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Kwanŭm (Avalokiteśvara) Divination: Buddhist Reconciliation with Confucianism in the Late Chosŏn

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Abstract: This paper looks at the interactions between Buddhism and Confucianism in the late Chosŏn era through a case study of Kwanŭm (Avalokiteśvara) divination and, thereby, attempts to demonstrate how Buddhist monks navigated their religion in a Confucian-dominant society. In particular, it discusses how Chosŏn Buddhist monks incorporated Confucian ethical values into the practice of Avalokiteśvara divination, which developed in the late Chosŏn era, based on the *Kwanŭm yŏnggwa*, the first Korean Buddhist manual for Avalokiteśvara divination. The unique amalgam of the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination practices became popular in this period by embracing the fulfillment of the Confucian duty of filial piety and sincerity as its essential element. In particular, the Confucian practice served as a deciding factor to receive the bodhisattva's blessings in this divination. The introduction of Avalokiteśvara divination, therefore, reveals another strategy of the Buddhist community to demonstrate its devotion by incorporating the ideology of the Confucian ruling class in the late Chosŏn era.

Keywords: Chosŏn Buddhism; Kwanŭm (Avalokiteśvara) divination; *Kwanŭm yŏnggwa*; Buddhist–Confucian relationship

1. Introduction

Avalokiteśvara divination is a unique combination of the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination. It became popular in the late Chosŏn era, the last dynasty of Korea, when both the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination flourished. Influenced by its Chinese counterparts, the two latter practices developed in Korea around or even before the period of the three kingdoms. They continued to thrive in the late Chosŏn era, with more extensive circulation and publication of their manuals. The Avalokiteśvara cult and divination were widespread among almost all classes of society, including Confucian elites, despite the perception that the literati class criticized and dismissed them. The popularity of the two practices allowed them to intersect with each other from time to time in the history of Korea. The introduction of Avalokiteśvara divination in the late Chosŏn era not only represents one such intersection, but also provides an example to demonstrate the Buddhist commitment to the Confucian values and ideals of *yangban* (the Confucian-educated elite of Chosŏn) society.

2. Socio-Cultural and Religious Background of Kwanŭm (Avalokiteśvara) Divination

2.1. The Marginalization of Non-Confucian Religions

It is worth looking at how Buddhism and folk religions were treated in the Chosŏn era before discussing Avalokiteśvara divination. When Confucian leaders helped Yi Sŏnggye 李成桂 (1335–1408, r. 1392–1393) found the Chosŏn dynasty, they aspired to build a Confucian state from top to bottom.

From the very beginning of the dynasty, therefore, they adopted the policy of anti-Buddhism and anti-folk religion. For example, major Buddhist festivals and rituals of Koryŏ such as *p'algwan hoe* (Eight Prohibitions Festival), *yŏndŭng hoe* (Lamp Festival), and *paekkojwa hoe* (Hundred Seats Assembly) were abolished in 1392. The state monk exam was discontinued in 1507. Monk status was also repealed from the Chosŏn state law code, *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典 (Great Code of Administration) in the same year. All the Buddhist schools that had thrived in the previous dynasty were officially closed in 1512 with the abolition of the two schools of Sŏn (meditation) and Kyo (doctrinal studies). The state Buddhist funeral and memorial rites for the royal family were also cancelled for good in 1516 after long years of debate. Folk religions did not fare well either in the newly founded dynasty. Early on in the Chosŏn dynasty, the government imposed a series of bans against folk religious practices, branding these cults as “perverse rites” (*ŭmsa* 淫祀) in 1398, 1411, 1431, 1472, and 1514. Some of these hostile actions against Buddhism and folk religions were codified into the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*. For example, according to this legal code, Buddhist clerics and perverse rite performers were not allowed to enter the capital, and furthermore, no Buddhist and folk religious rituals were permitted in the capital. These laws were maintained throughout the Chosŏn era and were included in the later state law codes of the *Taejŏn t'ongp'yŏn* 大典通編 (Comprehensive Great Code) of 1785 and the *Taejŏn hoet'ong* 大典會通 (Great Code Reconciliation) of 1865.¹

Along with these legal measures, Chosŏn Confucian officials and their government tried to replace Buddhist and folk religious rituals with Confucian ones. The Chosŏn government first enforced the state ritual code *Kukcho oryeŭi* 國朝五禮儀 (Five Rites of the Nation) in 1474, which provided standardized Confucian manuals for Chosŏn royal and state rituals.² In particular, the ritual code set forth the tripartite system of the rites for the royal ancestors, heaven and earth, and other various deities, excluding most of the non-Confucian rituals.³ The Confucian literati and the government, at the same time, promoted the *Zhuji jiali* 朱子家禮 (Family Rites of Master Zhu; K. *Chuja karye*) to spread Confucian rites into people's everyday lives. This ritual text, attributed to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), a co-founder of Chinese Cheng-Zhu learning, offered detailed manuals for the private rites of capping, weddings, funerals, and ancestor commemoration.⁴

The legal impositions and Confucianization efforts were effective, though some Buddhist and folk rituals were still carried out quite often among the people, including *yangban* literati, throughout the Chosŏn era. Buddhism and folk religions lost much of the socio-cultural and political privilege and influence that they had enjoyed in the previous dynastic periods. Furthermore, some surviving Buddhist and folk rituals were still attacked, criticized, and despised by many *yangban* literati.⁵ Nonetheless, there were a few Buddhist and folk religious traditions that thrived in the Confucian Chosŏn era. The Avalokiteśvara cult and divination were two such examples, which consequently brought about the resurgence of Avalokiteśvara divination in the late Chosŏn era.

