

“THE MYSTERIOUS LONELY SAINT”: REPRESENTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE *DOKSEONG* IMAGES IN KOREA

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Abstract

The *Dokseong* or “Lonely Saint” is a popular and frequently-worshipped deity in South Korea, whose representations can almost always be found in Korean Buddhist temples. However, this identity and characteristics of this figure remain obscure and little-understood by both Buddhist believers and scholars of Korean culture. His iconic representations are usually placed together with the popular Korean Shamanist/Daoist deities the *Sanshin* [Mountain-spirit] and the *Chilseong* [Seven Stars] and possibly other non-Buddhist representations in a special shrine for non-Buddhist deities within temple complexes, usually above and behind or next to the Main Halls. He may sometimes, however, be found in his own shrine.

Dokseong is regarded as a somewhat Shamanistic deity and supplicated for real-world benefits in the Korean Shamanic fashion, but is generally accepted as more of a Buddhist figure than the others enshrined with him, creating a surprising mystery and controversy about his historical origins and religious identity. In an original attempt to resolve this quandary, this study investigates the iconography of this lonely saint, and finds that some aspects suggest that his origin goes back to one of the foremost Buddhist saints (*arhats* in Sanskrit), *Pindola Bharadvaja*, a mythical figure widely held by Northeast Asian Buddhists to be one of the sixteen original and primary disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha. Aspects of this figure’s mythology help explain his Shamanistic status and function in Korean temples.

This study analyses these images together with the written sources in order to shed light on the origins of the representation of the Korean “Lonely Saint” and to place them into a wider context, and to rediscover his functional identity. This is the first known academic paper to do so, and should be of benefit to all who research East Asian Buddhist arts and Korean religious culture.

Introduction: The Mysterious “Lonely Saint”: *Dokseong* Images in Korea

In more than 80% of the roughly 6000 Buddhist temples and hermitages (sub-temples) now operating in South Korea,¹ the complex of buildings includes a special folk-spirit shrine which enshrines popular indigenous-shamanic or Chinese-Daoist-derived or folk-Buddhist deities. They are generally found behind or beside the Main Worship Hall. They are usually named *Samshin-gak* [Three Spirits Shrine] or *Samseong-gak* [Three Saints or Sages Shrine] on the signboards above their doorways.²

In these unusual shrines an interesting representation of a somewhat mysterious figure can usually be found, simply named *Dokseong* [Lonely Saint or Lone Sage] by Koreans. His identity does not seem to be too well understood, but veneration of him in hopes of receiving blessings and real-world benefits is quite popular, despite the general ignorance about him. Even the monks aren't sure of whom he is, except for a vague opinion that this Dokseong is an *arhat*³ (Covell 1986: 72).

Dokseong is always depicted as an elderly man with a distinctly bald head (sometimes protruding a bit at the top) and no hat, with kind but sad eyes, with white hair on the sides of his head and long white eyebrows, usually with no beard or moustache (shaven face), but occasionally with an “unshaven” stubble of facial hair (never a long beard). He is always depicted seated (cross-legged or with one knee up), wearing Buddhist robes⁴ and barefoot, and holding a *yeom-ju* [Buddhist rosary] and/or a wooden staff. In some cases he may be making a *mudra* [iconic gesture in Hindu / Buddhist art] with one hand.

He is almost always depicted as sitting on a rocky cliff-top beneath a pine-tree, and there is usually a rich background of mountains and forest, with clouds and a waterfall. Servants may be shown attending him (including brewing tea for him), and there may also be an incense-burner, books, mushrooms, flowers, deer, cranes and turtles nearby him. On many paintings we can find birds singing and flowers blooming around his figure, and possibly other natural symbols.

¹ When we speak of “Korea” in a modern sense and subsequently in this paper, we mean the current Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea. Little is known by the authors about the situation of Buddhism and other traditional Korean culture in North Korea, and so considerations of them are not included in this paper.

² Today there is usually one of these special shrines housing 3 (in rare cases, 4 or 5) of them, but a dwindling few temples still follow the older custom of separate shrines for each one. They are 19th Century Korean innovations that became very popular in the late 20th, and besides the most common names *Samshin-gak* [Three Spirits Shrine] and *Samseong-gak* [Three Sages/Saints Shrine], they may also be named *Samseon-gak* [Three Immortals Shrine], or others. Note that in this usage the suffix *-gak* is used to denote a non-Buddhist shrine; while *-jeon* is always used for the larger Halls containing regular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. There are a few unique cases where the shrine has another Buddhist-themed name with a *-jeon* suffix, such as the “Golden Wheel Precious Hall” at *Yeonju-am*. There were older names with more of a folk/Shamanic flavor that are no longer used at temples, such as *Guksa-dang* [National Teacher Shrine]. Sometimes, each of the three doorways of a Samshin-gak has its own signboard: *Sanshin-gak*, *Chilseong-gak* and *Dokseong-gak*, as if they are three shrines in one building; technically, they are three altars in one shrine.

³ The arhats were 16 or 18 fully-enlightened disciples of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni (Sokkamoni in Korean) in the sixth to fifth centuries BCE in Northern India. They are now popular Buddhist deities called *arhat* in Sanskrit, *luohan* 羅漢 in Chinese, *nahan* in Korean and *rakan* in Japanese language (Covell 1986: 72-74).

⁴ Often in the “southern” style, with one shoulder bare. He is never painted wearing the gray and brown robes of a 20th-century Korean monk. This acknowledges his Indian origins (Mason 1999).

Because his icons appear to be portraits of some elderly master-monk, there are a few Korean Buddhist monks who hold the opinion that he may represent venerable master Payak 波若 (562-613), a renowned monk from the Goguryeo Kingdom⁵ (who studied Tiantai Buddhism⁶ on China's Mount Tiantai, gaining enlightenment and dying there, never returning to Korea. However, this theory is not widespread among Buddhist believers or scholars, and plays no discernable role in the ritual veneration of the Dokseong (Mason 1999: 100). There is no evidence from historical or contemporary sources, nor motifs from his iconography, that suggests identification with any other historical master-monk of India, China or Korea itself.

