

DHĀRAṆĪ AND MANTRA
IN CONTEMPORARY KOREAN BUDDHISM:
A TEXTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPELL MATERIALS
FOR POPULAR CONSUMPTION

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The meaning and function of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras in Buddhist traditions is one of the most stimulating discussions in which scholars are currently engaged. This essay is an investigation of the uses of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras in contemporary Buddhism in South Korea by examining literature and materials intended for lay Buddhists. The phrase “realization of one’s desires” (*sowŏn sŏngch’wi* 所願成就) in Korean Buddhism “on the ground” functions much like the expression “this-worldly benefits” (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) in Japanese Buddhism.¹ Practices promising the realization of one’s desires, of which activities invoking and utilizing spells and incantations, are targeted specifically toward lay Buddhists. Following literary precedents set in medieval Sinitic Buddhism, the terms “*dhāraṇī*” (*tarani* 陀羅尼) and “mantra” (*chinŏn* 眞言) are used interchangeably in Buddhist literature for mass consumption. Popular interest in *dhāraṇīs* has been increasing steadily since the turn of the twenty-first century, in conjunction with the return to popularity of apotropaic charms and talismans (*pujŏk* 符籙). Drawing on long-standing traditions, contemporary promoters of the ritual application of *dhāraṇīs* assert that aspirants will not forget the Buddha’s teachings and will attain enlightenment quickly, overcome all manner of disasters and calamities, and get rid of all manner of karmic obstacles if they memorize them. Lay people utilize *dhāraṇīs* in essentially five ways: (1) in personal devotionals; (2) as *sūtra*-material copied for merit (*sagyŏng* 寫經); (3) as talismans and in household or business rituals supplicating for this-worldly

¹ For the most detailed discussion of “this-world benefits,” see Reader and Tanabe 1998.

benefits; (4) for exorcisms and death rituals; and (5) as materials enshrined in the chest cavities of Buddha images (*pokchang* 伏藏/腹藏) and in pagodas.

Some scholars see the extensive use of *dhāraṇīs* in East Asian Buddhist traditions as indicative of the pervasive influence of Esoteric or Tantric Buddhism,² while others view the widespread utilization of *dhāraṇīs* as a characteristic of mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism.³ As in India and China, legends and traditional narratives suggest that spells and incantations were pervasive among native thaumaturges, recluses, and religious specialists in the early Korean states. In addition, *dhāraṇīs* and, later, mantras, were a significant component of the Sinitic Buddhist practices that entered the Korean peninsula in successive waves beginning in the late fourth century. By the late sixth century some monks were specialists in protective Buddhist spells. Between the mid-seventh and mid-eighth centuries, several important *dhāraṇī-sūtras* entered the state of Silla 新羅 (ca. 300–935), which succeeded in conquering rival states on the peninsula due to an alliance with Tang 唐 China (618–907). These *dhāraṇīs*, which included the *Ñilakaṇṭha-dhāraṇī* (*Qianyan qianbi Guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 千眼千臂觀世音菩薩陀羅尼神呪經, T 1057; T 1060), *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* (*Suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經, T 1154; T 1153), and **Raśmivimalaviśuddhaprabhā-dhāraṇī* (*Wugou jingguang da tuoluoni jing* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼經, T 1024), endured in popularity for several hundred years and evolved in the procedures and contexts in which they were used through the Koryŏ 高麗 (918–1392) and Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1910) periods. An anthology of Sanskrit spells, *Dhāraṇī Collection from Sanskrit Books* (*Pŏmsŏ ch'ongji chip* 梵書摠持集), remains from the twelfth century in the mid-Koryŏ period, as well as numerous printed sheets of *dhāraṇīs* found stuffed in the chest cavities of Buddhist images. During the Chosŏn period, trilingual spell books, the most popular being the *Five Great Mantras* (*Odae chinŏn* 五大真言) – with its *dhāraṇī* transliterated in Siddhaṃ script, Korean script, and Sinographs – were

² See, for instance, Abé 1999: 152–157, 165–177, 182; Strickmann 1996; Strickmann 2002.

³ Schopen 1982; Schopen 1985; Sharf 2002; McBride 2005; McBride 2011.

published repeatedly between the late fifteenth century and the mid-seventeenth century.⁴ In some editions a short text titled *Brief Transcriptions of Efficacious Resonance* (*Yŏnghŏm yakch'o* 靈驗略抄) was appended in either literary Chinese or translation into the Korean vernacular. This short tract presents prescriptive stories on the effective uses of four popular *dhāraṇīs* typically included in the *Odae chinŏn* collections: (1) the *Dhāraṇī of the Heart of Great Compassion* or *Nilakaṇṭha-dhāraṇī* (*Taebisim tarani* 大悲心陀羅尼), (2) *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* (*Sugu chŭktŭk tarani* 隨求卽得陀羅尼), (3) *Buddhōṣṇīṣa-dhāraṇī* (*Taebulchŏng tarani* 大佛頂陀羅尼), and (4) *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* (*Pulchŏng chonsŭng tarani* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼) (Kim Mubong 2010, 75–169, esp. 80). In the late Chosŏn period, *dhāraṇīs* played a central role in mainstream Korean Buddhist ritual – a position more fully concretized in the first modern manual for Korean Buddhist ceremonies, *Must Read Texts for Buddhists* (*Pulcha p'illam* 佛子必覽, 1931), as well as in its revised and expanded successor text *Buddhist Rituals* (*Sŏngmun ũibŏm* 釋門儀範, 1935), which is still the standard compendium for Korean Buddhist ritual (McBride 2019).

The idea for this essay gradually emerged over the course of the last decade. I have had the opportunity to visit South Korea regularly and almost yearly since 2005, and during the year 2007 to 2008, I was a Fulbright Scholar in Korean History at Dongguk University in Seoul. In the summer of 2007, while teaching summer school at Korea University in Seoul, I met the owner of the local Buddhist supply store Kang Sinjŏng, whose pen name is Kosan 高山. Although I did not realize it at the time, I had just met one of the leading “masters of talismans” (*pujŏk tosa* 符籍道師) in contemporary Korea, who specializes in producing both Buddhist and non-Buddhist talismans by hand.⁵ The owners of Buddhist supply stores and bookstores in Seoul near Chogyesa 曹溪寺, the headquarters of the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism, Pongŭnsa

⁴ Sørensen 1991–1992; Sørensen 2010a; Sørensen 2010b; Sørensen 2010c; McBride 2001: 204–277; McBride 2008: 63, 71–73, 76–78, 112, 115; McBride 2011; Nam Hee-sook 2012; McBride 2018.

⁵ He gave me a copy of his book that contains more than fifty Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts in the Korean vernacular for ritual behavior and fifty-one talismans in an appendix (Kang 2004: 210–22).

奉恩寺 in the affluent Samsŏng Ward in Seoul, and in Kyŏngju 慶州, in South Kyŏngsang Province in the southeastern part of the country, have been my primary informants supplementing my own observations, although I do not pretend to follow the accepted procedures of anthropologists and ethnographers. Rather, this is an exploratory attempt at a “textual ethnography” of a widespread contemporary Korean Buddhist practice, drawing inspiration from the late Michel Strickmann’s discussion of the panoply of Buddhist spells and ritual procedures available in the apocryphal *Consecration Sūtra* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經) (Strickmann 1990).

A textual ethnography centered on materials produced and published for a mass market in a society oriented toward capitalism presents its own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the fact that a publication has been reprinted multiple times strongly suggests that the material contained inside has resonated with practitioners. Furthermore, the fact that inexpensive resources have stayed in print for many years, although the form of presentation may have changed slightly suggests deep and abiding interest in such materials. However, just because somebody purchases a book outlining various kinds of personal devotionals does not necessarily mean that he actually follows what the publication says. Nevertheless, when the wealth of available materials encouraging *dhāraṇī* practice is accumulated, the relevance and significance of the practice as a mainstream approach to the “realization of lay people’s desires” is clearly manifest. As stated above, I will treat *dhāraṇīs* in the following contexts: personal devotionals, *sūtra*-material copied for merit, talismans, exorcisms and death rituals and materials enshrined in the chest cavities of Buddha images and in pagodas.

Personal Devotionals

Dhāraṇīs are found commonly in the personal devotionals described in an inexpensive (2,500 Korean wŏn = approx. \$2.25 U.S.) and much-reprinted guide called *Devotional Methods for the Realization of One’s Desires* (*Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* 소원성취기도법). On the inside title page, the title is given as *Devotional Methods for the Realization of One’s Desires that You Can Do Even By Yourself* (*Honjasŏdo halsu*

innūn Sowŏn sŏngch'wi kidobŏp 혼자서도 할 수 있는 소원성취기도법). First published in 1998, I obtained a copy of the fifteenth printing published in 2012.⁶ The introductory matter outlines such things as the appropriate preparation and posture for devotions, the traditional order for offering Buddhist-style services (*pulgong* 佛供), narratives of the miraculous resonance of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, a list of twelve kinds of merit (*kongdŏk* 功德), glossed as “resonance” (*kamūng* 感應) one obtains if one offers devotions, and the method for making devotions by oneself.⁷

This method of personal devotions is significant because, although it prescribes a six-step routine structure for devotional practice, it also allows people a certain amount freedom or flexibility with regard to the practices they perform and texts they read and recite. The six-step procedure for devotions is (1) offering worship (*yegyŏng* 禮敬), (2) *sūtra*-recitation (*kyŏngjŏn toksong* 經典讀誦), (3) repentance (*ch'amhoe* 懺悔), (4) assiduous (*chŏnggŭn* 精勤) [devotions toward Avalokiteśvara], (5) making vows (*parwŏn* 發願), and (6) transference of merit (*hoehyang* 回向) for the deceased. *Dhāraṇīs* and spells are pervasive. The short first section on offering worship, which is comprised of offering worship to the Three Jewels and reciting a short Sino-Korean *gāthā*, closes with the aspirant chanting the invocation “*Om paaramik*” (옴 바아라믹) thrice.⁸ The more substantial procedure on *sūtra*-recitation starts by encouraging the practitioner to chant several spells three times each: “the mantra that purifies verbal karma” (*chŏngguŏp chinŏn* 淨口業真言), “the mantra for comforting all the deities [buddhas and saints] of the five directions” (*obang naeoe anwi chesin chinŏn* 五方內外安慰諸神真言), and “the mantra for opening the storehouse of the dharma” (*kaebŏpchang chinŏn* 開法藏真言).⁹ These short one- and two-line spells are actually the beginning of the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra* (*Ch'ŏnsu kyŏng* 千手經) and prepare the aspirant for the core of the *sūtra* and of the *sūtra*-recitation section: chanting the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime*

⁶ *Sowŏn sŏngch'wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012.