2.2. The Cult of Avalokiteśvara

The Avalokiteśvara cult has been one of the most popular devotional forms of Buddhism in East Asia. It thrived in the period of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in China when it was introduced in Korea. Although there are few records left of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Koguryŏ, there are more than ten extant Avalokiteśvara statues from Paekche and Silla.⁶ The popularity of the Avalokiteśvara

¹ (<http://krpia.co.kr>: “Hyŏngjŏn”, *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*; <http://krpia.co.kr>: “Hyŏngjŏn”, *Taejŏn hoet'ong*; , pp. 614–15). For anti-Buddhist policy in the Chosŏn era, see (Kim 2010; Son 2013, pp. 27–29; Sim 2003). For anti-folk religion policy in the Chosŏn era, see (Yi 2008, pp. 183–217).

² (Hakchawŏn 2017, p. 1).

³ For early Chosŏn state efforts to systematize its rituals, see (Kim 2003; Kim 2010; Kang 2015). For details on the features of the *Kukcho oryeŭi*, see (Yi 2009, pp. 83–86).

⁴ For details on the spread of the *Zhuji jiali*, see (Chang 2010).

⁵ For Confucians' anti-Buddhist actions, see (Kim 2017).

⁶ (McBride 2008, pp. 62–85; Pak 1995, pp. 47–88).

cult during the subsequent Unified Silla period can be demonstrated by anthropological and textual evidence. Even though there are only a few small figurines—most only 20 cm tall—of Avalokiteśvara from this period, it seems that many Avalokiteśvara statues in different sizes were created in this period.⁷ The *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) reports more than twenty stories of diverse classes of people worshipping Avalokiteśvara, for example, a male aristocrat praying to the bodhisattva to grant him a male heir or a poor commoner woman wishing for the bodhisattva to heal her son's eyes.⁸ From these sources, we also know that different types of Avalokiteśvara, such as the eleven-faced or thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, were popular in this period.⁹ The cult of Avalokiteśvara continued to thrive in Koryŏ. People from different social strata worshipped the bodhisattva for various reasons, such as success in Buddhist training, pure land rebirth, and acquisition of this-worldly fame and wealth. A high-ranking court official even prayed to the bodhisattva to protect the Koryŏ state against the invading Jurchen army in the 13th century.¹⁰ In this period, diverse Avalokiteśvara statues and paintings were also created, including “Suwŏl Kwanŭm to” (Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara painting) and “Paegŭi Kwanŭm to” (White-Robed Avalokiteśvara painting).¹¹

Despite the so-called anti-Buddhist policy, the Avalokiteśvara cult survived in the Chosŏn dynasty as one of the most popular forms of Buddhist practice. Not only commoners, but also royal family members and Confucian elites worshipped the bodhisattva, though the ruling class support was reduced compared to that in the previous dynastic periods. The popularity of the Avalokiteśvara cult in the Chosŏn era can be confirmed through the frequent publication and creation of related texts, statues, and paintings. There were approximately 21 texts and 130 different surviving editions regarding the bodhisattva cult of this time, which can be divided into three categories: (1) dhāraṇī; (2) ritual manuals; and (3) faith wonder stories.¹² Among these three, the first category was the most published. In particular, the *Qianshou jing* 千手經 (Sutra of the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara) was very popular and used in various types of Buddhist rituals. In the late Chosŏn era, especially, from the 17th century on, there were more than eight different editions of this scripture published. Other Avalokiteśvara texts, such as the dhāraṇī *Fo dingxin tuoluoni jing* 佛頂心陀羅尼經 (Dhāraṇī Sutra of the Supreme Mind of the Buddha), the ritual manual *Kwanŭm yemun* 觀音禮文 (Liturgies of Avalokiteśvara), and the wonder story *Kwanseŭm posal yŏnghŏm yakch'o* 觀世音菩薩靈驗略抄 (Abbreviated Compendium on the Divine Response of the Bodhisattva of Avalokiteśvara), were also published many times. Korean vernacular versions of some of the Avalokiteśvara texts were produced to make these texts more available to commoners and women. In the late Chosŏn era, Buddhist monks and commoner followers were major donors to the efforts to publish Avalokiteśvara texts. Hence, it was quite often the case that there were not one or two great donors, but several contributing to the publication of such texts. It was even the case that more than two hundred lay Buddhists donated to the publication of one text, as with the 1762 Kayasa edition of the *Kwanseŭm posal yŏnghŏm yakch'o*. Many statues and paintings that feature the bodhisattva were also created in the Chosŏn era. A total of 317 extant Chosŏn paintings exist that include the bodhisattva, most of which were made in the 18th or 19th century. In 226 of them, the bodhisattva appears as an attendant for Amitābha, Śākyamuni, or Vairocana Buddha.¹³ There are 26 extant Avalokiteśvara statues (10 from the 17th century, 15 from the 18th century, and 1 from the

⁷ (Kang 2010, pp. 3–33).

⁸ (<http://db.history.go.kr>: “T’apsang” 4, *Samguk yusa*); for details on the Avalokiteśvara cult in the *Samguk yusa*, see (Ra 2009, pp. 153–84).

⁹ (Chŏng 1982).

¹⁰ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>: “Ch’oe sangguk yangdanbyŏng Kwanŭm chŏmanso”, *Tongguk isang kukchip* 41).

¹¹ For Avalokiteśvara cult, statues, and paintings in Koryŏ, see (Chŏng 2009, pp. 113–27).

¹² For the publication of Avalokiteśvara texts during the Chosŏn era, see (Kim 2005, pp. 137–58; Pak 1987) and (<http://kabc.dongguk.edu>).

¹³ (Kim 2005).