As a wise old man sitting in a natural setting with multiple religious-iconic elements, he could easily be mistaken for the native/Daoist/shamanist Mountain-Spirit (*Sanshin* in Korean) with whom he is usually enshrined together, except that he has no hair-topknot with official's or royal headgear, his robes are not regal-Confucian and the Sanshin's tiger (messenger / enforcer / alter-ego) is missing.⁷

When enshrined together with a Sanshin, they are usually painted in a similar style, as if the two *taenghwa* [formal religious icon-painting] were a matched pair. They are in fact usually painted at the same time by a *taenghwa* artist, upon request of a temple. They show a similar mountain-landscape background on an equal-sized canvas. Many of the same symbols of longevity and spiritual status are often included in the background or held by a servant. Dokseong icons are so similar to Sanshin icons that they are sometimes mis-identified as each other by careless scholars or monks.⁸ It seems to be an ongoing problem that characteristic symbols of these two deities are exchanged or mixed by some artists – Dokseong holding a feather-fan, ginseng root or *bullocho* [immortality herb] sprig or being offered a peach by a servant, which are properly Sanshin motifs; or an opposite case of Sanshin holding a *yeom-ju*, making a mudra with one hand or sitting barefoot – a development that may be steadily obscuring both identities.

A statue of Dokseong is usually placed on the altar in front of his *taenghwa*, as with Sanshin, and it often shares iconographic motifs with the painted portrait, although a statue of a Buddha, Bodhisattva or Arhat is sometimes used instead.

These days Dokseong is usually seen on either the left or right side of a *Samshin-gak* [Three Spirits Shrine] trio, with *Chilseong*⁹ usually in the center (or Sanshin in rare cases); in a few cases the trio includes Yong-wang [Dragon-King of the Waters]

⁵ 고구려 or 高句麗. One of the Three Ancient Korean Kingdoms, traditional dates 37 BCE – 668 CE.

⁶ (天台, Wade-Giles: T'ien T'ai). He is recorded to have studied under Founding-Master Zhiyi (智顛, Wade-Giles: Chih-I, 538–597). Mount Tiantai is now in Zhejiang Province.

⁷ However, there are some examples where we can find tigers as fed by a servant on some Dokseong paintings. (For example a Dokseong painting in the collection of Zo Zayong, 19th century-see the online catalogue

<http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/searchbrowse?q=tiger&uname=bmecci&psc=S&filter=0#1>).

⁸ One example of this among many is found in *Korea: Scenic Beauty and Religious Landmarks* by Mark De Fraeye and Fritz Vos, 1995, where a photo of a Dokseong is captioned as being a Sanshin. Another is when the National Museum of Korea in its 1998 exhibition “Tigers in Korean Art” identified a small statue of a Buddhist Nahan (“He who tames the tiger”) as a San-shin (Mason 1999).

⁹ *Chilseong* represents in Buddhist form the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper, with the North Star and a Jeseok Buddha (*Indra*), primarily a longevity and fecundity icon derived from Chinese Daoism, but by now “absorbed” into Buddhist iconographical motifs.

replacing Dokseong. The most popular triad of Chilseong taking primary central position flanked by Dokseong and Sanshin can be interpreted as a meta-representation of the classic trinity found at the root of most East-Asian philosophy and religious art and customs: Heaven, Earth and Humanity.

Very occasionally, Dokseong is at the center of this trio. He is sometimes found in his own private shrine building (which is then entitled a *Dokseong-gak*), at temples and hermitages that are especially dedicated to him (or at which he is least featured for special veneration). Occasionally he is enshrined on a side-wall in the temple's Main Hall, with the other folk-spirits in one or more shrines outside. Any of these arrangements that feature Dokseong more prominently than the Sanshin and Chilseong could be said to raise his status above them, indicating that the authorities of that temple view him as more of a legitimate Buddhist deity than the other two.

But as Alan Carter Covell aptly asks,

“Why would such an obviously Buddhist portrait always be part of a Shaman Hall (folk-spirit-shrine) instead of being exhibited along with other Buddhas in the Main Hall of a Buddhist temple? The answer is long and complicated, and some of the details are still shrouded in mist. Apparently this arhat Dokseong has been accepted into the fold of Shamanism as a blend of Thēravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism and Religious Taoism, and, in addition, he is a special one of the arhats, not just a type or a stereotype.” (Covell *op.cit.*: 72).

But who exactly is this arhat? Can we get closer to this question?

Collecting all available sources about him in the last couple of years, pictorial and textual alike, this paper can shed light on his identity, or more precisely the origins of his representation.

We will see that how and for what degree the textual sources influenced his image, and thus our way leads to another mysterious figure called “*Naban jonja*”, about whom we have discovered that he was intended to represent *Pindola Bharadvaja* (in Sanskrit), the arhat who was sentenced to stay in Earth, not entering Nirvana until the coming of the Future Buddha Maitreya.

We can speculate that the reason for putting this Buddhist saint in the company of Daoist and shamanist deities can be connected to this certain arhat, whose legends indicate his connection with magic and immortality, concepts which play very important roles in East Asian folk religions. Therefore, placing this Buddhist figure into a landscape full of symbols of immortality can assist to explain the original identity of Dokseong as Pindola Bharadvaja. Reviewing the original texts about Pindola together with looking through the collected images can show a delicate relationship between religious texts and folk-art images.

Research Methods

The authors met in 2005 at a public talk by Dr. Beatrix Mecsi at Yonsei University (Seoul, Korea) where they have discovered their common interest in Dokseong images and the mystery surrounding this popular deity's identity.

Prof. Mason has been collecting photographs of the representations of Sanshin, Dokseong and other folk-deities in Korea for more than 20 years. Some of his photographs were scanned and organized and put together with the collection of Dr. Mecsi's photographs. The authors' photo-collection has grown to more than 350 direct representations of Dokseong, mostly formal icon-paintings found at Korean Buddhist temples from 1986 to 2008. The photographs in this collection were taken in temples from many Buddhist temples and hermitages, some which could be called 'large and important', and others that are small, remote and obscure, and a few museums and private collections. This collection is therefore considered a sufficiently large, varied and balanced sampling of the full range of Dokseong representations extant in Korea, from which useful data and valid conclusions may be drawn.