⁷ *Sowŏn sŏngch'wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 7–12.

⁸ *Sowŏn sŏngch'wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 12. Although the sound of this spell is similar to the Sanskrit word *pāramitā*, it is not the transliteration *paaramil* 바아라밀.

⁹ *Sowŏn sŏngch'wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 13–14.

Phrases (*Sinmyo changgu taedarani* 神妙章句大陀羅尼), a variant of the *Nīlakaṇṭha-dhāraṇī*. The *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* is presented in two forms: a transliteration of the Indic sounds (written in Siddhaṃ script) into the Korean script,¹⁰ and a Korean translation of the meaning of the *dhāraṇī*.¹¹ The Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra*,¹² which is comprised of *gāthās* and mantras, was constructed during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) as a manual for devotions and repentance practices and continually evolved during the twentieth century.¹³ The repentance section of the *sūtra* includes several short mantras that aspirants chant thrice: “the mantra for repentance” (*ch’amhoe chinŏn* 懺悔真言), “the mantra for purifying the dharma realm” (*chŏngbŏpkye chinŏn* 淨法界真言), “the mantra for protecting the body” (*hosin chinŏn* 護身真言), “the mantra of the subtle six-letter king of great clarities [*mahāvīdyārāja*], the original mind of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” [= *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*] (*Kwanseūm posal ponsim mūmyo yukcha taemyŏngwang chinŏn* 觀世音菩薩本心微妙六字大明王真言), and “the Cundī mantra” (*Chunje chinŏn* 准提真言).¹⁴

The repentance step consists of chanting the previously-mentioned “mantra for repentance” 108 times, 1,000 times, or 3,000 times.¹⁵ The subsequent phase of offering attentive devotions to Avalokiteśvara includes chanting “the mantra by which the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara eradicates karmic hindrances” (*Kwanseūm posal myŏrŏpchang chinŏn* 觀世音菩薩滅業障真言) thrice after assiduously chanting “the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” 108 times. The manual also has a short “text for worshipping the Buddha in the morning and evening” (*chosŏk yebulmun* 朝夕禮佛文), presented in both Sino-Korean and Korean script, which includes the “mantra for offering incense” (*hŏnhyang chinŏn* 獻香真

¹⁰ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 20–22.

¹¹ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 22–23.

¹² *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 13–33.

¹³ Chŏnggak 2011: 98–149. For an English translation of a short version of *Thousand Hands Sūtra*, see Buswell 1992: 236–42.

¹⁴ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 28–29. The king of great clarities (*mahāvīdyārāja*) mentioned in the spell is not a king, but refers to the spell being a superior spell or “king” among the various kinds of *vidyā*.

¹⁵ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 33.

言),¹⁶ which is also chanted thrice. There is also a section describing demonstrative language for Buddhist funerary rituals to pray for the spirit of the deceased to be reborn in the Pure Land (*yǒngga siŏ* 靈駕示語) that includes several *dhāraṇīs* and spells, which will be treated below.¹⁷

Aside from spells, this small, inexpensive manual reproduces several of the most popular short Buddhist texts read and chanted frequently by the laity: the *Heart Sūtra*,¹⁸ “*Gāthā* Summarizing the *Avataṃsakasūtra*” (*Hwaŏm kyǒng yakch’an ke* 華嚴經略纂偈),¹⁹ “Sŏn Master Isan Hyeyŏn’s Vow Text” (Isan Hyeyŏn Sŏnsa parwŏnmun 怡山慧然禪師發願文),²⁰ the *Sūtra on Compassion* (*Cibei jing*, Kor. *Chabi kyǒng* 慈悲經),²¹ and “The Chapter on the Gate to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” (*Guanshiyin pusa pumen pin* 觀世音菩薩普門品). The manual closes with “the forty-two hand mantras of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” (*Kwanseŭm posal sasibi sujŏnŏn* 觀世音菩薩四十二手真言).²²

Another popular and economical (4,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$3.50 U.S.) devotional manual is the *Devotional Methods for the Realization of One’s Desires: New Edition* (*Sinpyŏn Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* 新編 소원성취기도법), which was originally titled *Method for Assiduous [Recitation] of the Thousand Hands Sūtra* (*Ch’ŏnsu kyǒng chŏnggŭnbŏp* 천수경 정근법 [千手經 精勤法]), and was first published in 2008. The book was reprinted with its current title in 2009 and I obtained a copy of its second reprinting in 2010. As with the first devotional manual treated above, the inside title page adds the words “that you can do even by yourself.” The book is essentially a handbook for offering devotion to Avalokiteśvara employing “spell-chanting and ritual repentance using the 108 spells of the [Korean] *Thousand Hands Sūtra*” (*Ch’ŏnsu pae kp’al songju yech’am* 千手 百八誦呪禮懺), which comprises intoning the 108 spells of the *Thousand Hands Sūtra*, the *Great*

¹⁶ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 37, 40.

¹⁷ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 56–63.

¹⁸ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 42–44.

¹⁹ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 46–50.

²⁰ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 51–54.

²¹ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 72–73.

²² *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 89–95.

Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases in particular, but also including the “Cundī mantra” and making ritual penance with all diligence 108 times.²³

The introductory section of the handbook, reprinted from the Ven. Chagwang’s 滋曠 book *Let’s Achieve Buddhahood*, has short essays that describe various types of “Buddhist beliefs and practices” (*pulgyo sin-haeng* 佛教信行): “self-power and other-power with respect to devotions,” “worship,” “repentance,” “making vows,” “making pilgrimages to sacred sites,” “*sūtra*-reading,” “spell power,” “recollection of the Buddha” (*yōmbul* 念佛), and “*dhyāna*-practice.”²⁴ The section titled “Spell Power” is instructive because it briefly describes the value of making the recitation of spells an integral part of one’s personal devotions:

Spell power (*churyōk* 呪力) refers to the majestic power of mantras (*chinōn* 眞言; lit. “true words”) and *dhāraṇīs* (*tarani* 多羅尼). Mantras are the true words of the Buddha. *Dhāraṇī* is translated as meaning “comprehensively grasp [or to hold or maintain comprehensively]” (*ch’ongji* 總持). With respect to *dhāraṇīs*, one letter or one phrase contains many meanings.

There is great vitality for miraculous transformation in the true words of the Buddha. Therefore, if you recite true words you will eliminate calamities, achieve auspicious omens, extinguish karmic hindrances, and be reborn in the world system of Extreme Bliss. If you recite mantras you will receive the submission of hosts of demons, be cleansed of filthiness, be possessing of surpassing [*susūng* 殊勝] courage and wisdom, obtain limitless power, and achieve limitless merit.

When you recite these mantras first cleanse your body and mind and behave decently. If you make your mind like Mount Tai²⁵ and recite mantras with utmost sincerity, just as a shout in a great mountain gorge becomes an echo, you will obtain a bestowal of protective power [*kap’iryōk* 加被力] from all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and your courage and wisdom will be increased [*chūngjang* 增長].

Also, when you recite mantras, you will obtain something of personal power.

²³ *Sinp’yōn Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 7.

²⁴ *Sinp’yōn Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 11–25; cf. Chagwang 1989: 577–94.

²⁵ “Make your mind like Mt. Tai” (마음은 태산과 같이 하여 [心如泰山]) is a Chan/Sōn expression encouraging a practitioner to make his mind unmoving and unwavering.

Your own body and mind will be unified and to the extent that they become clean and pure all hindrances within your own psyche [*chōngsin* 精神] will disappear. Therefore, you will produce the conviction, wisdom, and courage to be able to work out whatever goal or purpose you desire by means of spell power. We will be able to say that we can go to the Buddha-stage [*pulchi* 佛地] through this spell power.²⁶

This short passage is significant because it encapsulates several core themes regarding *dhāraṇīs* and mantras that have endured in mainstream Mahāyāna practice for thousands of years. First, it articulates the fundamental unity of *dhāraṇī* and mantra. Second, it lays out the apotropaic and this-worldly benefits of *dhāraṇī* practice – not being troubled by calamities, getting rid of unwholesome karma, obtaining wisdom and power, enjoying the protection of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and being able to quell demons – as well as the conventional Mahāyāna promise of rebirth in the Pure Land. Finally, it promises that one can achieve his desires by means of chanting *dhāraṇīs*.

The structure of the *New Edition* includes many sections similar to the first manual treated above but in a slightly different order. For instance, the “text for worshipping the Buddha in the morning and evening,” which features the “mantra for offering incense,” comes first,²⁷ followed by “Sōn Master Isan Hyeyōn’s Vow Text” here called “Vow Text for Worshipping Buddha” (*Yebul parwōnmun* 禮佛發願文).²⁸ The “spell-chanting and ritual repentance using the 108 spells of the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra*” in the *New Edition* then basically follows the order of the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra* treated above. The liturgy is constructed in four stages: (1) repenting and making vows (*ch’amhoe parwōn* 懺悔發願), (2) offerings to Buddha at the upper altar (*sangdan pulgong* 上壇佛供), (3) encouraging offerings at the middle altar (*chungdan kwōn’gong* 中壇勸供), and (4) *sūtra*-reading at the lower altar: The *Gāthā* on the Dharma Nature (*hadan tokkyōng: Pōpsōng ke* 下壇讀經: 法性偈). There are three altars in the main hall of a Korean monastery: the upper altar is the main altar for offerings to the Buddha;

²⁶ *Sinp’yōn Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 21.

²⁷ *Sinp’yōn Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 31–34.