19th century). In the creation of these statues and paintings, commoners and monks served again as major donors.¹⁴

Yangban names were not frequently found in the surviving colophons, records of Avalokiteśvara paintings, and *pokchang* materials. However, this does not mean that *yangbans* did not engage in the practices of the Avalokiteśvara cult, as some scholars argue. In some materials, we can find actual cases of *yangban* faith in the bodhisattva. For example, in the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實 (Veritable Records of Chosŏn), a Confucian official named Yi Mansŏng 李晩成 (1659–1722) prays to the bodhisattva to save him from court punishment in 1722.¹⁵ In the *Wandang chŏnjip* 阮堂全集 (Complete Writings of Wandang), the scholar-official Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856) is stated to believe in the bodhisattva's wondrous power.¹⁶ *Yangban* support can also be found in some of the surviving *pokchang* (items put inside the statue) materials. To give a couple of examples, the names of governor Min Sijung 閔著重 (1625–1677) and mid-ranking official Kwŏn Taejae 權大載 (1620–1689) are recorded in the dedication for the Avalokiteśvara statue of Tŏsŏnsa, Kyŏnggi province, 1670.¹⁷ The names of magistrate Kim Kukp'yo 金國標 (fl. 17th century) and his wife were recorded in the list of donors in the dedication for the wooden Avalokiteśvara statue of Kaehŭngsa, Chŏlla province, 1680.¹⁸ Although there is not much direct evidence of *yangban* Confucians engaging in the practices of the Avalokiteśvara cult, it certainly attracted some *yangbans*.

2.3. Divination

Divination has been performed throughout the history of Korea among diverse classes of people. It began even before the period of the three kingdoms. According to the “Dongyi chuan” 東夷傳 of the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Annals of the Three Kingdoms), in Puyŏ, one of the earliest Korean kingdoms, divination was performed in the form of checking the hoofs of a cow.¹⁹ The *Samguk yusa* also shows that various divinations were conducted in Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla, such as stick-casting divination, sortilege, oneiromancy, geomancy, aeromancy, or zoomancy. For example, during the reign of King Mu (r. 600–641) of Paekche, the court carried out divination using a tortoise shell.²⁰ There were also people who specialized in divination for the state. For example, in Silla, there was an official astrologer called “ilgwan” 日官 who observed and interpreted celestial phenomena and accordingly performed divination to avoid disasters.²¹ Many of the divination techniques of the three kingdoms continued in Koryŏ. In several Koryŏ records, we can see that people at the time often relied on divination for important occasions in their lives, such as marriages and funerals. For example, when the national preceptor Pogak 普覺 (fl. 14th century) was young, he decided to become a monk, following a divination result. When the official Yi Sŏrim 李瑞林 (1154–1213) died, his grave site was decided through divination.²² In Koryŏ, there was a state office specifically dedicated to divination. It was called T'aebokkam, and it later merged with T'aesaguk for astronomy and was renamed Sŏun'gwan during the reign of King Kongmin (r. 1351–1374). Some officials in the office directly served as advisor for the king, being highly ranked in the court. The Koryŏ state conducted divination during important state occasions, such as epidemics, capital city transfer, diplomacy, and war. State divinations mostly took place in the temple or the royal shrine in the form of the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Book of Changes, an ancient

¹⁴ For *pokchang* records of Avalokiteśvara statues in the Chosŏn era, see (Yu 2017, pp. 375–575).

¹⁵ (<http://sillok.history.go.kr>: November 23rd of the second year of King Kyŏngjong).

¹⁶ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>: “Sŏdok” 27, *Wandang chŏnjip* 5).

¹⁷ For the Avalokiteśvara statue in the temple Tŏsŏnsa, see (Cho 2016, pp. 253–77).

¹⁸ For the Avalokiteśvara statue in the temple Kaehŭngsa, see (Ch'oe 2016).

¹⁹ It is not certain how this was actually performed. However, according to “Dongyi chuan”, this divination method was used to predict the auspice and omen of a war by examining the shape of the hoofs of a killed cow (<https://ctext.org>: ‘Puyŏ’, “Wei shu”, *Sanguo zhi*).

²⁰ (<http://db.history.go.kr>: “T'aejong ch'unch'ugong”, *Samguk yusa*; “Paekche pon'gi” 6, *Samguk sagi*).

²¹ (<http://db.history.go.kr>: “Wŏlmyŏng”, *Samguk yusa*); for divination practice in ancient Korea, see (Na 2017).

²² (Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu 1923 ha); for divination practice in Koryŏ, see (Kim 1973, pp. 192–93.)

Chinese oracle text), tortoise divination, or sortilege. In most of these cases, a state official or divination official carried out the divination, but when the situation was serious, the king conducted it himself, as can be seen in the case of King Hyōnjong (r. 1659–1674), who performed divination in order to determine whether to make a treaty with an invading Jurchen army in 1010.²³

In the Chosŏn era, divination was still popular and extensively practiced in society. The court also maintained a state divination office, called Sōun'gwan (later renamed Kwansanggam), though its importance was significantly reduced compared to that of Koryŏ.²⁴ However, this reduction in the role of the state divination office does not mean that Confucians never practiced divination or that they totally dismissed it as improper. Rather, many of them performed divination just as their Koryŏ counterparts did. Although there are few known cases, we still see evidence—in their personal literary collections—of *yangbans* themselves performing different types of divinations with little worry of receiving any social or political criticism. For example, in the *T'aektangjip* 澤堂集 (Writings of T'aektang), the scholar official Yi Sik 李植 (1584–1647) performed divination using a bamboo.²⁵ In the *Miam ilgi* 眉巖日記 (Diary of Miam), another official, Yu Hüich'un 柳希春 (1513–1577), frequently performed the *Zhouyi* divination when he was in exile or in the court.²⁶ In the *Nanjung ilgi* 亂中日記 (War Diary), general Yi Sunsin 李舜臣 (1545–1598) also quite often performed stick-casting and coin-casting divinations regarding the farming in his jurisdiction, family members' illnesses, auspice of battles, or enemy invasions.²⁷ Divination was also popular among commoners. *Sirhak* (practical learning) scholar Yu Tükkong's 柳得恭 (1748–1807) *Kyŏngdo chapchi* 京都雜誌 (Miscellaneous Records on the Capital City) provides a detailed record stating that the *ohaeng* (five elements 五行)-based *yut* divination was practiced by a number of commoners.²⁸ A little later, the *Tongguk sesigi* 東國時記 (Seasonal Customs of the Eastern Country) also reports the same.²⁹ Studying divination texts, including the *Zhouyi*, was not always regarded as something worthy of criticism in the late Chosŏn era. In fact, it was at times encouraged to study and practice such texts. The state-published *Ŭibang yuch'wi* 醫方類聚 (Classified Compilation of Medical Prescriptions) advises those who aspire to be great medical doctors to be well versed in divination techniques.³⁰ The *Wŏlsajip* 月沙集 (Writings of Wŏlsa) records an epitaph that a renowned literatus, Yi Chŏnggu 李廷龜 (1564–1635), composed for the deceased prime minister Sin Hüim 申欽 (1566–1628). There, Yi praises that Sin studied divination texts deeply and was particularly adept in interpreting the *Zhouyi*.³¹ Such renowned scholars as Yi Ik 李瀾 (1681–1764) and Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) also composed divination writings, the *Yŏkkyŏng chilsŏ* 易經疾書 (Brief Writings on the Book of Changes) and the *Yŏkhak sŏn* 易學言 (Introduction to the *Zhouyi* Divination), respectively.³²