These paintings are all unique — no two are exactly the same — and show a wide variety of artistic styles and iconographic elements.

The authors have created a data-base of these elements sorted into a table and represented on an internet website (URL address: <http://picasaweb.google.com/bmecsi/Dokseong?authkey=9IIfT0kmfdg>) in order to better understand the varied iconographies, religious and folk-culture ideas and features they represent, and their frequency or rarity.

Concerning the textual sources, the authors have made another database based on the studies by religious historians (especially on Strong: 1971, and de Visser: 1923 and Lee Ji-kwan 李智冠: 1999¹⁰) and have compiled a detailed bibliography about the Sanskrit and Pali texts together with the Chinese, Japanese and Korean sources.

Folk-religion or Buddhist Art?

Difficulties in Interpreting Korean Folk-Religious Paintings

Investigating the meanings of symbols and identity of figures represented in Korean folk-religious paintings is a complex task fraught with difficult issues, due to the characteristic conflation between otherwise-distinct spiritual traditions, and obscurity of authorships, histories and precedents:

“Korean and native traditions are quite difficult to research and write about due to the lack of written records from before 1900 or so, and the prejudicial character of what did get recorded by Neo-Confucian officials and Christian missionaries. In addition, there are no definite boundaries between the religious traditions in Korea. Buddhist beliefs blend together with the native Shamanism, Confucianism, Daoism and nationalism. The resulting ever-evolving, shades-of-gray conglomeration which we call "Korean Traditional Culture" has no unbroken laws, uncrossed borders or unvarying parameters; any definitive rules have many exceptions, and any definitive answers to the type of questions can be only partially valid — limited truths within a wide range of other 'truths' (Mason 1999: 24).

¹⁰ When referring to the Korean sources throughout the paper we have used Lee Ji-kwan's article.

As the leading late-20th-Century Korean-folklorist Dr. Zo Zayong wisely proclaimed:
"At times these religious motifs (Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist, Shamanist) are so complexly interwoven that it becomes impossible to determine to which specific religion each belongs. The end result of this is a general impression that in Korea there is Daoist Buddhism, Buddhist Shamanism, and Daoistic Shamanism, and that the thought behind religious ritual painting is actually the shamanistic folk content of each religion rather than its academic aspect."
(Zo 1982: 18-34).

The famous Korean folklorist Choi Namseon 최남선 崔南善 (1890-1957) insisted that this Buddhist-like figure who was worshipped at Samseong-gak (삼성각 三聖閣) or Dokseong-gak (독성각 獨聖閣) shrines did not have a connection with real Buddhist cults, but it was a part of the peculiar Korean worship-culture and a descendant of Korean folk-religion focusing on mythical national founding-king Dangun 단군 檀君. Thus, he thought that the origins of the cult of Dokseong was based on folk-belief, not formal religion. As Dangun was said in the main source of national myths and legends (*Samguk Yusa*)¹¹ to have ended his long pre-historic reign by taking shelter in a great sacred mountain and becoming its spirit,¹² thus Koreans regarded and venerated Dan-gun as one of the Sanshin, but after Buddhism was imported into Korea people venerated the Buddhistic Dokseong icon instead of Dan-gun / Sanshin, along with the Chilseong deity (which had been imported from Chinese Daoism) in the rear courtyards of their Buddhist temples (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 13-14).

However, it is impossible to accept this statement of Choi Namseon, since we have sources for the existence of this kind of representations only from the Joseon Dynasty King Sukjong's reign (1674~1720), not earlier; and the very common presence of Mountain-spirit icons enshrined together with Dokseong images make this theory unacceptable, as that would be a redundancy.

Nonetheless, Korean temples have enshrined Dokseong in Dokseong-gak shrines or along with Chilseong and Sanshin in what came to be called Samseong-gak, which can be connected to earlier beliefs of a primary trio of gods in Korean mythology. Choi Namseon's opinion should not be considered entirely far-fetched, but there are good reasons that we should look at the Dokseong cult as a derived result of Buddhist historical ritual and iconographic practices, rather than as a mere folk-belief.

Iconography of Dokseong

Dokseong paintings are generally rectangular-shaped (most often vertical but sometimes horizontal, most often the most recent examples), usually at least one meter tall, and about half a meter to three meters wide. Placed in front of them there is often a *Dokseong-sang* [Lonely Saint statue] usually cast of plaster, around 50 cm

¹¹ The *Samguk Yusa* (삼국유사 三國遺事, Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), was written in the late thirteenth century by the Korean Buddhist monk Iryeon (일연 一然, 1206 – 1289). See the best-known translation into English: *Samguk Yusa: Myths & Legends of the Three Kingdoms*, by Iryeon. English translation by Ha Tae-hung. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972.

¹² For a full discussion of this tale and its religious manifestations and connections, with precise references to the related texts, see Mason 1999: 132-138.

tall and depicting only the deity himself. The statue (if any) and painting are fronted by an altar where candles and incense are burned, and foods and water are offered.

Dokseong paintings are usually commissioned from professional taenghwa artists, generally anonymous artists working within pre-set parameters of iconographic composition. Individual expression is usually only visible in the details. The paintings have been generational and repetitive, usually begun by re-drawing or tracing over the main figures of worn-out paintings, then filling in the details and colors at whim. Most of them share similar main elements, but no two are identical. They may be one member in a matched-set of two or three paintings (often with Sanshin and sometimes also Chilseong or Yong-wang the Dragon-King).

In several centuries of Dokseong paintings production, there has been very little iconographic or stylistic change. Then as now, some are very simple and cartoonishly drawn, with little background depiction, few other figures and with the main figure taking up most of the work's area. Others feature more elaborated, colorful and realistic main figures; there are more other figures, both human, plant and animal; and the background of dramatic alpine landscape is much elaborated with the main figures occupying a minority of total space.