²⁸ *Sinp’yōn Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 35–39.

the middle altar is the guardians' altar, lit. the "altar of the Divine Assembly" (*sinjungdan* 神衆壇) or "spirit generals' altar" (*sinjangdan* 神將壇), featuring a painting of the deities who protect the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha) in the main hall; and the lower altar is the memorial altar.

Spells dominate the first stage of the liturgy. "The mantra that purifies verbal karma," "the mantra for comforting all the deities [buddhas and saints] of the five directions," and "the mantra for opening the storehouse of the dharma" all appear just as before preparing the way for the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases*. After this seminal spell follow "the mantra for repentance," "the mantra for purifying the dharma realm," "the mantra for protecting the body," "the mantra of the subtle six-letter king of great clarities, the original mind of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara" [= *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*], and "the Cundī mantra."²⁹ The second stage opens with a "mantra for purifying the dharma realm" that is different and much longer than the one referred to earlier, and includes a "mantra for making universal offerings" (*pogongyang chinōn* 普供養眞言) that is chanted thrice.³⁰ The third stage opens with the short "mantra for purifying the dharma realm" being chanted three or seven times, but is comprised of reciting the "*Gāthā* Summarizing the *Avataṃsakasūtra*" and the *Heart Sūtra*.³¹ The fourth stage is comprised of the "*Gāthā* on the Dharma Nature" [the poem on Ūsang's *Seal-Diagram* when not in the seal shape] and "demonstrative language for use in Buddhist funerary rituals" (*yōngga siō*), which will be treated below. The balance of the handbook is reproductions of Korean translations of a number of short *sūtras* that are popular with lay readers: the *Sūtra on Compassion*, the *Sūtra on Karma* (*K'allama kyōng* 칼라마경 [= *Jiemo jing* 羯磨經]), the *Amitābha Sūtra* (*Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經, T 366) [*Smaller Sukhāvativyūhasūtra*], "The Chapter on the Gate to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara," the *Diamond Sūtra*, and interestingly enough, the *Sūtra on the Spirit Spell of the Eight Positive*

²⁹ *Sinp'yōn Sowōn sōngch'wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 39–58.

³⁰ *Sinp'yōn Sowōn sōngch'wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 59, 61.

³¹ *Sinp'yōn Sowōn sōngch'wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 66–79.

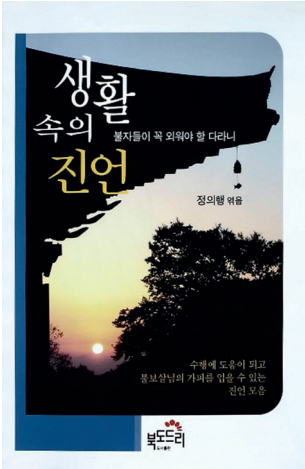


Fig. 1: The cover of Ŭihaeng's *Everyday Mantras: Must-memorize Dhāraṇī for Buddhists*.

*Powers in Heaven and Earth (Tiandi bayang shenzhou jing 天地八陽神呪經, T 2897).*³²

The late monk Ŭihaeng 義行 (1958–2016) published *Everyday Mantras: Must-memorize Dhāraṇī for Buddhists (Saenghwal sok ũi chinön: Pulchadūri kkok oewōya hal űntarani 생활속의 진언: 불자들이 꼭 외워야 할 다라니)* in 2013 (fig. 1) (Chōng 2013). It is an inexpensive (8,000 Korean wōn = approx. \$7.15 U.S.) compendium of 364 mantras, *dhāraṇīs*, and other Buddhist spells arranged categorically: (1) mantras associated with buddhas, (2) mantras linked to bodhisattvas, (3) mantras for invoking gods, (4) mantras within *sūtras*, (5) everyday mantras, and (6) mantras for use in rituals. All of the spells are presented in Korean vernacular transliteration only, and most entries consist of the name in Korean script, the name in Sino-Korean script, a Korean translation of the name, and the mantra, *dhāraṇī*, or spell in Korean script. Entries of the most popular *dhāraṇīs* and mantras, however, have some descriptive information and instructions for efficacious use. For instance, the

³² The *New Edition* claims that the *Tiandi bayang shenzhou jing* was translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (343–413) [Rajip, Ch. Luoshi 羅什] (*Sinp'yōn Sowōn sōngch'wi kidobōp* [2009] 2010: 181), but the Korean translation by Uch'ōn actually follows the Chinese translation attributed to the polymath Yijing 義淨 (635–713) that was discovered among the Dunhuang documents by Aurel Stein (S. 127). See T 2897.

longest single entry in the book discusses the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* (a.k.a. the “Great Compassion Spell”), but information of respectable length is found for several other *dhāraṇīs* including “the *dhāraṇī* for repenting of unwholesome karma [drawing on the power] of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha” (*Chijang posal ch’ūmbu tarani* 地藏菩薩 懺蒲陀羅尼),³³ “the mantra of light” (*kwangmyōng chinōn* 光明真言), the *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light* (*Mugu chōng-gwang taedarani* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼), *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* (*Taebul-chōng chonsūng taedarani* 大佛頂尊勝大陀羅尼), and the *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* (*Sugu tarani* 隨求陀羅尼).³⁴

Taken together, in his preface and introduction to the book, Ŭihaeng provides a compelling invitation to lay Buddhists to make recitation of mantras and *dhāraṇīs* a part of their daily lives. The introduction methodically explains what mantras are, and what the benefits are if one recites mantras. Invoking Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774), he asserts that mantras, or “true words” (*chinōn* 真言) are not only translated as “spell” (*chu* 呪) and “divine incantation” (*sinju* 神呪), but are the same as the Sanskrit word “*dhāraṇī*.”³⁵ Using passages from mainstream Mahāyāna *sūtras*, such as the *Damamūka* (*Xianyu jing* 賢愚經), *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra* (*Daji jing* 大集經), and the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (*Dazhidu lun* 大智度論), he describes the benefits as empowering one to not forget the teachings of the Buddha and to be able to obtain enlightenment quickly, enabling one to overcome misfortunes and fulfill one’s desires, and finally facilitating the eradication of karmic hindrances (Chōng 2013: 32–35).

Ŭihaeng presents a detailed explanation of the correct method to recite mantras. He asserts that one can practice them wherever and whenever, but admonishes that if people would practice them properly, they should

³³ Although the standard Korean reading of the Sinographs 懺蒲 is *ch’ambu*, the traditional Korean Buddhist reading in the case of this spell is *ch’ūmbu*.

³⁴ Chōng 2013: 93–101 (*sinmyo changgu*), 134–38 (*ch’ūmbu*), 248–51 (*kwangmyōng*), 243–44 (*mugu chōnggwang*), 258–59 (*sugu*).

³⁵ Chōng 2013: 30–31. The assertion that all *dhāraṇīs* are just mantras is the primary point of *Encomia on a General Interpretation of the Meaning of Dhāraṇī* (T 902), which is attributed to Amoghavajra. For an analysis of the text and the evidence regarding its connection (or lack thereof) to Amoghavajra, see McBride 2015: 184–188.

bathe and observe precepts of abstinence. They should recite mantras after performing repentance practices, and they should chant them performing the wisdom-fist mudrā (*kūṃgang chigwōnin* 金剛智拳印; *vajra mudrā*), like images of Vairocana in Buddhist monasteries, and visualization of the Buddha. In this context, he encourages aspirants to practice the “empowerment of the three esoterica” (*sammil kaji* 三密加持). He says that the “three esoterica” (*sammil* 三密) are different than the three kinds of karma (*samōp* 三業) living beings commit by means of body, speech, and mind, and means conduct, language, and thought in accord with the Buddha. Furthermore, “empowerment” (*kaji* 加持) refers to receiving the divine protection of the Buddha through mutual resonance (*sangūng* 相應). Thus, he encourages people who would recite mantras to purify their body, speech, and mind. He concludes with the practical invitation that people should recite short mantras often, and invokes the “the mantra of the subtle six-letter king of great clarities [*mahāvīdyārāja*], the original mind of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” [= *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*] (*Kwanseūm posal ponsim mimyo yukcha taemyōngwang chinōn* 觀世音菩薩本心微妙六字大明王真言) and “*cintāmaṇi-cakra-dhāraṇī*” (*yōūiryun chu* 如意輪呪) that people can recite without observing precepts of abstinence (Chōng 2013: 36–43). Although it is perhaps too early to assess the influence of this manual, it can be seen as encapsulating the contemporary view of mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as an integral part of lay Buddhist practice.

Pocket edition accordion books are also popular materials for lay believers. Although the *Heart Sūtra* and *Diamond Sūtra*, both of which conclude in *dhāraṇīs*, as well as the Avalokiteśvara chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, are certainly prevalent in this manner of publication, I want to mention two examples: first, the *Śuraṃgama Spirit Spell* (*Nūngōm sinju* 楞嚴神呪) and, second, the *Collection of Devotionals for Academic Accomplishment* (*Hagōp sōngch’wi kido chip* 學業성취기도집). The *Śuraṃgama Spirit Spell* reproduces this famous *dhāraṇī* in seven sections in the Korean vernacular script, including material explaining the necessity and method of using spell-power to quell and control demons.³⁶ This section begins with three proof-texts: First is a passage from the famous

³⁶ *Nūngōm sinju* n.d. [ca. 2013].

Silla exegete Wŏnhyo’s 元曉 (617–686) *Commentary on the Awakening of Faith* (*Kisillon so* 起信論疏): “People who control all demons certainly recite spells for controlling all demons (*ch’ima chu* 治魔呪) in the Mahāyāna.”³⁷ Second is a line from Zhiyi’s 智顛 (538–597) *The Great Calming and Insight* (*Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀): “With respect to demonic illness (*mabyŏng* 魔病), it is proper that provided that one should use the power of the cultivation (*suhaengnyŏk* 修行力) of deep insight (*kwan* 觀) and great spirit spells (*sinju* 神呪), they will be able to be cured immediately.”³⁸ Third is a paraphrase from Sŏsan Hyujŏng’s 西山休靜 (1520–1604) *A Mirror on the Sŏn School of Buddhism* (*Sŏn’ga kwigam* 禪家龜鑑):

With respect to chanting a spirit spell, although one is able to overcome karma of the present [life] by means of one’s own strength, because getting rid of karma from past lifetimes is difficult and because it is necessary to supplicate for divine power (*sillyŏk* 神力), not intoning spirit spells and seeking to distance yourself from the affairs of *māra* [*masa* 魔事] is not the right thing to do.³⁹

All of these proof texts speak directly to the primary function of the *Śuraṃgama Spirit Spell*: the exorcising and controlling of demons, and come before simple, straight-forward directions on reciting the *dhāraṇī* in a loud voice in such a manner that the sound penetrates one’s mind and “perfectly penetrates the sense-base of the ear” (*igŭn wŏnt’ong* 耳根圓通).