Although the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination were sometimes criticized and dismissed as non-Confucian and thus improper, these practices were quite popular among people, including *yangban* Confucians and commoners. The extensive popularity of these two practices in the late Chosŏn era led to the interest in and popularity of the synthetic practice of Avalokiteśvara divination.

²³ (<http://db.history.go.kr>: December, the first year of King Hyōnjong, *Koryŏsa chŏryo*); for discussion on the divination practices of the Koryŏ state, see (Kim 2013).

²⁴ For the Kwansanggam office in the Chosŏn era, see (Yi 2008).

²⁵ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>; 'Yujukto', "Si", *T'aektangjip* 5).

²⁶ For divination practice in the *Miam ilgi*, see (Song 2007).

²⁷ For divination practice in the *Nanjung ilgi*, see (Im 2012).

²⁸ For discussion on the *yut* divination in the *Kyŏngdo chapchi*, see (Im 2012).

²⁹ (<http://www.davincimap.co.kr>: *Tongguk sesigi*).

³⁰ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>: "Nondaeüi sübŏp", *Ŭibang yuch'wi* 1).

³¹ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>: "Yŏngüijŏng chŭngsi Munjŏng Sin kong sindo pimyŏng", *Wŏlsajip* 44).

³² (Sŏ 2017).

3. Avalokiteśvara Divination

3.1. Avalokiteśvara Divination before the Chosŏn Era

The synthesis of the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination had a long history in East Asia. The first such synthesis was made during the Song dynasty. Avalokiteśvara divination was performed in the temple Tianzhushi, Hangzhou, in the early 12th century, and the *Tianzhu lingqian* 天竺靈籤 (Numinous Lots of Tianzhu), a text related to this practice, circulated around this time. It seems, however, that it was carried out only within the monastic community in and around Hangzhou. It was in the Ming and Qing periods when Avalokiteśvara divination really thrived among Chinese people. In these later dynastic periods of China, a few Avalokiteśvara divination texts circulated, such as the *Tianzhu lingqian* and the *Tianzhu baiqian* 天竺百籤 (A Hundred Lots of Tianzhu). The *Guanshiyin pusa ganying lingguo* 觀世音菩薩感應靈課 (Numinous Lessons of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's Response) was also available around this time, published in 1592.³³

Reference to Avalokiteśvara divination was seldom found in Korea. It first appeared in the *Hyŏnhaeng sŏbanggyŏng* 現行西方經 (Sutra of Going Instantly to the Western Pure Land) by the monk Wŏnch'am 元岳 (fl. late 13th century). In particular, this Korean apocryphal scripture mentions Avalokiteśvara divination when it explains its own Hyŏnhaeng divination, saying that Hyŏnhaeng divination was similar to Avalokiteśvara divination.³⁴ Other than this, however, the scripture does not offer much explanation for Avalokiteśvara divination. Nevertheless, we can guess that it was practiced at least among the people of Wŏnch'am's community quite frequently because Wŏnch'am used Avalokiteśvara divination as a reference to explain his new divination more easily. However, it seems that Avalokiteśvara divination was not extensively conducted by people at this time because there has been no text yet found for this period explaining it in any detail or even making a simple passing reference to the actual performance of such divination. The same, in fact, applies to the subsequent period. After the *Hyŏnhaeng sŏbanggyŏng*, reference to Avalokiteśvara divination is not found in any type of Korean materials until the late Chosŏn era. It is not found in any Buddhist textual collections, official historical records, seasonal customs records, or literary collections of monks and Confucians. It seems that Avalokiteśvara divination was conducted among a small population around Wŏnch'am's time and thereafter was hardly performed any longer. Although it is still possible that it continued to be practiced in certain monastic communities, any substantial evidence supporting this possibility has not yet been discovered.

3.2. Avalokiteśvara Divination in the Late Chosŏn Era

In the late Chosŏn era, the first known Korean Avalokiteśvara divination-related text, titled *Kwanŭm yŏnggwŏ* 觀音靈課 (Numinous Lessons of Avalokiteśvara, hereafter *Yŏnggwŏ*), was published. This anonymous text was most likely created some time after the 17th century, inspired by Chinese versions. The text, most of all, clearly shows the Chosŏn Buddhists embracing Confucian ethics. There are more than two different editions of the *Yŏnggwŏ*. Two of the editions were published in the temple Wŏn'gaksa, Kyŏnggi province, both of which were combined with another divination—though non-Buddhist—text called *Ch'ŏn'gang sigwa* 天罡時課 (Opportune Lessons of the Big Dipper God in Heaven).³⁵ The *Yŏnggwŏ* is relatively short: both editions are only 30 pages long with approximately a hundred words per page. A small silk pocket is tied to one of the editions with a short string.

³³ It is not certain exactly how Avalokiteśvara divination was performed in Tianzhu, China. However, it was probably based on the manual, *Tianzhu lingqian*, which provides a similar divination method as the later Chinese and Korean Avalokiteśvara divination texts. The *Guanshiyin pusa ganying lingguo* has 32 divination verses, while the *Tianzhu lingqian* and the *Tianzhu baiqian* have 100 verses. For details on Chinese Avalokiteśvara divinations, see (Lin 2014).