The newer Dokseong paintings since the 1980s often use brighter colors than before, but otherwise follow the older motifs. The paintings have generally grown larger during the 20th century and into the 21st, reflecting Korea's prosperity.

Various different Dokseong paintings may include additional Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist symbols within them, but are usually fairly standard in their motifs. In a few of these paintings, Dokseong has no background or a generally-blank background; but he is usually depicted as sitting on a rocky cliff-top or in the high mountains with a grand view in the background. Actual such places are easily found among the Korean crags, and are often referred to as *Shinseon-dae* [terrace for Daoist immortals]. In the Korean view, this is the sort of place on which Buddhist meditations and Daoist practices are best performed, and where attainments or enlightenments take place (Mason 1999: 56).¹³

There is usually a gnarled pine tree beside Dokseong which symbolizes longevity and adaptive survival despite adverse conditions. The landscape backgrounds range from simple and cartoonish to more elaborate works derived from the East Asian Daoist and Neo-Confucian tradition of grand landscape-paintings, however some of them represent the adaptation of Western landscape-painting types

(see for example

<http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/searchbrowse?q=real+landscape&uname=bmeCSI&psc=S&filter=0#1>

<http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/searchbrowse?q=real+landscape&uname=bmeCSI&psc=S&filter=0#0>

<http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/searchbrowse?q=real+landscape&uname=bmeCSI&psc=S&filter=0#3>.

¹³ Modern Korean temple-wall paintings of the enlightenment and initial teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha, semi-historical events well-known to have taken place in flat forests, are depicted as occurring high up in the rocky-mountainous Korean landscape for this reason.

They usually include sharp mountain peaks and cliffs, a waterfall or two, swirling clouds and sometimes the sun. Other symbols of good luck, fertility and longevity are included in the most elaborate examples.

As stated above, Dokseong is usually shown with noticeably long white eyebrows. These range from rather long and bushy but still realistic for an elderly human to extremely long eyebrows (even hanging to his waist) that are explicitly unrealistic and must be seen as a symbolic religious motif of a super-human deity.

As we can see in the Aśoka Rain Sutra (Aśokavadāna), long white eyebrows are one of Pindola's characteristic features. Here then we note that a classical Buddhist scripture states that Pindola made an appearance in China, to reassure the doubting monk Tao-an 道安 (312-385 CE), even before he was officially known there. Indeed the same text immediately goes on to say: "Afterwards, when the Sarvāstivāda-vinaya arrived, the Reverend Hui-yüan then recognized that he about whom the Upādhyāya (i.e., Tao-an) had dreamed was the [Arhat] Pindola."¹⁴ (Strong 1979: 70).

Iconographical Origins: Arhats and the Daoist Immortals

The main figure in these pictures has iconographic similarities with Chinese and Korean depictions of the Arhats and the Daoist immortals [*shinseon* in Korean].

In both Theravada and Mahāyāna Buddhism, the arhats (the Sanskrit word arhat is pronounced *luohan* in Chinese, *nahan* in Korean and *rakan* in Japanese) were believed to have been the Buddha Śākyamuni's original disciples, and those who have attained enlightenment through their own efforts. They were endowed with exceptional wisdom and super-human powers. Their function was to protect the Dharma, or Buddhist Law, until the coming of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. The veneration of arhats first appeared in China during the Six Dynasties Period (4th-6th centuries). During that time they formed a group of sixteen figures. They are mentioned as such in the *Mahāyāna vatāraka Śāstra*, which was translated into Chinese by Daotai in the Liang Dynasty (367-439). The text is called *Da a luohan Nandimiduoluo suo shuo fazhu ji* (or in its more commonly used shorter version: the *fazhu ji*).¹⁵

The appearance of arhats in art seems to have happened around the Tang Dynasty (618-906) when the sixteen arhats were often depicted. One of the earliest records of such a composition is associated with the eight-century painter Lu Lengjia, a pupil of the great Wu Taozi. The famous Chan monk-painter Guanxiu (832-912) is also indebted by painting several arhat-series. See an example from Guanxiu's arhat-set, which has similarities with the Korean Dokseong iconography:

¹⁴ Link, p. 35. There are other traditions as "in Chinese Mahayana Buddhist iconography Ingeta jonja [Sanskrit: *Angaja*], one of the eighteen Nahan [arhats or Buddhist Saints], has always been depicted with extremely long eyebrows. This is symbolic of his great longevity which resulted from the merits piled up in many previous lifetimes. He evolved into a popular folk-religion figure the "Long-Eyebrow Luohan", frequently carved or painted on temple walls, thought to grant longevity, wisdom and other benefits to those lay-folk who supplicate him. In popular Chinese religion, he has served as the most Daoist aspect of Buddhism." (Mason 1999)

¹⁵ Translated into French by Sylvian Lévi and Eduard Chavannes ("Les seize arhat protecteurs de la Loi", *Journal Asiatique*, 1916: 5-15, 189-204

<http://picasaweb.google.hu/bmecs/Dokseong/photo?authkey=9IIft0kmfdg#5185122230516116290>

The cult of the sixteen arhats became widespread in China from the tenth century onwards, and flourished during the Song dynasty (960-1126). Later on eighteen figures compositions as well as a group of five hundred arhats also became widespread.

These arhats were "enlightened beings" but were capable of performing all sorts of miracles according to Chinese legends. They provided a good foil to the rival religion of Daoism's claim to various miracles. However, the arhats, by the time they were represented fully in art of the Song Dynasty, had acquired rivals in Daoist immortals. Therefore, it is not surprising that the arhats now performed numerous miracles to help them compete with Daoism for appeal to the ordinary divine-benefits-seeking lay-followers in the vast land of China.

