

**A COMMENTARY ON A BUDDHIST TALE: “SÖNYUL
COMES BACK TO LIFE” (SÖNYUL HWANSAENG
善律還生) IN *MEMORABILIA OF THE THREE
KINGDOMS (SAMGUK YUSA 三國遺事)***

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Buddhism introduced the concept of hell to East Asia, and many tales of hell were circulated. The narrative “Sönyul comes back to life” accompanied the dissemination of the concept of hell in the Unified Silla period. This story describes suffering in hell as retribution for the unwholesome act of stealing monastery possessions. However, the punishment in hell is not eternal in this story, and one can be saved through performing a memorial service for the dead. Memorial services for the dead are done by making offerings to the Three Jewels—the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha—by giving one’s possessions to monasteries.

The story “Sönyul comes back to life” seems to have been written by monks and been circulated as a karma tale of a Buddhist ceremony for the production of sutras and for appreciating the teachings of the sutras. Buddhist ceremonies were constructed and performed for the purpose of amassing meritorious virtues and expelling calamities through such things as reading sutras and understanding their content. Among these, dramatic preaching of the dharma was performed to communicate to ordinary people in a more lively and interesting manner than the teaching of the sutras. Animated stories of hell about actual people who could have been the listeners’ own neighbors were performed, and the story of “Sönyul comes back to life” seems to have been told at such a ceremony. In a story performed in a lifelike manner, sympathetic people willingly contributed their hearts and possessions to the Buddha, monks, and monasteries for the sake of their own futures.

Keywords: “Sönyul comes back to life” (Sönyul hwansaeng 善律還生), *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk yusa 三國遺事)*, Buddhist hell, Tales of Hell, Buddhist Ceremony

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In conceiving of hell, people believe that after death they will be judged according to the works they have performed in life and will go to hell and be punished for their evil actions. The concept of hell developed from the notions of the “soul” and “the other world” and includes systems of judgment and punishment. It appeared with the provision that reflection and introspection on the ethics of human behavior had progressed to a certain level. In human history, the concept of a judgment after death first appeared in Egypt, developed in ancient Persia, entered India in the later period of Vedic literature, and evolved into the idea of judgment after death in Buddhism.¹ In East Asia, the standard conception of hell formed with the introduction of Buddhism. Although the idea that the dead went to a dark, subterranean realm already existed throughout Asia, the concept of hell with its core ideas of judgment and punishment after death only blossomed after the accommodation of Buddhism.²

The Korean people also accepted the concept of hell through Buddhism. Before the adoption of Buddhism, ancient Korean people had no idea that after death people would be judged on deeds performed during their lives and that based on those deeds they would receive either reward or punishment. Although they thought that when a person died his spirit would go to the realm where people go after they die and that life would continue, they did not think that one’s ethical actions in this life influenced the mode or style of life after death. According to ancient Korean people, social status, the nature of death, and the conducting of proper mourning and funerals influenced the manner of life after death.³ With the transmission of Buddhism, however, the view of life and death

¹ For research on the history and development of the idea of hell, see the following: S. G. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: The Idea of Life After Death in the Major Religions* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967); Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (Jarcourt Brace, 1993); Turner’s book was translated into Korean as *Chioek ūi yōksa* Vol. I, II, trans. Yi Ch’ansu (Seoul: Tongyōn, 1998); Iwamoto Yutaka, “Jigoku shisō no denkai: kodai Indo ni okeru jigoku shisō tosono kigen” [The development of the concept of hell: The concept of hell in ancient India and its origin], in *Jigoku no sekai* [The world of hell], ed. Sakamoto Kaname (Tokyo: Keisusha, 1990); Chang Mijin, “Pulgyo munhwagwōn e issōsō ‘chiok’ ūi wōnsinhwajōk yoso wa kŭ ūimi” [The original mythological elements of hell in the Buddhist cultural sphere and their meaning], *Misul sabak* 7 (1995):189–242.

² Yu Weigang, “Zhongguo diyuguande xingcheng yu yanbian” [The formation and evolution of the concept of hell in China], *Shehuike zhanxian* [Social science front], Issue 4 (1988): 102; Yamaguchi Masao, “Jigoku izen: Shāmonizumo no Nihonteki denkai,” [Before Hell: The Japanese development of Shamanism], in *Jigoku no sekai* [The world of hell], ed. Sakamoto Kaname (Tokyo: Keisusha, 1990), 7.