The *Collection of Devotionals for Academic Accomplishment* is one of the most popular small devotional manuals (fig. 2).⁴⁰ The “academic accomplishment” referred to in this title means student performance on any kind of examination – primarily exams enabling students to go to the

³⁷ T 1844: 223c8–9. [謂治諸魔者。當誦大乘諸治魔。呪咀念誦之。]

³⁸ T 1911: 108a2–3. [若鬼魔二病此須深觀行力。及大神呪乃得差耳。] For a full English translation of the *Mohe zhiguan*, see Swanson 2017.

³⁹ Cf. “Intoning a mantra makes the deeds of the present [life] easier to control. Through your own practices you should counter and cleanse [that karma]; and for the past karma that is difficult to remove, you must avail yourself of its [the mantra’s] divine power. [That] Mātāṅga gained the fruit [of *anāgamin*] is the truth and not a lie. Therefore there is no such thing as distancing yourself from the affairs of the *māra* while not chanting the divine mantra.” See Jorgensen 2015: 122.

⁴⁰ *Hagŏp sŏngch’wi kidojip* n.d. [ca. 2013].

high school or college of their (or their parents’) choice. The recto side [inside] of the accordion book has a “Rite for Making a Vow” (*sōwōn ūi* 誓願儀), which is the “mantra for worshipping all the buddhas” (*pye chinōn* 普禮眞言), and an abbreviated version of the *Thousand Hands Sūtra*, which includes the recitation of eight mantras and is centered on the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases*. The verso side [outside] includes such things as lists for announcing the Tathāgata’s ten great vows and the four extensive vows, assiduous devotion toward Avalokiteśvara (including chanting “the mantra by which the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara eradicates karmic hindrances”), a *gāthā* for

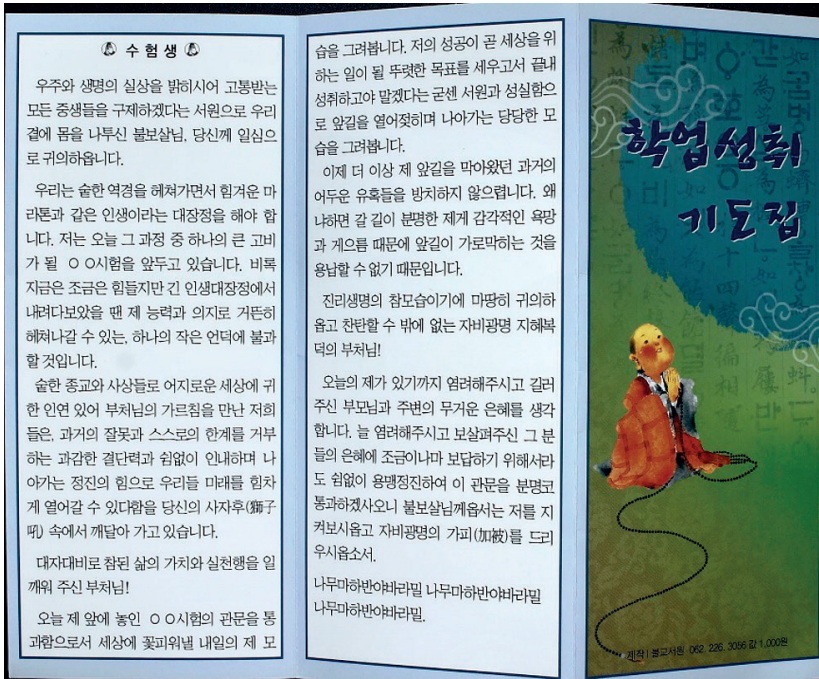


Fig. 2: The cover and last pages of the *Collection of Devotionals for Academic Accomplishment*. Notice the circular blanks in the second and fifth paragraphs of the accordion page shown at the left, where the name of the exam is inserted.

making penance, and a song for transferring merit. Most important, however, are two separate vow texts: one to be recited by the family of the student seeking academic accomplishment and the other for the student himself or herself. The two vow texts have blank spaces where the family members insert the name of the student in their vow, and where the student inserts the name of the examination he or she is taking.

The *Sūtra on the Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light* (*Mugu chōnggwang taedarani kyōng* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼經) has been an important icon in the modern Buddhist tradition in South Korea ever since the discovery of a woodblock print of the *dhāraṇī-sūtra* in the Śākyamuni Pagoda (Sōkkat’ap 釋迦塔) at Pulguk Monastery 佛國寺 in Kyōngju on October 13, 1966. Despite the fame of the *dhāraṇī* and many academic studies about it – and although the *sūtra* was translated into Korean as part of the Korean Translation of the Buddhist Canon project (Han’gūl taejanggyōng 한글대장경) – a translation in a style commonly used for lay Buddhist study in South Korea was first published by Sin Hūngsik in 2007 (Sin 2007). This version is intended for personal study and recitation and begins with the now-familiar “*sūtra*-recitation liturgy” (*songgyōng ūisik* 誦經儀式): “the mantra that purifies verbal karma,” “the mantra for comforting all the deities [buddhas and saints] of the five directions,” “a *gāthā* for opening the *sūtras*” (*kaegyōng ke* 開經偈), and “the mantra for opening the storehouse of the dharma.” Each of the mantras is recited thrice. The translation presents the text of the *dhāraṇī-sūtra* in two formats: first, the literary Sino-Korean text parsed for Korean readership with added markers and grammatical helps and the Korean pronunciation of every logograph placed on top of the corresponding Sinograph; and second, a vernacular Korean translation. The six *dhāraṇīs* and accompanying procedures that comprise the *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light* are presented in Korean transliteration first and then in Sino-Korean. This *dhāraṇī-sūtra* promises many kinds of protection, longevity, and this-worldly and spiritual benefits, but those emphasized by the publisher are found on the back cover:

If someone recites this *dhāraṇī*-spell immaculately once a day, he will be content for a hundred years. If one’s life is spent, one will be reborn in the world system of Extreme Bliss; and “One who constantly recites this *dhāraṇī*-spell at all times will immediately attain bodhi-wisdom, will always

remember his destiny, and will eternally be freed from premature death and all unwholesome bonds.”⁴¹

***Sūtra*-material Copied for Merit**

The devotional practice of copying *sūtras* and other material (*sagyōng* 寫經) is one of the most common and time-honored methods of making merit in the Buddhist world. Although skilled calligraphers and artists produce impressive illustrated manuscripts using precious materials such as gold and silver ink and indigo or black paper, which are also called *sagyōng*, here I refer to the simple practice of copying *sūtras* by devout laypeople for a variety of purposes. In essence, two types of materials for copying *sūtras* are available to laypeople and these materials are used in distinct devotional contexts. First are large sheets of paper with *sūtras* or *dhāraṇīs* printed on them, sold in packets of 100, which are used for group activities. Second are printed books for copying *sūtras*, *dhāraṇīs*, mantras, and other material, which are used for personal worship. The benefits of *sūtra*-copying and the memorization of particular *dhāraṇīs* (as well as *sūtras*) are explained in the *sūtra*-copying (*sagyōng*) books. The stand-alone practice of memorization of *dhāraṇīs* appears to have increased in recent years, as evidenced by the mass production of small inexpensive books and series of books for copying and chanting *dhāraṇīs* and mantras.

Printed pages of *sūtras* and *sūtra* material used for *sūtra*-copying in group contexts have some special features that distinguish them from books intended for personal *sūtra*-copying activities (fig. 3). The printed pages are almost always formatted to reproduce the features of a wood-block print. Thus, the title of the text appears on the right side, written vertically top to bottom. On the left side of the sheet are lines with words that enable the individual to devote the merit obtained from copying the *sūtra* to fulfill a vow or realize his wishes. The first line of this colophon is a space for articulating the person’s vow (*parwōnmun* 發願文). The next line is for the individual’s address (*chuso* 住所), and the final line asks for his/her birthdate (month and day), and finally the name of the

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of this *dhāraṇī*, see McBride 2011: 40–48.

postulant making the vow (*parwŏn haengja* 發願行者). In this way, the person makes their vow and the merit more concrete and creates a lasting record of the merit produced.

The *Heart Sūtra*, which concludes with the famous spell *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*, is one of the most common *sūtras* copied for merit by groups of Korean devotees. Material to copy the *Heart Sūtra* is published in two forms: a Sino-Korean version (Kumārajīva’s translation, T 250) and a version in the Korean script. In the summer of 2015, in the bookstore in the basement of the Templestay building across the street from Chogyesa, the Headquarters of the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism in Seoul, for instance, in addition to the *Heart Sūtra* and its famous spell, five *dhāraṇī* texts were available for purchase in packets of 100 sheets: “the *dhāraṇī* for repenting [of unwholesome



Fig. 3: A package of 100 sheets of the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* used for group *sūtra*-copying activities.

karma]” (*ch’ūmbu tarani* 懺蒲陀羅尼), “the mantra of light” (*kwang-myōng chinōn* 光明真言), the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* (*Sinmyo changgu taedarani* 神妙章句大陀羅尼), the *Uṣṇīṣavi-jaya-dhāraṇī* (*Pulchōng chonsūng tarani* 佛頂尊勝大陀羅尼), and the *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light* (*Mugu chōnggwang taedarani* 無垢淨光大陀羅尼). These *dhāraṇī* sheets for *sūtra*-copying present transliterations of the Sanskrit spell transliterated in the Korean script. Although printings of “the *dhāraṇī* for repenting [of unwholesome karma]” and “the mantra of light” in red ink on white paper can be found in some stores, these are not for *sūtra*-copying – they are for funerary rituals. Several slightly different printings of the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* are available for purchase, suggesting that this *dhāraṇī* is the most efficacious – or at least popular and profitable – as a group activity.