A theoretical hierarchy did exist, with the Buddhas at the top, then the bodhisattvas and below them the arhats, but since the latter had been more human than the others, they seemed more approachable to the average Korean worshipper. Bodhisattvas had an appeal since they were dedicated to helping suffering humanity, but they had never been human or striven along the long personal path to Nirvana (according to Indian Buddhism). "With the influx of powerful bodhisattvas during the eighth and ninth century in Korea, arhats tended to be less important. But they never ceased to be worshipped." (Covell *op.cit.*: 72-74)

In the first stage four arhats were venerated, then the first sixteen (sometimes eighteen in China and Tibet, although the two extra figures may in fact be Bodhisattvas in some instances) and finally a set of five hundred arose in Korea as art themes as in China, and such figures can still be found in some temples on the peninsula as small-size, seated statues in an arhat (or *nahan*) hall. In addition, the concept of painting five hundred of these disciples became popular, with five on each silk scroll and a series of a hundred scroll paintings. Both China and Japan produced such a series in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and the concept must have been popular in Korea also (see Nahan 2003, catalogue of the Chuncheon National Museum), but no complete set of a hundred scrolls has survived in Korea, although Japan has several sets of a hundred scrolls with this subject (*ibid*: 72-74).

Identification of Dokseong as Pindola: Textual sources of Korea's "Naban jonja"

Among the textual sources the Ritual texts or so-called *Jebanmun* 제반문 (諸般文) are the ones that refer to Dokseong as Naban jonja¹⁶ (Pak Se-min 朴世敏: Comprehensive Archive of Korean Buddhist Rituals 韓國佛教儀禮資料叢書, vol.2 pp. 646b-647b) Seoul: Samseong-am, 1993).

The ritual text *Haeinsa Jaebanmun* (해인사 海印寺 제반문 諸般文) from Haein-sa, one of Korea's largest and most-important monasteries, has a postscript mentioning Dokseong written by Nakam Winul 낙암의눌 落巖義訥 (1666~1737) dated to 1719

¹⁶ *Naban* 那畔.

thus showing that the cult of Dokseong had already existed before that time (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 13).

In the *Haeinsa Jaebanmun* we can read this passage indicating the identification of Dokseong as Naban-jonja:

“Dokseong-jonja was at the middle of the world between the time before Maitreya appears and after Śākyamuni had passed away, and he did not appear at human communities. But he enjoyed his life with meditation, walking around in the forests of pine trees, and made a small cottage used as temple inside a deep forest. Laying down in the small temple or rambled, there were a lot of flowers in bloom, beautiful birds singing. He was sitting on the cottage, wearing white clothes halfway exposing his shoulder, and his white, snow-like eyebrows covered his eyes. Today a pupil who worships and asks you to descend to this place and let us devote ourselves to Naban-jonja, who had an order to stay in the human world, teaching and leading mankind.” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 13).

The particular features of this deity mentioned in this text are the pine tree, a cottage, blooming flowers, singing birds and he is introduced in these texts as wearing white clothes with shoulders half-exposed, and with a snow-like eyebrows covered his eyes. These features can often be seen in many Dokseong paintings, and therefore we can assume that it is a pictorial tradition which has followed the Jaebanmun texts. However other paintings incorporated the representations of the *shipjangsaeng* [ten symbols of longevity]¹⁷ into their compositions, associating this saint with the Sino-Korean folk-Daoist popular-cult of longevity.

The *Dokseong-cheong* (독성청 獨聖請) chapter in the *Jakbeopkwigam* (작법귀감) scripture has almost same content with Jaebanmun (제반문), but there is a little bit of correction. Especially at *Unshimge* “운심계”, it praises Naban-jonja like this, “We devote ourselves to Nabanjonja who is already obtained *sam-myeong* (삼명, three kinds of brightness) and achieved surplus of both mankind and himself.” (Korean Buddhist Canon 한불전 10, p.571a9~c14; Comprehensive Archive of Korean Buddhist Rituals 韓國佛教儀禮資料叢書, vol. 3. p.399a, Seoul: Samseong-am, 1993 cf. Li Ji-kwan 1999: 13).

The next text shows further evidence that *Pindola Bharadvaja* (in Korean: *Binduro-jonja*) and Naban-jonja are the same figure. We are about to find out how the record of Naban-jonja corresponds with Binduro-jonja’s behavior. This will trace the origin of Korea’s folk-deity Dokseong back to Pindola, one of the foremost Buddhist saints (*arhats*, in Sanskrit), a mythical figure widely held by Northeast Asian Buddhists to be one of the sixteen original and primary disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha, who are generally believed and depicted as enjoying immortality in a Buddhist Heaven with their master. However, the myth of Pindola says that he was punished for mis-use of his magical powers by being exiled from Buddhist heavens until the advent of Maitreya the future Buddha, and directed to live on the Earth in the meantime and assist human beings with those magical powers as penance.

The *Dokseong-jaewimun* (독성제의문) in the Jaebanmun (제반문) (Korean Buddhist Ritual Data Collection 2, p.682b2) shows Naban-jonja, saying “He was

¹⁷ This is a popular motif in traditional Korean folk-art; see Mason 1999: 92-95.

staying at Mount Tendai [Ch: Tiantai-shan] and always meditated.” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 13).

Section Shipsongryul (십송률) 37 of the Daejeongjang (대정장 23, p.268c12) says that Jyotishka (Suje-jangja 수제장자) made a wooden rice-bowl and hung it on a tall pile with a pouch when Sejon (세존) was at Wangsa-seong (왕사성), and said that anyone who has supernatural powers could take the rice bowl. Binduro-jonja heard that and took the rice bowl with his power. Then we can see the story that Buddha hears this and give a harsh punishment to Binduro-jonja.

“Why did you become so greedy that you show off your divine power to humans to take that small rice bowl? From now on, you are not allowed to enter Nirvana and you will be expelled from Namyem-buje (남염부제 南閻浮提, Nirvana) forever.” Thus Binduro-jonja was expelled from Namyem-bujae and then appeared at Seoguyaniju (서구야니주 西瞿耶尼洲). (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 15).