³ For research on the view of the world after death held by Koreans prior to the introduction of Buddhism, see Na Hŭira (Na Hee La), *Kodae Han’gugin ūi saengsagwan* [Ancient Korean views of life

flavored with the Buddhist theory of retribution newly influenced Korean ways of thinking and attitudes toward life. The Buddhist concept of hell teaches that after death one receives judgment on the actions of this life and that people who have performed evil deeds fall into hell where they receive awful punishment. This teaching regulated life in the present world through fear about the next life. Therefore, the concept of hell molded, shaped, and regulated moralistic ideals for actual society and social values.

How was this concept of hell accommodated and how was it disseminated in ancient Korea? The Buddhist concept of hell was initially made known through scriptures that mentioned ideas about hell. However, when ordinary people encountered scriptures directly, they would not have been able to understand the concept of hell. To the common illiterate people, the teachings of Buddhism were conveyed through such things as paintings, images formed into carved sculptures, and stories embellished so that doctrines could be understood easily and in an interesting manner. Many narrative portrayals (C. *bianxiangtu* 變相圖) of hell were painted in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907), in which Buddhism flourished along with their explanatory “transformation texts” (C. *bianwen* 變文). These were used widely as educational materials by missionary monks (C. *jiaohuaseng* 教化僧).⁴ Even in Japan, after the Nara period (710–794), pictorial portrayals of hell were visible, and in the Heian period (794–1185), many wall paintings of hell were found in temples and monasteries.⁵ Furthermore, because stories about hell were curious and interesting enough to attract people’s attention, many tales were created after the introduction of Buddhism. In ancient Korea as well, paintings, sculptures, and stories were probably made and circulated that propagated concepts of hell. However, unfortunately, not many of these materials have been preserved. Paintings and images are completely non-extant, and only a few stories of hell have been preserved.

A typical narrative endowed with the structural elements of the concept of hell, in which someone is judged after death on whether their deeds in this life have been good or evil and, as a result, receives punishment in hell is “Sōnyul comes back to life” (*Sōnyul hwansaeng* 善律還生), which is the only such story recorded in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa* 三國遺事).⁶ Accordingly, to

and death] (Seoul: Chisik sanōpsa, 2008).

⁴ Michihata Ryōshū, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shisōshi no kenkyū: Chūgoku minshū no Bukkyō jūyō* [Research on the history of Chinese Buddhist thought: The reception of Buddhism by the Chinese masses] (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1979), 95.

⁵ Ienaga Saburō, “Jigokuhen to Rokudōe,” [Narrative portrayals of hell and paintings of the six paths of rebirth], in *Jigoku no sekai* [The world of hell], ed. Sakamoto Kaname, (Tokyo: Keisusha, 1990), 423.

⁶ Although a hell story associated with the Silla monk Sun’gyōng 順璟 is preserved in the *Song*

understand how the concept of hell was formed in ancient Korea after the introduction of Buddhism and how it circulated, I think it is meaningful to evaluate this narrative at length. In this article, I analyze the story “Sönyul comes back to life” on the basis of the structural elements at the core of the concept of hell, examine the significance of the form and structure of the story, and consider how it conveyed the concept of hell to ordinary people.

I. THE DATING OF THE “SÖNYUL COMES BACK TO LIFE” NARRATIVE IN *MEMORABILIA OF THE THREE KINGDOMS*

The complete narrative of “Sönyul comes back to life” may be presented as follows:

Sönyul, a monk of Mangdök Monastery (望德寺), received a donation and intended to pay for the completion of a copy of the *Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom in 600 Rolls* (*Yukpaek panya kyöng* 六百般若經), but he was suddenly brought before the underworld tribunal (*myöngbu* 冥府) before he finished it. The underworld official asked, “What was your occupation during your life in the human world?” Sönyul replied, “I sought to complete a copy of the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom* (*Taep’um kyöng* 大品經) in my declining years, but I came here before it was finished.” Thereupon, the netherworld official said, “Although your allotted life is now over if we follow the register of human lives, because your excellent wish has not yet been completed, you should return again to the human world to fully complete your precious books.” So he sent the monk back.

