇄’ 역사에만 주목하면 이들 문헌들이 탑 신앙과 관련해서도 아주 중요한 역할을 했다는 사실을 간과하게 된다. 특히 『무구정광대다라니경』은 중국, 한국 및 일본에서 두루 인기가 있었는데 각 나라마다 이를 다루는 방식(예컨대, 경이 어떻게 작성되고 분포되었는지, 또 탑 안에 어떻게 봉안 되었는지 등 문제)에서는 흥미로운 차이를 보인다. 『무구정광대다라니경』은 경 자체를 만들고 이를 숭배할 것을 권장하고 있는데 이는 적어도 7세기 이후 아시아 전역에서 발견되는 불사를 반영하고 있다. 따라서 한국에서 이러한 실천이 어떤 특이한 문화적 변용을 보였나 살피기 전, 먼저 경의 간행과 숭배가 아시아 불교 전통 안에서 어떤 위치를 점하는지 질문해 보아야 할 것이다. 흔히 『보협인다라니경』은 신라의 『무구정광다라니경』이 고려 시대로 이어진 것이라고 간주되나, 이 경에서 진정 새로운 것은 무엇일까 질문해 볼 필요가 있다. 또한 이들 두 다라니경에만 주목하는 것이 과연 옳은지 역시 검토해 봐야 한다.

주제어: 『무구정광대다라니경』, 『보협인다라니경』, 불사리, 법(신)사리, 불탑, 인쇄, 불사리 신앙