³⁴ (<http://kabc.dongguk.edu>: *Hyŏnhaeng sŏbanggyŏng*, Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ 6.861b05).

³⁵ It is not clear who wrote this *Ch'ŏn'gang sigwa* and when it was written. It is not found in any of the Chinese and Korean text collections. It is also not a Buddhist divination text. It is also not known how it was used.

Within the pocket, there are five wooden cubes with each character of *ohaeng* written on one side of them. These five cubes were made to be used for the practice of Avalokiteśvara divination, though all the extant *Yōnggwa* editions give an instruction that uses coins to conduct such divination instead of cubes.

The *Yōnggwa* is basically a manual for Avalokiteśvara divination. The process of the divination is rather simple. It simply requires five coins to perform. It is a little unclear, but a practitioner can use the coins one by one or all the coins together. In the latter case, each of the five coins should have one of the five Chinese characters for *ohaeng* written on one side. According to the text, Avalokiteśvara divination starts with purification. Before performing a divination, a practitioner washes his/her hands clean and burns incense. The practitioner puts all five coins on a plate or hand and passes the plate or hand through the incense smoke. After this purification process, the practitioner puts his/her hands up to the sky and shakes them. Then, he/she bows down in front of the image of Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva with utter respect and says the following prayer:

I take refuge in the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who saves [sentient beings] out of suffering with great compassion and numen as large as heaven. The golden boy and the jade girl who are giving divination signs and all the gods and deities that come and go in the empty space! Now, on a certain day of a certain month in a certain year, a certain disciple has not been able to determine on a certain issue and therefore respectfully bow and ask the bodhisattva for help! Please show one of the thirty-two divination signs! Please clearly show the sign of fortune or misfortune, success or failure, and rise or fall without following human feelings or ghostly desires! There will be no one who cannot receive a wondrous sign if he or she exerts utter sincerity.

南無大慈大悲 救苦救難 廣天靈感 觀世音菩薩 翻卦金童 掇卦玉女 空過往 一切神祇 今某年某月某日 有弟子 某姓某名 某省某府某縣某某社人 因為某事 憂疑未決 虔誠拜請 在三十二課占一課 莫順人情 莫順鬼意 吉凶禍福 成敗興亡 報應分明 凡誠心誠意者 無不靈驗也。

After this prayer, the practitioner throws the coins onto the mat. The divination result can be read with the combination of the *ohaeng* characters shown. There are 32 combinations. As briefly mentioned before, any five coins can be used for the divination without needing to write the *ohaeng* characters on them, but, in this case, they are used one by one instead of being used all together. One is put onto a plate and thrown onto a mat after making the prayer, and this process is repeated four more times. In the case of using the coins one by one, the first one represents *kūm* (metal); the second, *mok* (wood); the third, *su* (water); the fourth, *hwa* (fire); and the fifth, *t'o* (earth). This way, the same thirty-two combinations can be obtained.

The *Yōnggwa* consists of the 32 divination signs (*chōmgwae*) with an *ohaeng* combination, two sets of corresponding fortune-telling verses, a short interpretation, and actual cases for each sign. Approximately one half of the 32 lots (14) can be regarded as auspicious; about one-third (9) are in the middle; another one-third (9) are very bad fortunes. The fortunes and misfortunes of the *Yōnggwa* are categorized by two sets of three grades (first set of upper, middle, and lower 上中下; second of upper, plain, and lower 上平下). The *Yōnggwa*, however, also often uses terms such as auspice (*kil* 吉) and omen (*hyung* 凶) in its grading, as can be seen in lots 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25–29, and 30.

The first of the two sets of the fortune-telling verses is a quatrain with five Chinese characters in line. Each of the first verses in the *Yōnggwa* gives a vibe as to whether the given divination sign is auspicious or inauspicious. For example, the verse of lot 8 says, “Good virtues receive the heavenly assistance; One beckons the cheerful force at the door; Since people give a helping hand to each other, fortunes are naturally visiting joyfully” 好承天佑 門招喜氣新 有人相助 福祿自寧忻. The verse certainly appears to correspond to the upper-auspice of the divination sign. Lot 4, on the other hand, foretells the middle-plain of fortunes. Its verse reflects this state, predicting, “While a boat is floating on the river and lake, one collects many jewels on the water shore; since one will be used greatly, disasters disperse away but, how about fortunes?” 船泛江湖 灘邊獲寶多 更宜將大用 災散福如何. Lot 6 shows

a bad fortune with the lower-plain. Its verse hence provides advice to avoid misfortunes by saying, “Fit in the share of the gentlemen and do not use the words of petty men; Be careful at every situation; grow good fortunes and keep them safely” 且安君子分 勿用小人言 凡事皆當謹 作福保安然.

The five-word quatrain is followed by another set of the fortune-telling verses, which constitutes one of the features of the *Yōnggwa*. This second set of verses is also made up of quatrains, but with seven words in line. Each of the 32 lots includes this second set of verses except lot 5. Just as with the first set, it explains the ambience of the lot, but reveals its good or bad fortunes more clearly. Looking at the lots above, the second verse of lot 8 emphasizes good fortunes: “Though neither planning, moving, nor working hard, Dragon sends treasures every day; since house shines brightly with many auspicious occasions, endless fortunes reach the gate” 不謀不動不辛勤 日日龍來送寶珍 家宅光輝多吉慶 無邊福祿到家門. The second verse of lot 4 shows a middle level of fortunes, saying, “If one seeks property, it will naturally come, though slowly ... The delight lying in the troubles becomes great auspiciousness” 求財遲緩自然來 ... 喜在憂中成大吉. The verse of lot 6 clearly forebodes misfortunes, which reads, “Although one works over many years, [everything is] unclear; fearing the evil while deceiving the good, there will be no future; though seeking property every day, one gains no profit and interest; there will be just disputes every morning” 連年作事不分明 怕惡欺良沒後程 日日求財無利息 朝朝惟有是非生.