On the road back, Sönyul met a woman. She was crying and bowed before Sönyul and said, “I was also a native of Silla in the southern continent of Jambudvīpa. My parents covertly stole a plot of wet paddy land from Kūmgang Monastery (金剛寺); I was implicated in the crime, was taken by the netherworld authorities, and have undergone extreme suffering for a long time. Now, monk, when you return to our homeland, please tell my parents to return the field immediately. Furthermore, when I lived in the world, I hid a bottle of sesame oil under my bed and also a roll of beautifully woven cloth between the sheets of my bed. If you take the oil

gaoseng zhuan [*Lives of Eminent Monks* compiled in the Song], it is not a hell story made to spread the concept of hell to ordinary people because it is a narrative associated with reciprocal criticism within the Buddhist learning of this monk. Aside from this, there are some episodes about hell in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, but they are not endowed with the components of the concept of hell like “Sönyul comes back to life.” On this issue, see Na Hūra, “T’ongil Silla wa Namal Ryöch’o ki chiok kwallyöm ūi chön’gae,” *Han’guk munhwa* [Korean Culture] 43 (September 2008): 245–265.

and light a lantern for the Buddha and sell the cloth and use the money for the expenses to finish the sutra, it will be a benefit to me in the netherworld, and I hope I will be freed from my sufferings.” To this, Sōnyul asked, “Where is your house?” The woman replied, “It is a village to the southwest of Kuwōn Monastery (久遠寺) in the Saryang Region (沙梁部).” After hearing her response, Sōnyul continued on the road and was immediately brought back to life.

At this time, Sōnyul had already been dead for ten days, and because he had been interred at the foot of the eastern side of South Mountain (Namsan 南山), he shouted from his grave for three days. A passing herd boy heard his cries, came and reported to the monastery, and the monks of the monastery went and dug up the grave and drew Sōnyul out. Sōnyul gave a full account of his personal experience, and he went to the home of the woman he had met. Although she had been dead for fifteen years, the oil and cloth were just as she had said. Sōnyul supplicated for blessings to come to the woman in the netherworld as she had instructed, and the woman’s spirit came and said that, owing to the monk’s favor, she had been freed from her suffering. The people of the time were amazed at the monk’s story; there was no one who was not struck with wonder, and they assisted him in completing the precious books.

That sutra is preserved in the library in the Office of Monastic Affairs in Kyōngju. Every year in spring and autumn, a ceremony is held in which the sutra is read selectively to supplicate for the expulsion of calamities.

A eulogy says,
 Envable! Our monk, following the wholesome karmic connections,
 His soul returned and came to his old homeland!
 When parents ask about my wellbeing,
 Please tell them to return that paddy field for me quickly.⁷

Before I enter into the main subject of this article, I need to mention the background to the dating of “Sōnyul comes back to life” in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*. *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* is a book begun by the monk Iryōn 一然 (1206–1289) in the late thirteenth century and completed by other authors after that. Accordingly, a fundamental question advanced by scholars regards the historical “reliability” of *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*.⁸ In addition, because the

⁷ *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 5, in *Taishō shinsū daijōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 [Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon], eds. Takakasu Junjirō, et al., 100 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932[–1935]) (hereafter T no., vol. page, register, and line), T 2039, 49.1013c24-1014a16 (Sōnyul hwansaeng 善律選生).

⁸ Regarding this, see Henrik Sørensen, “Problems with using the *Samguk Yusa* as a source for the History of Korean Buddhism,” *Cahiers d’études coréennes* 7 (2000). In this article, Sørensen cautions against materials in the *Samguk yusa* uncritically as sources for the history of Buddhism in the

materials preserved in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* are mostly narrative in form, if we connect their narrative format with the problem of textual transmission, it is only natural that the dating of the narratives in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* presents a problem. Not only do I think that the materials in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* do not speak of historical facts as they are recorded, but I also think that records possessing narrative form should not be believed to date to the time period that is claimed in the text. However, that being said, we cannot disavow or reject the dating of all records in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*. Some materials in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* are epigraphy, primary sources of the time period, which were translated into the text, and others were rendered from oral traditions, legends, and folklore (*kubi chönsüng* 口碑傳承), regarding which it is impossible to clearly know the date of formation. Thus, the dating of materials in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* must be assessed and evaluated on an individual basis. Moreover, Iryön, the primary compiler of *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, did not change or alter his original source materials wantonly or arbitrarily. He merely seems to have edited by selection materials that appealed to him.⁹