This refers to the most famous story about Pindola’s career is the one as a disciple of the Buddha, which refers to his performance of a magical feat in front of the laity. “The story is well known as it is found in the vinayas of five 'different schools and is recounted in a number of Pāli commentaries as well. It need only be summarized here. Jyotiska, a rich man of Rājagrha, had a begging bowl made from a block of sandalwood, and, wishing to see a display of supernatural powers, he suspended it from the top of a high bamboo pole and organized a contest: whoever could bring the bowl down using magical powers could keep it. Different heretic masters (tirthikas) all try to obtain it, each one pretending in various devious fashions to be endowed with supernatural faculties. But the rich householder is not to be fooled; he wants graphic proof of their powers. Then Pindola happens by together with Mahā Maudgalyāyana. He urges the latter (who is well known as a master of supernatural faculties) to take the bowl, but Maudgalyāyana declines and suggests that Pindola do it instead. Pindola, therefore, flies up into the air in full view of the assembled crowds, tours the city several times, grabs the bowl and brings it to the rich man who fills it and honors him. He then goes back to the vihāra. The whole incident, however, is reported to Buddha who questions Pindola, reprimands him severely for having exhibited his supernatural powers, and then makes a Vinaya rule the effect that the performance of magical feats in the presence of laymen will henceforth be a *duskrta* offence.”¹⁸ (Strong 1979)

Therefore, we can see that the Korean text might refer to this episode.

There are some similarities between the story of Binduro-jonja in Shipsongryul (십송률) and the story of Naban-jonja in the Jaebamun.

“...He stayed in nature, never went out to human world. He enjoyed meditation in a mountain and lived inside a cave on a tranquil stream. He walked along birds’ singing and blooming flowers....” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 15).

¹⁸ See the various Vinaya accounts in Lévi and Chavannes, pp. 233-47, and the expanded version of the story in The Commentary of Dhammapada, ed. H.C. Norman (London: Pali Text Society, 1912, vol. 3: 199-203 (cf. Buddhist Legends, trans. Eugene Watson Burlingame, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 30, part 3: 35-38).

This behavior of Naban-jonja is very similar to Binduro-jonja who was ordered to stay at Seogyuaniju without going back to Nirvana.

The *Dokseongjaewimun* in the Jaebanmun (Korean Buddhism Ritual Data Collection 2 p.682a7) describes Nabanjonja like this:

“He is always so merciful and grants everyone’s wish who prays sincerely. He could remove all kinds of catastrophe and achieves morality.” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

In the same book (Korean Buddhism Ritual Data Collection 2 p.682b3), it says,
“He does not enter into Nirvana and waits until Maitreya descends to the human world and constructs Yonghwa-hwisang (용화회상 龍華會上), while saving all mankind by himself. (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

The Cheongbindurogyeong <청빈두로경> (대정장 32 p.784b5) says,
“The king, prince, minister, elders of India (The most dominant four classes) always offered food to Binduro-jonja. One day Binduro-jonja used his supernatural powers in order to get Suje-jangja’s wooden rice bowl, and got ordered by Buddha to leave Nirvana and stay at Seogyuaniju to help mankind. (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

Beopwon-jurim (법원주림) in the 42nd volume of Daejeon-jang (53, p610a3) has completely the same story with the one above. Therefore, we can find out there is a remarkable similarity by the story that both stay at human world and saves mankind without entering into Nirvana.

The *Jaebanmun Dokseongjaewimun* “독성제의문” (Korean Buddhist Ritual Data Collection 2 p.682a7) describes Naban-jonja as “The snow-like white eyebrows covered his eyes.” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

Jap’ahapgyeong <잡아합경> 23rd volume (대정장 2 p169b25) says,
“At that time King Asoka (Ayuk 아육왕) praised Binduro-jonja, and Binduro-jonja’s hair was white and he was like a *Baekji-bul* (백지불; or 연각, a divine person who gets self-enlightenment without relying on Buddha’s preaching).” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

In addition, the same book (대정장 2 p169c4) says,
“Bindurojonja lifted up his long white eyebrows to look at the king, and talked with him.” (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 16).

As Strong (1971) says:

“In considering the story of the meeting of Pindola and King Aśoka, we should not fail to note, first of all, the cultic setting in which it takes place. Aśoka decides to undertake a great *pañcavārsika*—a quinquennial entertainment of the Sangha.¹⁹ For that purpose he invites the community of the four quarters

¹⁹ Precisely what the *pañcavārsika* consisted of is a matter of some scholarly debate. E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil (The *Divyeivaddna* [Cambridge: University Press, 1861, index, s.v.) considered it to consist of the entertainment of the monks during the five months of the rainy season (var,Fa). This view was

to come to him in Pātaliputra where he plans to make them offerings of food and clothes.

A great number of monks are assembled. However, it is immediately apparent that the reunion is incomplete, for at its very center, the seat of the elder has remained empty. Aśoka, in consternation, asks Yagas, the most venerable elder present: "How is it that the elder's seat is not mounted? Is there here someone else who is older than you?" "There is, O great king" comes the answer. "This seat is that of Pindola Bhāradvāja whom the self-mastered best of speakers [i.e., the Buddha] designated as foremost of lion-roarers."²⁰

Immediately then, we have established here the theme – so important in the Chinese cult – of Pindola's empty seat in the midst of an assembly about to receive food offerings. This is immediately followed by the theme of Pindola being the one undying figure who bridges the gap between the time of the Buddha and the "present" age. Aśoka, a man of the post-parinirvāna period is most astonished that Pindola is still alive, and, perhaps betraying signs of an incipient cult in which Pindola's actual arrival at an assembly was both uncertain and usually mysterious, he asks: "Is it possible for us to see him?" "Great king," answers Yagas, "you will see him now." And there follows the account of Pindola's spectacular arrival. Flying through the air like a *rājahamsa* surrounded by several thousands of arhats in "half-moon formation," he alights in the midst of the assembly and takes his place on the empty seat, his white hair flowing and his white eyebrows so long that they hang down and cover the pupils of his eyes.²¹ Pindola Bhāradvāja has arrived to receive his food offering, and his presence is clearly a sign that Aśoka's pañcavārsika is being carried out properly.

At this point there occur some intriguing exchanges between Aśoka and Pindola which provide clues to the interpretation of his cult and legend as a whole.

By virtue of the fact that he personally *knew* (and attained enlightenment under) the Buddha, Pindola, of course, establishes a connection between the age of the Buddha and the present, profane, post-parinirvana time of Aśoka. This connection, however, is more than that of a mere witness – the link of memory across time. In an actual, more experiential sense, Pindola also makes the Buddha himself present in the here and now situation. This is expressed in the text in a rather intriguing way.