The short interpretation section of the *Yōnggwa* explains the fortune-telling verses. Each interpretation, which consists of a series of four-word sets, tells the good or ill fortunes of the lot in terms of approximately 20 different occasions, including marriage, child birth, commerce, law suit, moving, and illness. The interpretations of the 32 lots do not always deal with the same occasions, though some of them overlap. A few of these occasions likely appealed to Confucian elites, which shows that the *Yōnggwa*, despite its folkloric nature, also targeted the upper class of society as its audience in addition to the common people. The possible occasions that would have appealed to the Confucian class in the *Yōnggwa* include whether one will pass an exam, obtain a governmental position, get a promotion in court, or produce a male heir to carry on the family. This section of short interpretation predicts whether these occasions will develop in an auspicious or ominous way in the future. For example, as for the question of a government position, lot 27 gives a greatly auspicious prognostication by saying that one gains a position with a good stipend when seeking one and that he sees a bright career ahead once entering the court. On the contrary, lot 32 offers the opposite, stating that it is hard to get a governmental position though seeking one and that there will be a misfortune if he has already acquired one. The same goes for the property fortune: lot 21 says that if one seeks property, he obtains it; lot 3 reads that one does not get much from seeking property; lot 13, on the other hand, predicts that one obtains nothing in his pursuit of property.

Finally, the *Yōnggwa* offers actual cases for the divination signs, another feature that could distinguish it from the other versions of Avalokiteśvara divination. All the cases are Chinese examples with a specific year that use a name of a different imperial era. Although there are a few earlier and later eras, Ming eras made up more than two-thirds of the cases. The latest era in the cases was the first year of Tianqi of the Ming dynasty (1621), which confirms that the *Yōnggwa* was compiled after the mid-seventeenth century. Because all of the Chinese era names and land names but two are correct, it can be guessed that the compiler(s) was an educated intellectual.³⁶ Most of the lots give only one case, except lots 2, 25, 29, and 30, which provide two. These cases were likely intended to emphasize the efficiency of Avalokiteśvara divination by giving an impression that they had actually happened, though most were likely fictional.

³⁶ In two of the divination cases in the *Yōnggwa*, a reign name or year is wrong. Lot 19 gives the thirteenth year of Tianfu 天福, the era name for Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 936–942) of Later Jin (936–947), which was used during the first to ninth year (936–942) and 12th year (947). However, there was no 13th year in the Tianfu era. Lot 29 offers a case in the second year of Zhengshun 正順 during the Yuan dynasty. It seems Zhengshun is a typo of Zhishun 至順 (1331) because there was no such Yuan era of the former.

Examining lot 1 from the title to the actual case as an example, its divination title or sign is *Sōngsin* (Starquake) 星震, which a practitioner can get when all *ohaeng* sides of the five coins are oriented up. Its first fortune-telling verse reads, “A colorful phoenix gives auspice; a camelopard lands on the imperial capital; misfortunes disappear while countless fortunes arrive; jubilant delight is full of the courtyard” 彩鳳呈祥瑞 麒麟降帝都 禍除多福至 喜氣滿庭除. The verse gives the impression that this divination sign is very auspicious. The second verse is the same in this regard. It says, “Since one has just obtained this year’s fortunes in his life, he will meet an auspicious occasion repeatedly and [everything] will be peaceful; since one will obtain abundant property, along with the glorious rank and salary of a noble man, he will have numerous fortunes at his disposal” 生平方得今年運 吉慶重逢更太和 財旺貴人榮祿位 遂心百事福祥多. The second verse more clearly shows the propitiousness of this divination sign. Its short interpretation confirms this impression and adds more detailed explanations as follows:

“When you try to get a governmental position, you will get one; if you already have a position in the government, you will get promoted to a higher position; if you take an exam, you will pass; if you go out, you will obtain property; if you are involved in a lawsuit, you will win; if you are ill, you will get better; if you seek wealth, you will get it; if you are going somewhere, you will get there; if you look for someone, you will find him/her; if you have lost a thing, you will soon recover it; even though you are sixty, you will get a son; your family will have occasions to celebrate; if you want to be married, you will get married; if you are in trade, you will have a deal; if you move to somewhere else, you will become greatly lucky; if you wish it to rain, there will be rain; if you wish it to stop, there will be no rain”.

求官得位 朝觀高遷 考試得意 出路得財 訟事有理 病者安寧 求財十分 行人即至 尋人得見 失物東見 六甲生男 家宅吉慶 婚姻得成 見貴遂心 買賣十分 移徙大吉 祈雨即有 占晴即霽.

Finally, the lot ends with two cases: after a man in Qingzhou 青州 whose wife was pregnant received this Starquake sign from Avalokiteśvara divination in the second year of Zhenguan (628), his wife gave birth to a son; a man in Zhangzhou 漳州 got this sign in the same year, and afterwards, he had happy occasions to celebrate one after another.

There are lots that are more related to Confucian aristocrats. One such case is lot 12, which divines good fortunes. The practitioner can receive this lot when the *ohaeng* combination indicates fire and wood. The first quatrain verse says, “When one pushes himself forward, he accomplishes an achievement; An idle Confucian returns, wearing a silk brocade robe” 進取逢通建 寒儒衣錦回. The second line of this first verse implies success in the civil service exam with the phrase, “a silk brocade”, which indicates court attire. This good sign becomes clearer in the second divination verse, which reads, “Rice sprouts meet a welcome rain after a long drought . . . An outstanding scholar now appears on the gold poster after taking the exam; A dragon in trouble in the water obtains a chance to arise to the sky” 禾萌久旱降甘雨 . . . 秀士今科登金榜 困龍得水上天時. The gold poster (*kūmbang* 金榜) here refers to a poster on which the names of the exam passers are listed. Therefore, this verse predicts that one who has prepared for the civil service exam with long and arduous effort will finally pass it and obtain a government position. This case also gives such an example: after a man in Dangtu, Anhui province, received this lot in the ninth year of Xuande (1434), he took the exam and passed it with honors. Passing the civil service exam was one of the crucial elements by which a Confucian aristocrat could maintain his and his family’s economic, political, and social status as *yangban* in their region. Therefore, many aristocrats invested a huge amount of money and years of effort into preparing for it, amongst which only a handful of them succeeded. Therefore, this lot could serve to provide hope and consolation for Confucian students who studied for a long time under serious economic and psychological pressure.