That being the case, how can we view the dating of “Sönyul comes back to life”? This narrative is presented as having occurred in the Unified Silla period (668–935). It is not, however, an actual historical fact from the Silla period. It is a narrative constructed with Silla as the temporal and spatial background based upon tales with similar patterns that had been formed previously in China. Accordingly, the temporal and spatial phenomenon called “Silla,” which is asserted in this narrative, is not reality, but constructed. Therefore, it is necessary for us to question whether the tale indeed reflects the Silla people’s concept of hell.

This narrative was crafted blending the concrete sense of temporal and spatial reality found in tales of pilgrimages to hell (*chiok sullye tam* 地獄巡禮談) and stories of restoration to life after visits to the underworld tribunal (*myöngbu sosaeng tam* 冥府蘇生談), which were widely prevalent after the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (ca. 386–589) in China. Many themes linked to Buddhism can be

Unified Silla period. I think that this is an appropriate admonition. Nevertheless, for several reasons that I state in this article, I intend to use the narrative “Sönyul comes back to life” with caution as a primary source for understanding the circumstances surrounding the accommodation and dissemination of the concept of hell in Silla.

⁹ Richard D. McBride II, “Is the *Samguk Yusa* Reliable? Case Studies from Chinese and Korean Sources,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 11, no.1 (Fall 2006), 182; Nam Tongsin, “*Samguk yusa* üi sasö rosö üi t’ükching” [The distinctive characteristics of the *Samguk yusa* as a historical book], in *Iryön kva Samguk yusa* (Iryön and the *Samguk yusa*), ed. Iryönhak Yön’guwön (Seoul: Sinsöwön, 2007), 110.

seen in collections of narratives: the actions of sutra-copying (*sagyōng* 寫經), sutra-reading (*tokkyōng* 讀經), and image-making (*chosang* 造像) are judged as wholesome karma. The stealing or appropriation of monastery property is cause for punishment. When one who will be restored to life receives the decision of the court in the netherworld and returns to this life, he meets a person suffering in hell, accepts a request from that person, and resolves the suffering in hell of the person who made the request. Stories of this type can be seen in collections of tales of cause-and-effect retribution, such as *Records of Signs from the Unseen Realm* (*Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記), *Record of Reports from the Netherworld* (*Mingbao ji* 冥報記), and *Record of Collected Marvels on the Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記), which were compiled from the Northern and Southern Dynasties period through the Tang period.

When Buddhism was transmitted from China to Korea and Japan, Chinese stories of hell were also spread throughout these countries. The temporal and spatial character of the Chinese narratives was crafted into Korean and Japanese stories of the “here and now.” “Sōnyul comes back to life” is considerably similar to tale no. 23 in roll 3 of *Miraculous Stories from Japan* (*Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記), which was compiled from the late eighth to the early ninth century. A certain monk sought to copy the *Perfection of Wisdom in 600 Rolls*, but was murdered and went to the netherworld. The judge in the netherworld said that he was killed by someone else’s hand for the sin of having used monastery goods carelessly in this life, and issued the verdict that he would be brought back to life to complete his vow to copy the sutra, as well as being ordered to pay back in full the goods he had used carelessly.¹⁰

In “Sōnyul comes back to life,” the monk Sōnyul receives the reward of being brought back to life for the wholesome cause of making a copy of the *Perfection of Wisdom in 600 Rolls*. The parents of the women from the Saryang Region of the Silla capital misappropriated property of the monastery, and their daughter was punished in hell vicariously. Although the structure of the narrative of Silla is slightly more complicated than that of Japan, the two narratives are similar with respect to cause-and-effect retribution. In this way, stories similar to “Sōnyul comes back to life” were formed and circulated not only in Silla and contemporary China, but also in Japan.