Although Pindola is physically there on the seat in front of him, Aśoka does not immediately see him "face to face." As we have mentioned, Pindola's long white eyebrows hang down and cover the pupils of his eyes, and this, in

shared by Burnouf (p.351 n.2.) who, however, also suggested that the term referred to a larger gathering and entertainment of the monks every five years. Lamotte (p. 66) adds that it was not necessarily held every five years, but was the occasion on which kings spent in honor of the Sangha whatever had accumulated in their treasuries during a five year period. In any case, it is clear that it was an occasion of offering on a grand scale.

²⁰ Aśokavadāna, p.96 (cf. Burnouf, p.353)

²¹ *ibid.*

quite literal terms, keeps them from "eye to eye" contact. This noteworthy physical feature of Pindola, which is mentioned in only one other text, is on the one hand simply indicative of Pindola's great age; he has, after all, been alive for a number of centuries. But the text is so curiously specific about his eyebrows and his eyes that some further interpretation is called for.

The matter becomes clear when it is put in the context of the Buddhist ceremony of the consecration of Buddha images. As is well known, the climax of any ritual of dedication of a painting or a statue of the Buddha is the moment of the "insertion of the eyes."²² Until they are painted or put in, the image is considered to be lifeless, ritually irrelevant, just a lump of clay or stone or metal. But with the eyes in, it becomes alive, consecrated, a Buddha-image rather than an image of the Buddha, or, as an early Western observer of the ceremony put it, "a god."²³

With his white brows covering his pupils, Pindola at first sits before Aśoka in much the same way as an unfinished "blind" Buddha image. It is, therefore, a moment of great importance in the text when, we are told, with King Aśoka bowing down before him, "the elder lifted up his brows with both hands and gazed straight at the king."²⁴

The point is clear; in the cultic situation established by Aśoka and confirmed by his offerings and devotion, the live Pindola is consecrated, i.e., is sacralized in much the same way as an image of the Buddha. And just like the Buddha image at the precise moment of its consecration, Pindola "makes present", ritualistically speaking, the Buddha who is absent in Nirvāna. Aśoka's own words to Pindola confirm it:

"When I destroyed the enemy host and put the whole earth ... as far as the oceans under a single rule, then my joy was not what it is upon seeing you today. Seeing you now, I see the Tathāgata, and by this sight my faith has been doubled."²⁵

Such a discovery of the presence of the ultimate object of devotion in the immediate focus of devotion, whether that be an image, a stūpa, an icon, or, as in this case, a man—a monk, comes as no surprise to the historian of religions; it is, to a great extent, characteristic of all cultic situations. The text of the Aśokavadāna, however, goes on to specify this experience in a very precise way.

Having opened his eyes by lifting his brows, Pindola then immediately proceeds to recall for Aśoka the times when he saw the Blessed Buddha "face to

²² Interestingly, one of the first records of this ceremony attributes its earlier performance to Aśoka. See Samantapāsādikā: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Vinaya Pitaka, ed. J. Takakusu and M. Nagai (London: Pali Text Society 1924), vol. 1, p. 43. The rite spread all over the Buddhist world and continues to the present day. For several examples of *kaigen* (the opening of the eyes) as it is called in Japan, see M. W. De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, 2 vols (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1935), 1: 34, 39, 299, 324, and 2: 481, 582, 605, 642. For a modern Sinhalese example, see Richard Gombrich, "The Consecration of a Buddhist Image," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1966): 23-36.

²³ Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (orig. pub. 1681; reprinted as *Ceylon Historical Journal*, vol. 6, 1958), p. 130. See also Gombrich, p. 24.

²⁴ Aśokavadāna, p.97 (cf. Burnouf, p. 354)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

face, with his own eyes just as Aśoka sees him now."²⁶ Three of these occasions actually refer to incidents we have already encountered in our own survey of Pindola's legend. He says, for example, that he saw the Buddha when he flew with the mountain top to Punclavardhana and the Blessed One ordered him not to enter Parinirvāna. He also saw him at the great "twin miracle" in Śrāvasti which, it will be recalled, was occasioned by the interdiction on magical displays by bhiksus. Finally, he saw him at his descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven (which follows in the same sequence after the Śrāvasti miracle).²⁷

One other occasion he mentions we have not encountered before in Pindola's legend; he claims to have spent a rainy-season retreat in Rājagṛha together with the Buddha and five hundred arhats. But it is the fifth occasion on which Pindola saw the Buddha which is of the most interest to us. For it makes the Buddha present for Aśoka in a very special way by revealing to him his own previous life in which he in fact was with the Buddha:

"Finally, O great king," says Pindola, "when of yore the Blessed One had entered Rājagṛha for alms and you as a child threw a handful of dust into his bowl, thinking 'I will give him some grits,' I, at that time, was right there. And the Blessed One predicted: 'This boy, one hundred years after my Parinirvāna, will be a king named Aśoka in the city of Pāṭaliputra, a cakravartin of one of the four regions, a dharmic dharmarctja who will effect the distribution of my reliquaries and the erection of the 84,000 dharma-rājikas.'" ²⁸

The significance of the whole cult and legend of Pindola is perhaps most clearly revealed in this passage. It is not just "the Buddha" or the time and place of the Buddha in general that Pindola makes present in the cultic situation; it is rather a particular time and place of the Buddha that is specifically geared to be relevant to the life of the individual merit-maker.

The "gift of dust" which Aśoka made as a child in a past life to the Buddha was both his simplest and his most important act of merit. If, on the one hand, because of its simplicity, it becomes a basic fundamental act of merit which any layman, no matter how poor, can perform, on the other hand, it remains very specific to Aśoka. In a sense, it defines his whole being because it marks the time when he was with the Buddha and when he planted the seeds which were to lead to his kingship and eventually to his enlightenment. It is this very specificity that guarantees the particular individual's religious experience, or perhaps re-experience, of the Buddha which quells his doubts and reestablishes his faith. Pindola, by his presence, makes the departed Buddha relevant to the specific individual who makes offerings in the post-parinirvāna age (Strong 1979: 50-88).