Books for personal *sūtra*-copying are numerable and constitute a genre unto themselves in bookstores and Buddhist specialty shops. Although many short *sūtras* and poems, including such things as the “*Gāthā* Summarizing the *Avatamsakasūtra*,” have traditionally been copied for merit, in the twenty-first century *dhāraṇī* texts have become increasingly popular. Not only have Buddhist publishers supplied several different editions for copying the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases*, but to these have been added such popular spells as the “*Śuraṅgama* spirit spell” (*Taebulchōng nūngōm sinju* 大佛頂楞嚴神呪), “the mantra of light,” and the *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light*.

In 2014, Unjusa, one of the largest publishers of Buddhist books, began distribution of a thirteen-volume series titled *Dhāraṇī (Mantra) Sūtra-copying [Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng* 陀羅尼(真言)寫經] specifically oriented toward individuals seeking to copy these spells to realize distinctive goals. The series appears to have been conceived in such a manner for a devotee to work through personal issues and family concerns, pursue various this-worldly benefits including health and personal advancement, and finally seek rebirth in the Pure Land *Sukhāvātī* for one’s deceased parents and oneself. Although some books only have one or two different short spells to copy, others present as many as five or six distinct *dhāraṇīs* or mantras. The one characteristic that all of these spells share is brevity; none is longer than a few lines. English

translations of the subtitles of the thirteen volumes provide insight into the practical concerns and this-worldly benefits sought by the individuals who purchase the books in this series.

1. Mantras for Repenting of Sinful Acts Committed in One's Previous Lives⁴²
2. Mantras for Eliminating Karmic Hindrances⁴³
3. Mantras for Prenatal Education and Young Children⁴⁴
4. Mantras for Scholastic Achievement⁴⁵
5. Mantras for Freeing Oneself from Illness⁴⁶
6. Mantras for the Realization of One's Desires⁴⁷
7. Mantras for Finding Employment and Obtaining Promotion⁴⁸
8. Mantras for a Harmonious Home⁴⁹
9. Mantras for Eliminating Misfortune and Inviting Good Fortune⁵⁰
10. Mantras Causing One's Deceased Parents to be Reborn in the Pure Land Sukhāvati⁵¹
11. Mantras for Health and Longevity⁵²
12. Mantras Invoking Wealth and Riches⁵³
13. Mantras Causing One to be Reborn in the Pure Land Sukhāvati⁵⁴

⁴² *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 1* 2014. [참회진언, 관세음보살참회주]

⁴³ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 2* 2014. [광명진언, 관세음보살 멸업장진언, 지장보살 멸정업진언, 정삼업진언, 세제죄장진언, 보현보살멸죄주]

⁴⁴ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 3* 2014. [호제동사다라니, 장수멸죄 호제동자다라니]

⁴⁵ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 4* 2014. [문수보살 오자진언, 대일여래 만족일체지진언, 관세음보살 보경수(寶鏡手)진언, 관세음보살 보경수(寶經手)진언, 혜철수진언]

⁴⁶ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 5*: 2014. [약사여래 대진언, 약왕보살진언, 문수보살 소제병고다라니, 제일체질병다라니]

⁴⁷ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 6* 2014. [대원성취진언, 수구진언, 준제진언, 관자재보살여의륜주]

⁴⁸ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 7* 2014. [보궁수진언]

⁴⁹ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 8* 2014. [보병수진언]

⁵⁰ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 9* 2014. [불설소개길상다라니]

⁵¹ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 10* 2014. [해원결진언, 보부모은진언, 선망부도왕생정토진언]

⁵² *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 11* 2014. [금강수명다라니, 연수명다라니, 보현연명보살진언]

⁵³ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 12* 2014. [여의주수진언, 여의륜관음진언]

⁵⁴ *Tarani (Chinōn) Sagyōng 13* 2014. [무량수불설 왕생정토주, 결정왕생정토주, 구생시방정토진언, 아미타불종자진언]

Besides the conventional religious concerns of expiation of sin and unwholesome karma and seeking rebirth in the Pure Land for one's deceased parents and oneself, the spells in this series focus on tangible, practical concerns of ordinary people: doing well in school and getting into the right university, finding a job and being promoted, staying healthy and having a happy family life. Although not explicitly stated anywhere in the books, these wants and desires are the very things that married Korean women, who probably constitute the largest group of lay Buddhists consuming this material, are most concerned about. This series highlights how the long-standing practice of copying spells and *dhāraṇīs* has been commodified, repackaged for contemporary South Korean society that is increasingly materialistic and concerned with the realization of personal wants and desires. By stating this I do not imagine that there was a pristine time when Koreans were not concerned with the realization of their personal desires, but rather that the success and stresses of capitalism and a market economy converge with the Buddhist publishing industry encouraging individuals to seek satisfaction in the accomplishment of straightforward goals. More recently, Buddhist authors have published attractive, expensive books that, for example, cater to popular interest in learning or at least gaining some exposure to Siddhaṃ and comprehensive coverage or inclusion of all known *dhāraṇīs* and mantras.⁵⁵

Talismans

Talismans (*pujök* 符籙) have become popular (again) in recent years. According to Kang Sinjōng, talismans on white paper reflect a “Buddhist” context, and talismans on yellow paper reflect a “Confucian” context, although I suspect that “Sinitic” (or Daoist) might be a better word than “Confucian.” Talismans are carried on the person and particular talismans are carried for specific purposes. However, the two traditions have intermixed and Buddhist talismans are also found on yellow paper.

⁵⁵ Pak and Yi 2015. This book costs 29,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$26.00 U.S. In addition, see Pak Myōngsuk 2016a; 2016b. Each volume in this two-volume set costs 35,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$26.00 U.S.

Furthermore, the most potent talismans are ones that have been written by hand by a specialist rather than merely printed. These kinds of talismans typically cost between 4,000 and 7,000 Korean wŏn (approx. \$3.50 to \$6.25 U.S.), although some larger handwritten talismans cost 10,000 Korean wŏn (approx. \$9.00 U.S.) or more.

Buddhist supply shops and stores located near the premises of Buddhist temples sell a wide assortment of objects that may be considered talismanic. Talismans come in a wide variety of forms. For instance, talismans and charms can be small rosary-bracelets, necklaces showcasing a small Buddha image, key chains, small wooden tablets, and small gold-colored cards (5 cm by 8 cm) in protective plastic cases featuring Avalokiteśvara and Bodhidharma. Many of these have the expression “realization of one’s desires” (*sŏwŏn sŏngch’wi*) carved or impressed in either Sinitic logographs or the Korean script on individual beads of the rosaries. One popular and inexpensive talisman of the gold-card type is an attractive feminine-looking white-robed Avalokiteśvara bearing a *kuṇḍikā* in her right hand, and standing on a red lotus blossom. The talisman has the “mantra for realizing one’s desires” (*sŏwŏn sŏngch’wi chinŏn* 誓願成就眞言) written in the Korean script along with the words of the spell: “*Om amok’a salbadara sadaya sibe hom*” (옴 아모카살바다라 사다야시베훬).⁵⁶ The shape of the talisman makes it easy to carry on one’s person in one’s wallet or purse.

Hand-drawn talismans in red ink on yellow paper are usually in the form of one large and exceptionally detailed, complex, and expanded block-or-rectangular-shaped Sinitic logograph written on the paper vertically (fig. 4). The yellow paper is typically 19 cm by 9 cm, although some are written on larger paper 20 cm by 10 cm. These talismans are often described as being for a single apotropaic purpose, such as “dissolving depression” (*ulchŭng haeso* 憂鬱症解消) or “invoking good fortune” (*chaesu taegil* 財數大吉). An example of a Buddhist-inspired talisman on yellow paper is the “mantra for subjugating demons” (*hangma chinŏn* 降魔眞言), which presents the spell first in Siddham and then in the Korean vernacular script (fig. 5).

⁵⁶ This mantra is also called the “mantra of desire-realization” (*wŏnsŏngch’wi chinŏn* 願成就眞言).

So-called “Buddhist” talismans on white paper typically have a visual structure different from talismans on yellow paper – although the very same talismans can be found on yellow paper as well. Buddhist talismans are written on slightly larger paper, which is characteristically 11 cm by 23 cm. Block-shaped Sinitic-style logographs are found on both sides of a circular central space. The central circular space usually has some kind of pictorial element to it: the “talisman for the realization of one’s desires” (*sōwŏn sōngch’wi pu* 誓願成就符) has an eight-leafed lotus blossom, the “eradication of sundry demons” (*chapkwī somyŏl* 雜鬼消滅) features a horned red-faced demon, the “talisman for success in an examination, finding employment, and obtaining a promotion” (*hapkyŏk, ch’wījik, sūngjin pu* 合格, 就職, 昇進符) has a boat-shape encompassed



Fig. 4: Talismans written on yellow paper in Buddhist supply store in Kyŏngju, South Korea, June 2014.

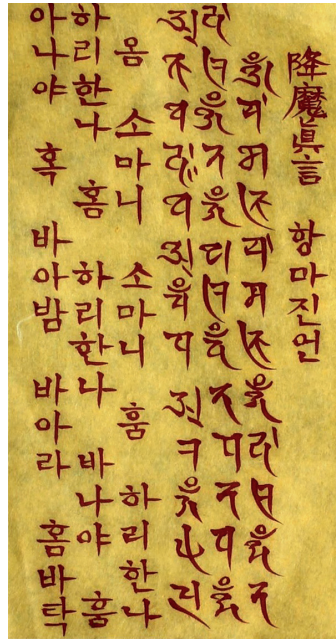


Fig. 5: The “mantra for subjugating demons” on yellow paper.