¹⁰ *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 [Miraculous stories from Japan], three rolls, by Kyōkai in 787; edited and annotated by Endō Yoshimoto and Kasuga Kazuo, *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* 日本古典文学大系 70 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), roll 3, no. 23; 用寺物復將寫大般若建願以現得善惡報緣, 318-319. For an English translation see Kyoto Motomuchi Nakamura, trans. and ed., *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973; reprint, Surrey, England: Curzon, 1997), 252–253.

The narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” is a story connected not only to the concept of hell, but also to faith and the ceremonies of the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. After this sutra in 600 rolls was translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 602–664) in Tang China, this sutra was copied and published frequently in China and Japan. The sutra was also believed to be able to ward against disasters if the sutra was either read or lectured,¹¹ and ceremonies linked to this were performed frequently. In Japan, ceremonies for copying and reading the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* were held regularly after the eighth century.¹² Faith and rituals associated with Buddhist sutras were in vogue in Silla as well.¹³ Seen from the viewpoint of commentaries on the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras that were executed by Silla monks, there was a cult of the *Larger Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* in Silla, and ceremonies related to it were probably held.

Similar to Silla, Japan adopted and adapted Chinese stories on hell; further, a narrative that was similar in structure and content to the story “Sōnyul comes back to life” had already been crafted in Japan at the same time as the Silla period. In addition, Buddhist ceremonies providing an opportunity to craft and transmit this tale were probably being held from the Silla period. Furthermore, if we consider that the narrative preserves specific place names and monastery names, it is not unreasonable to infer that the form of “Sōnyul comes back to life” originated in the Silla period.

The selection and recording of this narrative in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, however, also clearly reflects the opinions of a Buddhist monk of the late Koryō 高麗 period (918–1392). This is because it would be impossible for an orally transmitted narrative to be recorded in prose and mentioned in documentary literature without the vested interest of the compiler. Iryōn, who is considered to be the compiler of this story, probably felt the need to record this narrative from the standpoint of maintaining and disseminating Buddhist faith and rituals as a

¹¹ Because large sutra texts could not be read and lectured on in their entirety during a ceremony, they were read and lectured on selectively. This kind of ceremony involving the selective reading of and lecturing on a sutra was called ‘*chōndok*’ (轉讀).

¹² Kim Chongmyōng, *Han’guk chungse ūi Pulgyo ūrye: Sasangjōk paegyōng kwa yōksajōk ūimi* [Medieval Korean Buddhist rituals: Their theoretical background and historical significance] (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisōngsa, 2001), 74.

¹³ The Japanese monk Ennin 圓仁 (794–864) who spent time among Silla émigré communities in Tang, mentioned ceremonies associated with lecturing on sutras (*kanggyōng ūisik* 講經儀式) in the diary he kept of his travels in Tang China. See *Nittō gubō junreikō ki* 入唐求法巡禮行記 2, “The Mt. Chi cloister [held a] ceremony for lecturing on the sūtras. [The people/monks of] Silla held the lecture ceremony all day, and [the people/monks] of Silla [held] a sūtra-chanting ceremony” (赤山院講經儀式, 新羅一日講儀式, 新羅誦經儀式).

leader of the Buddhist world and a spokesman tasked with promulgating an understanding of the Buddhist world.