Lot 14 also shows the devotion of the *Yŏnggwa* to Confucian social values. However, in contrast to lot 12, it forebodes bad fortunes, which are categorized in the lower-middle. Lot 14 can be obtained with the *ohaeng* combination of fire and water. Although the first divination verse represents the general dismal atmosphere of the lot, it imbues a little sense of hope, saying, “Since one’s mind is much unsettled, even though he seeks, he can achieve nothing; since his endurance finally turns into fortunes, if he keeps his share, he will avoid disasters” 自心多不定 求謀未得成 忍耐方為福 守分免災星. The second verse presents more direct advice to escape disasters, advice that is directly connected to Confucian ethics. The verse urges, “As an advice to you, do good, do not evil, and cultivate the small mind of yours for yourself; practice filial piety diligently to your parents since it is the heavenly principle that naturally brings many fortunes” 勸君為善莫為惡 方寸心田掌自摩 父母堂前勤孝敬 昭然天理福來多. This lot later presents a case about people who failed to pass the civil service exam: after a person named Zhaoxiang 趙祥 performed divination to see who could have an audience with the king (i.e., pass the exam and obtain a court position) in the second year of Hongzhi (1489) and received this lot, he searched in Jishui, Jiangxi province, but there was no one.

Awareness of Confucian aristocrats pervades the *Yŏnggwa*. As already mentioned, there are references to prospects of achieving governmental positions and passing the civil service exam in most of its short interpretation sections. The two sets of the divination verses of the text could also serve as a means to cater to the literary interests of intellectuals, including *yangban* literati, in addition to a ritual function to give more detailed implications to the divination signs. The fact that there is no illustration in the *Yŏnggwa* could mean that this Korean text targeted intellectuals who could read Chinese as its main audience, although it could also simply reflect the level of the publication culture and development in the late Chosŏn era.³⁷ Indeed, as can be seen below, there was a case that a *yangban* official performed Avalokiteśvara divination by himself without any help from a Buddhist priest.

3.3. The Cases for the Performance of Avalokiteśvara Divination in the Late Chosŏn Era

The acceptance of Confucian values in Avalokiteśvara divination is more obviously revealed in its actual performance in the late Chosŏn era, although there are few surviving cases. The renowned Buddhist master Ŭngun Kongyŏ’s 應雲空如 (b. 1794) literary collection reports two prayers for Avalokiteśvara divination.³⁸ Ŭngun, in fact, composed the prayers for both of the two cases on behalf of prominent Confucians: the magistrate of Miryang, Kyŏngsang province, and *puwŏn’gun* (Queen’s father) in the capital city.³⁹ Although the Miryang magistrate is hard to identify, *puwŏn’gun* was Kim Chosun 金祖淳 (1765–1832) who was the patriarch of the Andong Kim clan, the most powerful *yangban* clan in the late Chosŏn era. It seems that Ŭngun performed Avalokiteśvara divination for these *yangban* Confucians. Both of the master’s prayers for the two *yangban* elites begin by praising the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. One of the praises reads, “Since the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara possesses a great compassion, he guides sentient beings to get out of suffering by manifesting a number of reincarnations. Therefore, if we take refuge in the bodhisattva, we will receive many fortunes and avoid misfortunes. Our evil karmas will also disappear.” As can be seen, this praise part of the prayers apparently intends to encourage faith in Avalokiteśvara. Then, the prayers introduce the commissioners of Avalokiteśvara divination, the magistrate and *puwŏn’gun*, respectively, and give a brief explanation for the reason for performing the divination. In the case for *puwŏn’gun*, the prayer does not offer much detail on the reason, while, in the case of the magistrate, the prayer wishes for him to get a promotion because his

³⁷ For the development of publications in the late Chosŏn era, see (Chŏng 2010, pp. 23–90).

³⁸ In these two prayers, the title, “Kwanŭm yŏnggwa”, was never mentioned. Nonetheless, these prayers wished for the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to respond to *ohaeng*. Because the *Yŏnggwa* was the only text that was related to *ohaeng* in the late Chosŏn, the Kwanŭm divination of the two cases was most likely performed based on the *Yŏnggwa*.

³⁹ (<http://kabc.dongguk.edu>: “Miryang chol Yigong Kwanŭm chŏm ch’uksa”, 應雲空如大師遺忘 HPC 10, 733c03–c21) and “Yŏngan puwŏn’gun Kwanŭm chŏm ch’uksa”, op.cit., 733c23–p.734a13).

promotion in the government has been delayed. Then, the prayers end by asking the bodhisattva to grant his divine divination.

What is interesting in these prayers for two high-class *yangban* members of the Chosŏn era is that Confucian ethics are seemingly more emphasized than faith in Avalokiteśvara. Of course, at first, the prayers mention that if people take refuge in the bodhisattva, there will be many benefits. However, when the prayers reach the point of introducing the commissioners, these prayers place much more emphasis on Confucian ethics. In particular, the prayers describe the commissioners' virtues and good deeds, all of which are related to Confucian morality. For example, in the case of the Miryang magistrate, the prayer for him praises him for possessing all the virtues that a good local magistrate is supposed to have. He is considerate, generous, and honest in nature. He also consoles victims of disasters and takes no bribe. *Puwŏn'gun's* case is the same in this regard. In fact, the level of the praise is more heightened. This is understandable considering the social and political status of Kim Chosun at the time. He is depicted as an ideal Confucian. His filial piety is great and properly expressed according to the Confucian *ye* (Ch. *li*) propriety. His benevolence (Kr. *in*, Ch. *ren*) is also great to the point of reaching other people, implying that his Confucian virtue is complete because, according to Confucian teachings, benevolence should be practiced for other people only after fulfilling it for one's parents, brothers and sisters, and close people. Neither prayer says anything about its commissioner's Buddhist practices. The prayers never mention, for example, how they sincerely worshipped Avalokiteśvara or how they accumulated Buddhist merit by donating to a temple or a monk. In order to demonstrate to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara that these two Confucians deserve the bodhisattva's blessings before the divination, the prayers instead show how they are good Confucians or how loyal they are to Confucian ethics. These prayers just assume that possessing good Confucian qualities is enough for them to receive the bodhisattva's blessings.