Also, in the Yanggo-seungjeon (양고승전) 5th volume named Seokdoan-jeon (석도안전) (Daejeong-jang 50 p353b17), we can find the description of Buddhist monk Taoan at Dongjin (동진 東晉):

²⁶ *Ibid.* P.98 (cf. Burnouf, p. 354)

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* The reference is to Aśoka's most famous act in a previous life: his "gift of dust" to the Buddha.

“Doan-beobsa (314~385) was always afraid that his annotation would not correspond with the original contents of Sutra when he annotated many Sutras. He once tried to request support to Buddha and asked if his annotation is right, and he saw an Indian Buddhist monk in his dream, whose hair was white and had long eyebrow. The Buddhist monk said, “Your note is reasonable and not different from the original meaning of Sutras. And I will not enter into Nirvana and help you to finish annotating Sutras, staying at Seoyeok, seoguyaniju.” After Doan saw the dream, he annotated the Shipsongyul, and finally he became to know that the monk in the dream was Binduro-jonja. (Lee Ji-kwan 1999: 17).

There are more similarities in this text between Naban-jonja and Binduro-jonja, such as that both had white hair and long eyebrows.

There is another old story showing Pindola’s mis-use of supernatural powers and explaining his exile from Nirvana:

“When hurrying to attend one of the Buddha's meetings, Pindola flew through the air, absentmindedly dragging a mountain behind him. This caused a pregnant woman to have a miscarriage. Thereupon Pindola was ordered to remain on earth until the appearance of Maitreya or the "Buddha-to-Come.”” (Covell *op.cit.*: 75).

“This ex-communication of Pindola from the assembly of other disciples, plus what can be considered the longest "life sentence" ever meted out, made Pindola the only person who had seen the face of the Buddha Sakyamuni, who would still be alive when Maitreya came. Thus, in a strange way, Pindola's punishment gave him a special position among the arhats, a fact that the Chinese, who admired longevity, were quick to realize.” (*ibid*: 75).²⁹

“Pindola's story of dragging a mountain behind him has an interesting parallel in the Samguk Yusa. This book contains many tales of miracles including one dated to the seventh century. That so-called miracle occurred in Baekje when a holy monk brought a mountain to the site of Mireuk-sa 彌勒寺, by causing it to fly through the air. Mireuk-sa is dedicated to Maitreya.” (*ibid*: 76).

The association of Dokseong with Maitreya is occasionally depicted in Korean iconography. In the photo-database created for this research there is an example from Gyeongju Nam-san Muryang-sa (無量寺) where in front of the Dokseong painting there is a statue of Maitreya. However, there are not so many examples of this usage elsewhere, and this case could be religiously-unintentional.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/bmececi/Dokseong/photo?authkey=9IIfT0kmfdg#5184744999243538626>

(See the textual sources in Appendix and Bibliography.)

²⁹ “This, characteristic of Pindola's being condemned to wander for all time, a mysterious outsider who occasionally 'appears here and there in this world, long ago motivated the encyclopedic Japanese scholar Minakata Kumagusu to compare Pindola to the figure of the "Wandering Jew" whom Jesus condemned on the way to Calvary to remain in this world until his Second Coming, and who thereafter wandered for centuries throughout Western Europe, a living witness to the events of the Christian Holy Week.” (Strong 1979: 78)

The word Naban 나반 那畔 has opposite meaning with Jeoban 저반 這畔. Naban 나반 means ‘that way’ and 저반 means ‘this way’. Binduro-jonja has been expelled from Nirvana 남염부제 by Buddha because he was blamed for taking the wooden rice bowl. From 남염부제, 서구야니주 is at ‘that way’, that is why Binduro-jonja is also called as Naban-jonja.

The Place of Pindola in Japanese Buddhist Temples

Representations of Arhat Pindola can also be found in Japan (Korea’s close neighbor and fellow importer of Chinese Buddhism); however, the iconography, enshrinement and usage are quite different from the Korean Dokseong images.

The popular Japanese Pindola-cult can be traced back to the Edo period, where as a statue of an elderly man – often painted red – is being placed at the entries, doorways of Buddhist temples, where they were used as a healing saint.

Pindola statues were originally used at the refectories of Buddhist monasteries, following the Chinese example, but later in the Edo period sculptures of Pindola were used almost exclusively for touching and healing the sick parts of one’s body. These types of icons are called *nadebotoke* [“rubbing”-saint]. The specific place this statue is placed – namely outside the sacred complex – can help us identifying him as Pindola, since the Japanese are also tending to forget about the origins and identification of this commonly represented saint.³⁰

Conclusion

Dokseong, or the “Lonely Saint” is a not very well-known, but often worshipped Buddhist-like figure in the Shaman-halls in Korea. This paper resulting from our research has identified and traced back the origins of these representations in textual and visual sources.

Our way leads back to a particular arhat, Pindola Bharadvaja who was worshipped as a separate figure from the very early times. Since he has associations with magic and longevity (he had to stay in Earth until the coming of the Future Buddha, Maitreya), he became surrounded by longevity symbols and placed together with Daoist and folk-deities in Korea. This form of enshrinement is unique to Korea; we have seen how in Japan he is conceived as a healing saint and his figure is usually represented in a sculpted form outside the halls of Buddhist temples from the Edo period onwards.

The common feature of these images in Korea and Japan that both are approachable and very human figures who are intermediators to the holier and more psychologically-distant Buddha-realms. This feature is supported by the background religious texts which discuss Pindola as not entering Nirvana, but living on Earth

³⁰ See more about the Pindola-cult in Japan in Dr. Mecsi’s forthcoming article.

maintaining a unique direct living connection with the historical Buddha Sakyamuni, whom he used to see face-to-face.

This legend was reportedly influenced the 16th century European legend of the “Wandering Jew”, thus connecting not only the Buddhist traditions with the Daoist and folk religions in the case of Asian countries, but also reaching to the Western world and coloring those Christianity-related myths and legends.

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