For these many reasons, we can say that the narrative “Sönyul comes back to life” is a Buddhist tale of cause-and-effect retribution, which was formed and circulated along with the dissemination of the concept of hell in the Silla period. Mangdök Monastery, the spatial setting of this tale, was completed in the fifth year of Silla king Sinmun 神文 (685) according to the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi* 三國史記).¹⁴ Even Kūmgang Monastery is said to have been a monastic complex founded by the monk Myōngnang 明朗, who was active in the second half of the seventh century.¹⁵ If these facts are reliable, the *terminus post quem* for the formation of this story would be the second half of the seventh century. The understanding of Buddhism and the performance of faith-based practices proliferated among the common people during the Unified Silla period. Diverse stories of cause-and-effect retribution related to hell were crafted in Silla, just like in contemporary Tang China and Japan. We can infer these kinds of circumstances due to the compilation of narrative collections, such as the *Tales of the Bizarre from Silla* (*Silla sui chōn* 新羅殊異傳) and *Record of Collected Marvels on the Lotus Sutra* (*Pōphwa kyōng chiphōm ki* 法華經集驗記).¹⁶ The Silla monk Ŭijōk 義寂 returned from Tang at the end of the seventh century and composed the *Record of Collected Marvels on the Lotus Sutra* in the early eighth century.¹⁷ Being a collection of tales of efficacious response like accounts from such Chinese works as *Record of Reports from the Netherworld* and *Record of Collected Marvels on the Diamond Sutra*, the contents cannot be said to be composed of narratives of hell in Silla. However, in one tale of retribution contained in the *Widely Praised Tales of the Lotus Sutra* (*Hongzan Fabua zhan* 弘贊法華傳), which was compiled in China in the eighth century, the main character is a native of Silla. The story is as follows. The son of Kim Kwaui 金果毅 of Silla leaves home to become a monk at a young age. He reads the *Lotus Sutra*, and then stops at the second roll and burns one logograph. He then dies and is reborn in the family of another person named Kim Kwaui. Every time he recites the second roll of the *Lotus Sutra*, he forgets that one logograph from the scripture.¹⁸ Narratives of rebirth and cause-and-effect (*yunhoe in'gwa* 輪廻因果) like this, which are related to the *Lotus Sutra*, already appear in the

¹⁴ *Samguk sagi* 8:97 (Sinmun 5).

¹⁵ *Samguk yusa* 4, T 2039, 49.1004b10-c4 (I Hye tongjin 二惠同塵).

¹⁶ Regarding this, see In Kwōnhwan, *Han'guk Pulgyo munhak yōn'gu* [Research on Korean Buddhist literature] (Seoul: Koryō Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1999), 196–197. There are no stories of hell in the few remaining fragments of the *Silla sui chōn*.

¹⁷ Kim Kyōnghūi, “Ŭijōk ūi Pōphwa kyōng chiphōn ki e taehan koch'al,” [A study of Uijōk's *Record of Collected Marvels on the Lotus Sutra*], *Ilbon munhwa hakpo* 19 (November 2003): 221–233.

¹⁸ *Hongzan Fabua zhan* 9, T 2067, 51.41c9–20 (Tang Xinluoguo shami 唐新羅國沙彌).

Record of Reports from the Netherworld, which was compiled by Tang Lin 唐臨 in the mid-seventh century, and in *Widely Praised Tales of the Lotus Sūtra*, which was compiled by Huixiang 惠祥 in the eighth century.¹⁹ These kinds of stories were transmitted to Silla, were adapted into stories such as the one of the Silla native called Kim Kwaŭi, and were then transmitted to Japan, where they were further modified into tales of Japanese natives, such as one called “On recollecting and reciting the *Lotus Sutra* and gaining an immediate reward to show an extraordinary sign” in *Miraculous Stories of Japan*.²⁰ We can infer the conditions for the adaptation and dissemination of narratives crafted in China at that time into Silla and Japan from the individual situations of each story. That being the case, we can satisfactorily infer that the circumstances by which Chinese stories of hell were transmitted to Silla in the Unified Silla period were adapted to the Silla people and were disseminated throughout the country. Seen from this perspective, although the exact dating of the narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” cannot be known, there is sufficient possibility that it was constructed as a story of hell of the Silla people in the Unified Silla period.

II. THE KARMIC RETRIBUTION OF FALLING INTO HELL AND THE BURDEN OF RETRIBUTION

In that case, let us now analyze this story systematically to ascertain how the concept of hell is reflected. At the core of the concept of hell is judgment and punishment for the deeds of one’s life. In this narrative two cases of judgment for the actions of one’s life are presented. First, let us look at the judgment regarding the deeds of the monk Sōnyul, the hero of the story. Sōnyul sought to make a copy of the *Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom* in his lifetime, but he died before completing it, and went to the underworld tribunal. He was ordered to return to this life and complete the Buddhist sutra, and then returned to the netherworld; and had the opportunity to be restored to life. Because copying a Buddhist sutra is a good deed, it is a karmic cause, and being brought back to life is a form of retribution or recompense. Copying, reading, or carrying a sutra is one of the important wholesome causes for obtaining good retribution in the Buddhist theory of karmic retribution.²¹

¹⁹ *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 3:398b (Cui Yanwu 崔彦武), in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1264 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995); Hongzan Fahua zhuan 6, T 2067, 51.28c20–29a4 (Qinjun dongsi shami 秦郡東寺沙彌).