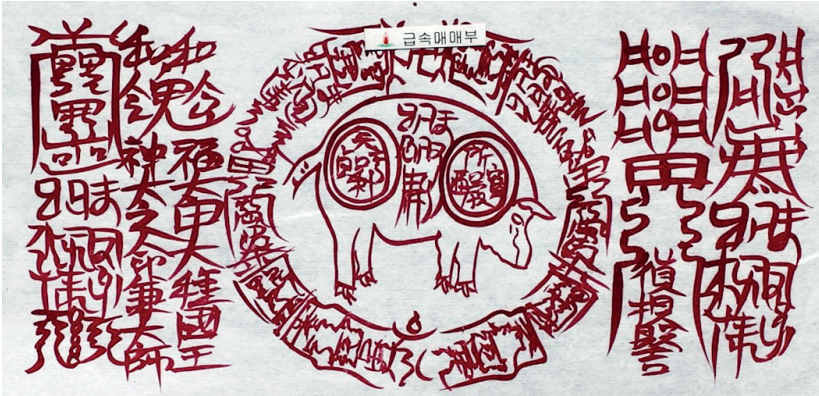


Fig. 6: The “talisman for quick sales” on white paper.

by a talisman, the “talisman for causes and connections” (*inyŏn pu* 因緣符)⁵⁷ has a butterfly shape, and the “talisman for quick sales” (*kŭpsok maemae pu* 急速賣買符) has a good-fortune pig with spells written on its body in some written forms (fig. 6), and a winged-horse or horses in others. These kinds of talismans can be used in conjunction with other ritual behavior, such as exorcisms.

Exorcisms and Death Rituals

Dhāraṇīs are the central element in various types of exorcisms and death rituals. For instance, the handbook *Devotional Methods for the Realization of One’s Desires*, which I discussed in detail above, has a short section on “demonstrative language for use in Buddhist funerary rituals” (*yŏngga siŏ* 靈駕示語).⁵⁸ Brief instructions for a home-style ceremony encourage the practitioner to set up an offerings table with food, an image of the deceased, an ancestor tablet (*wip’ae* 位牌), and objects the

⁵⁷ This talisman is for bringing to pass various kinds of causes and conditions – including but not exclusive to human relationships – according to one’s will or desires. It is best when worn or carried on one’s body or person.

⁵⁸ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 55–71.

deceased treasured during his or her life. The devotee supplicating rebirth in the Pure Land for the deceased sits directly in front of the altar that has been set up and prepares mentally for this compassionate service. The directions then say that the devotee should recite the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra* one time, which as we have seen above is comprised primarily of short mantras and the longer *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases*.⁵⁹ The liturgy, which the devotee is encouraged to recite clearly and slowly, closes with three spells each chanted thrice: “the mantra for breaking open hell” (*p’ajiok chinōn* 破地獄真言), “the mantra for resolving grievances and bonds” (*haewōn’gyōl chinōn* 解冤結真言), and “the mantra causing rebirth in the Pure Land in the highest grade of the highest class” (*sangp’um sangsaeng chinōn* 上品上生真言).⁶⁰ Also included in this section are several other spells associated with freeing the deceased from netherworld troubles and demons and enabling the departed to repent and be liberated from the cycle of rebirth and death: “the mantra of light” (*kwangmyōng chinōn* 光明真言), “the mantra for subjugating demons” (*hangma chinōn* 降魔真言), and “the spell causing liberation” (*haet’al chu* 解脫呪), taken from the *Sūtra on the Five Thousand Five Hundred Names of the Buddha and Spirit Spells for Removing Obstacles and Eradicating Sins* (*Wuqian wubai foming shenzhou chuzhang miezui jing* 五千五百佛名神呪除障滅罪經).⁶¹ After these spells are two short texts, the *Sūtra on Dreaming of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara* (*Kwanseūm posal mongsu kyōng* 觀世音菩薩夢授經)⁶² and the “*Gāthā* on the Dharma Nature by the Patriarch Ŭisang” (*Ŭisang Chosa pōpsōng ke* 義相祖師法性偈), which is the poem part of the Silla monk Ŭisang’s (625–702) *Seal-diagram Symbolizing the Dharma Realm*

⁵⁹ *Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [1998] 2012: 55.

⁶⁰ *Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [1998] 2012: 63.

⁶¹ *Sowōn sōngch’wi kidobōp* [1998] 2012: 64–65.

⁶² The *Kwanseūm posal mongsu kyōng*, also called the *Kusaeng kyōng* 救生經 and *Mongsu kyōng* 夢授經, is an abbreviated and alternate form of *King Gao’s Avalokiteśvara Sūtra* (T 2898). The title is possibly based on the reference to the *Sūtra on the Dream of Sun Jingde in the Northern Wei Period* (*Yuan Wei Sun Jingde mengshou jing* 元魏孫敬德夢授經) reported in T 2154: 581b24; T 2157: 906a22, 909a20. The short *sūtra* contained in the Korean devotional manual begins with several phrases found the first paragraph of the *Gaowang Guanshiyin jing*, T 2898: 1425b8–11; however, it includes invocations of various forms of Avalokiteśvara not found in the Taishō text.

of the *One Vehicle* (*Ilſŭng pŏpkye to* 一乘法界圖) that encapsulates the teaching of the *Avatamsakasūtra*.⁶³ The section on funerary texts closes with one of the most popular *dhāraṇīs* associated with repentance: “the *dhāraṇī* for repenting of unwholesome karma [drawing on the power] of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha” (*Chijang posal ch’ūmbu tarani* 地藏菩薩懺蒲陀羅尼), which comes from the preface to the *Sūtra on the Ten Wheels of Kṣitigarbha* (*Dizang pusa shilun jing* 地藏菩薩十輪經).⁶⁴

The section on Buddhist funeral rituals in the *New Edition* is comparable to what we have just treated above, save that it is much shorter. It includes similar instructions for constructing an altar and parallel language for invoking the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas to cause the deceased to be reborn in the Pure Land, and closes with “the mantra for breaking open hell,” “the mantra for resolving grievances and bonds,” and “the mantra causing rebirth in the Pure Land in the highest grade of the highest class” each being chanted thrice. Here, however, only “the mantra of light” and “the mantra for subjugating demons” are appended.⁶⁵

Paper *dhāraṇī* clothing for Buddhist funerary services is also available for purchase. Inexpensive packages are available for men (green) and women (pink) (1,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$0.90 U.S.). Paper clothing for men has the titles of the spells “mantra for breaking hell” (*p’a chioek chinŏn* 破地獄真言) and the “mantra for eradicating sins” (*myŏlchoe chinŏn* 滅罪真言) written in black in Sino-Korean logographs and the spells themselves written in red in Siddham on the light blueish collar of the upper part of the jacket (fig. 7). The word *om*, written in Siddham script, is placed at the center of the chest. The men’s white paper jacket and pants are decorated with Chinese coins and Siddham *dhāraṇīs* in medallion shapes. Women’s paper clothing has the same spells as the men’s, but written only in gold in Siddham on the red collar underneath a Buddhist swastika (fig. 8). The women’s clothing also has Chinese coins and Siddham *dhāraṇīs* in medallion shapes, but the size of the *dhāraṇī* medallions varies depending on who has printed the clothing.

⁶³ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 66–69.

⁶⁴ *Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [1998] 2012: 70–71.

⁶⁵ *Sinp’yŏn Sowŏn sŏngch’wi kidobŏp* [2009] 2010: 84–94.



Fig. 7: *Dhāraṇī* clothing for men.



Fig. 8: *Dhāraṇī* clothing for women.

The women’s clothing package I have has an additional long rectangular print of the *Diamond Sūtra* in the shape of a seven-story pagoda on the left side of the sheet and three spells in red on the right: the “mantra of the six-letter king of great clarities” (*yukcha taemyōngwang chinōn* 六字大明王真言 = *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*), the “mantra of light,” and the “mantra for subjugating demons” written in the Siddham and Korean scripts. These three spells are located underneath a box with the line “making of a vow for rebirth in Sukhāvātī” (*wangsaeng kūngnak parwōn* 왕생극락발원 [往生極樂發願]) in it for the “filiality-practicing [son or daughter]” (*haenghyo* 行孝) to write the address and name of the deceased as well as his or her own name. Although the paper *dhāraṇī* clothes are in the shape of a shirt or blouse and pants, when used, the paper clothes are not removed from their envelope. Rather, on the envelop there is space set aside for the deceased’s name and other information.

Once filled out, the envelope is attached to the corpse with tape or string and placed on the deceased's chest prior to interment. The burial of individuals with clothing decorated with *dhāraṇīs* presents an interesting practical evolution from the often-repeated instruction in many *dhāraṇī* texts urging practitioners to bear or carry a copy of the *dhāraṇī* on their person when they are buried. Such texts typically promise that such an individual will avoid rebirth in bad states (denizen of hell, hungry ghost, or animal), and promise various sorts of benefits and blessings in the hereafter. Classic *dhāraṇīs* that make such promises, in much reprinted Buddhist materials from the Chosŏn period, are the *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* (*Sugu chūktūk tarani* 隨求卽得陀羅尼) and *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* (*Pulchöng chonsüng tarani* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼) (Kim 2010: 282).

Several do-it-yourself kits for performing exorcisms are available for purchase and contain straightforward directions. For instance, a bestowal of [dharma-]food to rescue someone from illness (*kubyöng sisik* 救病施食) exorcizing/dispelling the misfortune of illness (*kubyöng sisik pyöngaek p'uri* 救病施食 病厄풀○) is performed to expel a ghost that has attached itself to the body of the patient and is afflicting it with injury so that the patient can live freely. The method of use is for one to attach a paper on which the saint's name is written (*wimok* 位目; the bodhisattva who does not want to achieve Buddhahood fast but stays in the realm of form for a long time to benefit living beings due to his compassionate mind [*pijüng posal* 悲增菩薩]) above the altar for the bestowal of food. Underneath the paper where the saint's name is written one places the seven envoys of the netherworld – seven paper dolls hung above altar as a place for the soul to depend during the liminal period of the ritual – and below that place [images of] seven horses. Then read the *Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī for Dispelling the Misfortune of Illness* (*Kubyöng sisik pyöngaek tarani kyöng* 救病施食病厄陀羅尼經). The directions also say that if one uses *dhāraṇī* clothing for funeral services for ancestors it will be even more effective. All the things needed to do the ceremony are contained in the inexpensive package (2,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$1.80 U.S.), including the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* and “substituting a person's life and destiny” (*taesu taemyöng* 代數代命) [talismans] on five-colored paper. The contents of the envelope are produced using crystallized cinnabar (*kyöngmyöŋ chusa* 鏡面朱砂).