Avalokiteśvara divination apparently does not aim to simply obtain prognostication. As Beverley F. McGuire shows, it could also play a didactic role, functioning as a diagnostic or pedagogical tool for higher (moral or spiritual) learning.⁴⁰ In the case of late-Chosŏn-era Avalokiteśvara divination, it encouraged practitioners to do good deeds. When practitioners performed divination and received a good sign, it was interpreted as meaning that they should continue their moral life to maintain their good fortune rather than being relieved and loose. On the other hand, when practitioners received a bad fortune, they were thought to need to change their bad deeds to avoid bad fortune or to maintain their good deeds if they had been doing good. Thus, this Avalokiteśvara practice was not meant to be only a one-time practice, similar to other divination practices in China and Korea.⁴¹ Rather, it was most likely meant to be used as a regular practice to check on changing fortunes through changing actions. More importantly, these actions in question were Confucian-oriented, though faith in Avalokiteśvara was not totally ignored or faded away. Faith in Avalokiteśvara as a divine being who would respond to a practitioner's sincerity underlies the whole process of divination: the bodhisattva would give his divination at the request of a practitioner and accordingly grant fortunes to him. Nonetheless, the grounds that Avalokiteśvara uses to decide to grant fortunes is the embodiment of Confucian ethics in a practitioner's life, at least for these two cases of divination for the Confucian literati. Here, we can see another example of the Buddhist embracing of Confucian ethics in the late Chosŏn era.

Although there are not many records for the actual performance of Avalokiteśvara divination, it was probably somewhat frequently practiced in the late Chosŏn era, just as in Qing China and Tokugawa Japan.⁴² The abovementioned two cases show that such divination could be popular in

⁴⁰ Beverley F. McGuire provides Ouyi Zhixu 益智旭 (1599–1655) as such an example. According to her, Ouyi used divination "as a diagnostic tool for determining karma, so that one might then repent for one's previous misconduct and commit oneself anew to the Buddhist path." For more details on divination and karma, see (McGuire 2019, pp. 37–52)

⁴¹ For example, people performed divination on a regular basis in Chosŏn Korea, as already seen in the cases of Yi Sunsin and Yu Hüich'un in the Section 2.3.

⁴² (Smith 1991, pp. 233–45).

different regions because those two Confucian aristocrats who commissioned the divination were in two distantly separated regions and were significantly influential in their respective regions (*puwŏn'gun* in the capital and the state; the magistrate in Miryang, Kyŏngsang province). The explanations of the fortune-telling verses in Avalokiteśvara divination can also be applied to all classes of society. We can guess that it was practiced among quite a few people, including *yangban* Confucian literati. A monk could be, at times, invited to perform the divination just as in the abovementioned two cases. As Huang explains for the case of the Tianzhu divination, monk adepts of Chosŏn Korea probably would have served as “guide, advisor, or divine mediator” in the divination ritual.⁴³ However, because the Avalokiteśvara divination manual does not necessarily require a professional officiant, ordinary lay practitioners could perform the divination by themselves especially when they were able to read classical Chinese. There was indeed such a case. The *Pukchŏng ilgi* 北征日記 (Diary of the Northern Expedition), in the early-19th-century *yangban* official Yi Chint'aek's 李鎭宅 (1738–1805) literary collection, reports that Yi performed Avalokiteśvara divination for his fellow Confucian elite, praising the *yangban's* filial piety.⁴⁴ When Avalokiteśvara divination was conducted in the late Chosŏn era, people could be reminded that they should practice Confucian personal, social, and national ethics for the bodhisattva to grant them their blessings, as shown in these cases.

4. Conclusions

Avalokiteśvara divination resurfaced in the late Chosŏn era. This unique amalgam of the Avalokiteśvara cult and divination practices adapted itself to Chosŏn society by embracing the Confucian values of filial piety and sincerity as its essential element. As such, Confucian practice served as a deciding factor to receive the bodhisattva's auspicious sign, though the Buddhist faith was never excluded. A practitioner's commitment and devotion to the bodhisattva did not guarantee good fortunes any longer. Instead, it was none other than Confucian practices that would make him or her worthy of the bodhisattva's blessings. Buddhist monks also used such divination to pander to the literary interest of Confucian elites. This divination and its performance site then became a “cultural venue” for Buddhist monks to boast their knowledge of Confucian culture and literature and thereby attract Confucian literati. The reintroduction of Avalokiteśvara divination therefore could be viewed as another strategy of the Buddhist community to make Buddhism survive and thrive in the Confucian-dominant society of the Chosŏn era.

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- Koryŏsa chŏryo* 高麗史節要.
- Kukcho oryeŭi* 國朝五禮儀.
- Kwanŭm Yŏnggwa* 觀音靈課.
- Samguk sagi* 三國史記.
- Samguk yusa* 三國遺事.
- Sanguo zhi* 三國志.
- T'aektangjip* 澤堂集.

⁴³ (Huang 2007, p. 282).

⁴⁴ (<http://db.itkc.or.kr>: “Pukchŏng ilgi, Tŏkpong sŏnsaeng munjip 峯先生文集 4).

Taejŏn hoet'ong 大典會通.
 Taejŏn t'ongp'yŏn 大典通編.
 Tongguk isang kukchip 東國李相國集.
 Tongguk sesigi 東國時記.
 Ŭibang yuch'wi 醫方類聚.
 Ŭngun Kongyŏ taesa yumang rok 應雲空如大師遺忘.
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