Other small do-it-yourself kits (3,000 Korean wŏn = approx. \$2.75 U.S.) include “*Dhāraṇī* for exorcising all sorts of evil spirits and baleful influences [*sal* 煞]” (*Mansa salp’uri tarani* 만사살풀이다라니), “*Dhāraṇī* for meeting the Dragon Spirit” (*Yongsin maji tarani* 용신맞이다라니), and “*Dhāraṇī* for meeting with good fortune” (*Chaesu maji tarani* 재수맞이다라니) (fig. 9). The instructions for using these *dhāraṇīs* include both reading aloud and burning the *dhāraṇī* material,



Fig. 9: Do-it-yourself-kit for using the “*Dhāraṇī* for meeting with good fortune.” Not all of the talismans contained in the envelope shown on the left are shown on the right.

placing three-sheets of the *dhāraṇī* under one's mattress and then burning them in a clean place after seven days (and repeating the action thrice if the baleful influences are severe), and placing the *dhāraṇī* on one's person or in one's business' cashbox or under the mattress of one's bed. For full translations of the instructions see the Appendix. The Silla monk-scholar Ŭisang's "Seal-diagram Symbolizing the Dharma Realm of the One Vehicle of the Avataṃsaka" is also employed as a *dhāraṇī*. Using the alternate name "Diagram of the Quintessence of the Dharma Nature" (*Pöpsöng simdo* 법성심도 [法性心圖]), a new ritual context has been created for this impressive poem set in a seal-diagram shape that encapsulates the teachings of the *Avataṃsakasūtra*. The directions promise that calamities will not be able to invade one's home if one cherishes it within one's household and that all things will work to one's liking. The methods of using it are to place it in one's automobile or on the chest of the deceased before interring them. If one does so, the directions promise that one will be free from accidents and car-breakdowns, the deceased will go to the Pure Land, and the living will amass loads of merit (see Appendix, Sec. D).

Materials Enshrined in the Chest Cavities of Buddha Images

The practice of enshrining objects and materials (*pokchang* 伏藏/腹藏) inside Buddha images, pagodas (*t'ap* 塔; Skt. *stūpa*), and behind or on top of scroll paintings (*t'aenghwa* 幀畫) enjoys a long history in the Buddhist world. The earliest extant example in Korea dates to mid-eighth-century Silla, and many more examples of this kind of votive activity remain from the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods. Korean scholarship suggests that one of the primary differences between the early Korean practice and that of China and Japan is that Koreans have emphasized the enshrining of *sūtras*, *dhāraṇīs*, textiles, and votive inscriptions, while their Chinese and Japanese counterparts installed miniature representations of internal organs along with a rich assortment of texts and other votive objects.⁶⁶ In contemporary Korean Buddhism, *dhāraṇīs* are among

⁶⁶ Lee 2013: 61. For images of articles – including *dhāraṇīs* – enshrined in Buddha images from the Silla through Chosŏn periods, see Kungnip Chungang Pangmulgwan 2015: 78–121.

the chief objects enshrined in Buddha images. In the late twentieth century, the most common object sold in Buddhist supply shops for such activities was the ubiquitous *Pagoda-shaped dhāraṇī of the Diamond Sūtra* (*Kūmgang panya paramil kyōng t'aptarani* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 塔陀羅尼), the *Diamond Sūtra* printed in red on a long sheet of white paper with the Sinographs comprising the form of a seven-story jeweled pagoda (fig. 10). This kind of print is still the most common in Korea and can be purchased for 500 Korean wŏn (approx. \$0.50 U.S.). The *Pagoda-shaped dhāraṇī of the Diamond Sūtra* is installed in Buddha images and pagodas and is wrapped together with woodblocks and carried on the heads of believers in the increasingly popular devotional activity of “bearing the Buddhist canon on the crown of one’s head” (*chōngdae pulsa* 頂戴佛事) (McBride 2017: 132).

In recent years, people have several more choices regarding “*dhāraṇīs* for enshrining in the chest cavity of a Buddha image” (*pokchang tarani* 腹藏陀羅尼). Such *dhāraṇīs* include the *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light* – the title *Mugu chonggwang tae tarani* is in Sino-Korean graphs and the *dhāraṇī* is in Siddham on yellow paper – and several different printed *dhāraṇīs* with the generic title “*dhāraṇīs* for enshrining



Fig. 10: Envelope containing the *Pagoda-shaped dhāraṇī of the Diamond Sūtra* printed in the form of a seven-story jeweled pagoda.

in the chest cavity of a Buddha image:” (1) the “*dhāraṇī* of the Thousand-handed [Avalokiteśvara]” (*ch’ōnsu tarani* 千手多羅尼) for drawing on the “power of the sublime wisdom of Avalokiteśvara” (*Kwanūm myoji ryōk* 觀音妙智力), a Siddham *dhāraṇī* printed in red ink on yellow paper, and (2) a hodge-podge of various kinds of Siddham diagrams including a “diagram of red lotus blossom with eight petals” (*p’aryōp taehongnyōn chi to* 八葉大紅蓮之圖), “diagram of the Cundī [spell] in nine syllables” (*Chunje kuja to* 准提九字圖), “diagram of the arrayed Diamond region” (*yōl kūmgang chibang chi to* 列金剛地方之圖), and the “diagram of the seed-syllables of the five wheels” (*oryun chongja to* 五輪種子圖). In addition to the foregoing, *dhāraṇīs* that were popular for this practice during the Koryō period are still in use: the *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhāna-hṛdayaguhyadhātu-karaṇḍamudrā-dhāraṇī* (*Ilch’e yōrae simbimil chōmsin sari pohyōbin tarani* 一切如來心祕密全身舍利寶篋印陀羅尼), the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* (*Pulchōng chonsūng tarani* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼), “circular womb realm *maṇḍala* in Siddham with A-letter” (*Aja pōmja wōnsang t’aejanggye mandara* 阿字 梵字圓相胎藏界曼陀羅) and “circular womb realm *maṇḍala* in Siddham” (*Pōmja wōnsang t’aejanggye mandara* 梵字圓相胎藏界曼陀羅)⁶⁷ are also enshrined in the chest cavities of Buddha images. Large *dhāraṇī* prints are placed in large images and small ones (like the previously mentioned *Great Dhāraṇī on Immaculately Pure Light*) are placed in small images in preparation for the eye-opening ceremony (*kaean* 開眼 or *kaegwang* 開光).

The reasons for the selection of particular or specific *dhāraṇīs* and mantras to place inside an image is a matter of some conjecture. Although an individual lay person’s personal connection to or individualized success with a particular spell or incantation certainly plays or can play a factor, long standing conventions in Korean Buddhism are also important, as well as the desire to forge a connection with the past by enshrining in an image a *dhāraṇī* or mantra discovered in an image or pagoda

⁶⁷ On the directions for a printed *dhāraṇī* featuring various kinds of Siddham *dhāraṇīs* in diagram form, these *maṇḍalas* are conceptualized as *dhāraṇīs* because they are called *Aja pōmja wōnsang t’aejanggye mandarani* and *Aja pōmja wōnsang t’aejanggye mandarani* respectively, although the logographs are merely those for *maṇḍala*.

made in earlier times. Nevertheless, because copies of more than one *dhāraṇī* or mantra can be placed inside any given image, the aspirant is not limited to only one choice. Furthermore, judging by conventional practice coming down from the Chosŏn period, because stacks of one hundred sheets of individual *dhāraṇīs* or mantras are stuffed into the Buddhist image, along with other materials, those commissioning images have flexibility to do what they want.

Conclusion

Dhāraṇīs and mantras are an integral part of the practical life of Korean Buddhists in the twenty-first century. Far from being incidental to lay practice, the recitation of mantras and *dhāraṇīs* is emerging as a central component to the successful “realization of one’s desires.” Drawing on long-standing traditions, contemporary promoters of the ritual application of *dhāraṇīs* assert that aspirants will not forget the Buddha’s teachings and will attain enlightenment quickly, overcome all manner of disasters and calamities, and get rid of all manner of karmic obstacles if they memorize them. Lay people utilize *dhāraṇīs* in essentially five ways: (1) in personal devotionals; (2) as *sūtra*-material copied for merit; (3) as talismans and in household or business rituals supplicating for this-worldly benefits; (4) for exorcisms and death rituals; and (5) as materials enshrined in the chest cavities of Buddha images and in pagodas. Although lay people must rely of monastic experts in the appropriate rituals for the eye-opening and enshrining objects in the chest cavities of Buddhist images, their hopes and wishes are manifest to some extent in the *dhāraṇīs* and mantras they choose to be placed in the images they commission.

The most popular *dhāraṇī*, both from the standpoint of accessibility to cheap reproductions as well as broad application, is the *Great Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases*, which is more generally known in East Asia as the “Great Compassion Spell.” Widely reproduced as part of the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra*, the most commonly used liturgical *sūtra* in contemporary Korean Buddhism, this variant of the *Nīlakaṇṭha-dhāraṇī* circulates in a wide variety of forms and is used in most forms of devotional practice and seeking this-worldly benefits. Another relevant

recent development is the increased ritual use of Ŭisang's "*Gāthā* on the Dharma Nature," the Silla monk's poem that encapsulates the teachings of the *Avataṃsakasūtra*. Besides enjoying widespread use in *sūtra*-copying, this *gāthā* is used in funerary ritual and exorcisms just like an apotropaic *dhāraṇī* cum talisman that offers protection from calamities and protection from harmful influences and accidents.

What is the significance of this widespread use of *dhāraṇīs*? All of these materials can be used effectively and efficaciously (or at least so the directions say) without recourse to the mediation of monks and nuns, but one would be hard pressed to find religious activities more ritualistic than the recitation of *dhāraṇīs*. The mantras and *dhāraṇīs* are powerful in and of themselves and if recited properly – in other words, if one prepares appropriately and follows the procedures – promise the realization of one's desires, whatever they might be. Although some instructions encourage practitioners to be mindful and contemplative, particularly Ŭihaeng's *Everyday Mantras*, to argue that internal spiritual development is more important than the acquisition of this-worldly benefits is difficult. The mass-produced materials articulate many distinct desired outcomes of practice. Does this, then, replace the importance or necessity of meditating monks and nuns? If a superfluous position for monastics is understood as the essential component of "modern" religion, this position is ambivalent in contemporary lay-oriented Korean Buddhism because the primary producers of this overwhelming amount of cheap, accessible, mass-produced material are monastics themselves. This being the case, this material cannot be seen as replacing the role of the monastic teacher. Rather, the monk-author serves as an unseen spiritual mentor (Skt. *kalyāṇamitra*) who guides the lay aspirant through an overwhelming amount of potential ritual behavior, such as the hundreds of known mantras, to the most beneficial practice to accomplish his or her desires.

Perhaps the best Western term to use as a heuristic device to investigate and understand *dhāraṇīs* and mantras is the Latin expression *ex opere operato* ("from the work worked").⁶⁸ In Roman Catholicism, the

⁶⁸ I would like to thank Rob Gimello for introducing me to this term when he served as the discussant for this paper at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, on April 1, 2016. I believe it will be fruitful to use as a heuristic device to investigate mantras and *dhāraṇīs* in the East Asian Buddhist context.

expression usually refers to sacraments (rites, ceremonies, rituals, services) deriving their power from Christ's work rather than the role or ministration of humans. A popular misunderstanding of the concept is that rituals or liturgies work automatically and independently of the faith of the recipient – for East Asian Buddhism we might read “aspirant” or “practitioner.” The officially sanctioned position, however, is that for a sacrament “to work,” the recipient needs faith. In modern usage, the expression frequently refers to the idea that the sacraments are efficacious in and of themselves rather than being contingent on the attitude or faith of either the minister or the recipient. From this perspective, the efficacy of a ritual is a result, not of the priest or minister, but of Christ himself.

The usefulness and practicality of this concept in investigating Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* and mantras should be obvious, although here I will do no more than paint a few broad strokes and save a more thorough analysis for later. Where do *dhāraṇīs* and mantras derive their efficacy and apotropaic power from? Is it the faith and preparation of the practitioner or the latent spiritual power of the Buddha or bodhisattvas who taught the spell or for whom the spell is named? The role of the “transfer of merit” (*pariṇāmanā*) from buddhas and bodhisattvas in the effectual use of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras cannot be over-emphasized, and its similarity to the power by which Roman Catholic sacraments are believed “to work” cannot be ignored. This being the case, however, following the procedures for using *dhāraṇīs* and mantras are somewhat different than receiving Christian sacraments. Chanting Buddhist spells is active behavior, and the act of reciting *dhāraṇīs* and mantras is said to purify the body and mind of the practitioner, rid the person of unwholesome karma, and bestow personal power. Receiving Christian sacraments can be seen as passive behavior, with the priest or minister functioning as the conduit of Christ's power. In the contemporary Korean practice of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras, however, both active and passive elements are present, which may account in part for the broad popularity of these ritual practices because they appeal to ordinary people with varying spiritual capacities and faith in the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, function to calm and focus the mind on a single purpose or for a specific result, and are supported by large collections of stories, anecdotes, and narratives attesting to their efficacy.

Appendix: Instructions for Four Do-It-Yourself *Dhāraṇī* Rituals

A. *Mansa salp'uri tarani* 만사살풀이다라니 (*Dhāraṇī* for exorcising all sorts of evil spirits and baleful influences [*sal* 煞])

Uses

When nothing is solved and there is no improvement because there are many kinds of baleful influences, such as the generalissimo evil spirit (*taejanggun sal* 大將軍煞), an evil influence from the place where a person died (*sangmun sal* 喪門煞), a baleful influence arising from an event to pay condolences among one's close relatives (*chogaek sal* 弔客煞), an unlucky direction (*samsalbang* 三煞方), baleful influences causing storms of life (*sep'a sal* 世波煞), baleful influences [from consuming] raw meats (*yukhoe sal* 肉膾煞) [?], baleful influences from deceased spirits (*ogwi sal* 惡鬼煞), troubles with ancestors' graves (*myot'al sal* 墓頃煞), troubles with moving (*isat'al sal* 移徙[止+頁]煞), baleful influences afflicting one's marriage (*honin sal* 婚姻煞), evil spirits blighting a wedding (*chudang sal* 周堂煞), alcohol-induced debauchery (*ūmju pangt'ang* 飲酒放蕩), disharmony in the home (*kajōng purhwa* 家庭不和), conjugal incompatibility (*wōnjin* 元嗔), wandering spirits (*yuhon* 遊魂) [?], baleful influence resulting in serious accidents or death (*paekho sal* 白虎煞 [bitten by white tiger]), short lifespan (*tanmyōng* 短命), illness (*chilbyōng* 疾病), baleful influence causing disharmony in a conjugal relationship (*kongbang [sal]* 空房[煞]), proclivity to indulge in sexual behavior/affairs (*tohwa* 桃花), spreading of fire [?] (*hwagak* 火脚) [?], troubles/distress (*uhwan* 憂患), disease (*pyōnggo* 病故), and unexpected accidents (*hwoengaek* 橫厄), [do this procedure]. When, no matter how hard you try, you are blocked and do not achieve your aims, [do this procedure].

Method

- (1) Burn candles and incense without fail at your place of business or place where you will stay.
- (2) Put things into position on the west side when you start, and it is well if you do it at an intersection where there are a lot of people coming and going.

- (3) Place the three sheets of the *dhāraṇī* for exorcising baleful influences under your mattress and burn them after seven days in a clean place. In the case that the nature of the baleful influence (*salsōng* 煞性) is intense, repeat these procedures three times.

Efficacy

After you have done the foregoing, as the baleful influences are exorcised your affairs will gradually become more favorable.

- B. *Yongsin maji tarani* 용신맛이다라니 (*Dhāraṇī* for meeting the Dragon Spirit)

Uses

When you seek to entreat the dragon spirit in rivers or the sea, when you receive great suffering due to the waters, when an elderly person is sick in your household, [follow this procedure]. People who work aboard boats use this *dhāraṇī* to enable them to be free from boating accidents and operate their boats smoothly.

Method

- (1) Select a day to pray to the dragon king.
- (2) Do not eat fish for seven days before you begin your prayers.
- (3) Burn [the talisman] while reciting the *Sūtra on the Dragon King Samādhi* (*Yongwang sammae kyōng*). Because the *Sūtra on the Dragon King Samādhi* has the *dhāraṇī* in its contents, reading it is sufficient.

Efficacy

People who work aboard boats will catch lots of fish without accidents, old people will enjoy long life, and prayers regarding one's wishes will be granted.

- C. *Chaesu maji tarani* 재수맛이다라니 (*Dhāraṇī* for meeting with good fortune)

Uses

Use when there are difficulties impeding good fortune in the operation or management of your work, business, dealings, investments, and so

forth, and when you are at the end since you don't have any customers, doing only a little business, and when for no reason your work is in a slump.

Method

Select an auspicious day,⁶⁹ bathe, and following the restraining precepts [of Buddhism].

- (1) Burn candles and incense at your place of work.
- (2) After greeting the divinity or ancestors you always implore, thrice exclaim “Please help me to change my fortune for the better in this auspicious site” and “*Om kŭp kŭp yŏ ullyŏng.*”
- (3) If you place [this *dhāraṇī*] in the safe, cash depository, or strong box of your business, keep it on your person, or place it underneath your bed, it will be sufficient.

Efficacy

People bearing the hundred surnames will become a great throng [in front of your place of business], your business dealings will turn out well, your company will flourish, success and fortune will change for the better, and your difficulties will clearly be eliminated.

* If you burn this *dhāraṇī* when you pray, even when praying for good fortune or holding an exorcism to invoke good fortune (*chaesu kut*), the efficacy is very great.

D. *Pŏpsŏng simdo* 법성심도 (Diagram of the quintessence of the dharma nature)

Uses

The Diagram of the Quintessence of the Dharma Nature is also called the “Ocean-Seal Diagram” and the “*Gāthā*-Diagram on the Dharma

⁶⁹ What I have translated as “auspicious day” (*saengi ch'ŏnŭi poktŏgil* 生氣 天宜 福德日) refers a method of divining the day's fortune by applying the binary designation of the day according to the sexagenary cycle (*ilchin* 日辰) and one's age using the binary designation of birth day, month, and year according to the sexagenary cycle (*kanji* 干支) to the eight trigrams (*p'algwae* 八卦) of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, Kor. *Yŏkkyŏng* 易經).

Nature.” It is said that if this is cherished in each household, all manner of calamities will not invade [your home]; and things that you hope and desire and matters that are difficult to resolve will be realized just as you wish.

Methods

- (1) Place this in your vehicle after purchasing it and holding an automobile rite to protect against accidents (*ch'a kosa*).
- (2) Place on the chest of a deceased person and hold the funeral.

Efficacy

You will not have an automobile accident in your vehicle; your car will not break down; deceased persons will be led to the path leading a wholesome place, rebirth in the Pure Land Sukhāvati; and living persons will amass merit.

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- T 2898 = *Gaowang Guanshiyin jing* 高王觀世音經 (*King Gao's Avalokiteśvara Sūtra*). One roll. T 2898, 85.1425b–1426a.

ABSTRACT

This essay is an investigation of the uses of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras in contemporary Buddhism in South Korea by examining literature and materials intended for lay Buddhists. Popular interest in *dhāraṇīs* has been increasing steadily since the turn of the twenty-first century, in conjunction with the return to popularity of apotropaic charms and talismans. Lay people utilize *dhāraṇīs* in essentially five ways: (1) in personal devotionals; (2) as *sūtra*-material copied for merit; (3) as talismans and in household or business rituals supplicating for this-worldly benefits; (4) for exorcisms and death rituals; and (5) as materials enshrined in the chest cavities of Buddha images and in pagodas. The most popular *dhāraṇīs* seems to be the *Dhāraṇī of Spiritually Sublime Phrases* (*Sinmyo changgu taedarani*), a variant of the *Nilakanṭha-dhāraṇī* from the Korean *Thousand Hands Sūtra* (*Ch'ōnsu kyōng*).