²⁰ *Nihon ryōiki* 1, no. 18; for an English translation see Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories*, 129–130.

²¹ Yuchi Zhiping and Xi Jia, *Yin guo jie du* [An interpretation of cause and effect] (Nanning Shi: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1999), 8. There are many narratives about hell related to this one in

The judgment of Sōnyul was not a decision about unwholesome behavior. The judgment and punishment of misdeeds, which is at the core of tales of hell, comes out in the narrative of the woman Sōnyul meets on the road to return to this world upon receiving the order to be restored to life. This woman said that she was involved in the crime of her parents' appropriating land belonging to a monastery and that she had suffered torment in hell. More precisely, the appropriation of monastery land is an unwholesome action,²² and its retribution is suffering in hell. The stealing or spoiling of monastery property is an evil deed emphasized repeatedly in Buddhist sutras.²³ Therefore, many narratives were crafted about people who misappropriate the possessions of monasteries falling into the unwholesome paths of rebirth beginning with hell and enduring suffering. Beginning with the story of the monk Daozhi 道志 of the Liu-Song 劉宋 dynasty (420–479) during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, who stole the objects of a Buddhist pagoda, died, and suffered brutal torment,²⁴ many such narratives were crafted in China. In addition, *Miraculous Stories from Japan*, which was compiled at the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth century in Japan, preserves several narratives in which those who steal or use the possessions of the *samgha* or monasteries are reborn as cattle, suffering many difficulties, and repaying the sins of their former lives. Kyōkai 景戒 (fl. 787–822), the compiler of this book, cites several sutras when saying, “those who steal the possessions of the *samgha* commit a sin greater than that of the five heinous crimes (*oyōke* 五逆) [(1) patricide, (2) matricide, (3) killing an *arbat*, (4) shedding the blood of a Buddha, and (5) destroying the harmony of the *samgha*],” and he emphasizes that the unwholesome retribution of people who commit this kind of

China and Japan. To top all this, there is a narrative that during the Chinese Sui dynasty (581–618) a monk named Fazang 法藏 committed the sin of carelessly using the possessions of the Three Jewels (the Buddhist church), was dragged before the netherworld tribunal, and was judged. He received a decision that he had to extinguish all of the sins of his life by copying a sutra. So he was restored to life to copy a sutra. The act of showing reverence to the sutras is said to be the most wholesome action to destroy the unwholesome karma of one's lifetime. See *Fayuan zhubin* 法苑珠林 18, T 2122, 53.420b2-19 (Sui shamen Shi Fazang 隋沙門釋法藏).

²² In particular, monastery land was the most important land which served as the basis for the monastery's economy in premodern Korea. See Yi Pyōnghui, “Sawōn kyōngje,” [Monastery economy] in *Han'guk Pulgyosa yōn'gu immune* [An introduction to Korean Buddhist history research] (Seoul: Chisik Sanōpsa, 2014).

²³ In *Fayuan zhubin* 74, T 2122, 53.842c-847a (Taodaobu 偷盜部), several Buddhist sutras are cited explaining that appropriating the possessions of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Samgha, in other worlds the possessions of the Three Jewels (the Buddhist church), is a severe sin causing one to fall into hell.

²⁴ *Fayuan zhubin* 79, T 2122, 53.874c5-27 (Song Shi Daozhi 宋釋道志).

sin is inevitable.²⁵ The appropriation of temple possessions is not only a great sin in Buddhism causing one to fall into hell, but is emphasized in Christianity as well. In Christian visionary literature, there are narratives of kings and subjects who go to hell for carelessly using the possessions of the church.²⁶

There is a strange configuration here, however. It is that this woman who has been long suffering torment in hell is not receiving retribution for her own unwholesome action. The people who have perpetrated the evil deed of appropriating the monastery land are the parents of the woman. Nevertheless, the daughter was dragged to the netherworld tribunal and is suffering torment in hell as retribution for this unwholesome act instead of her parents. This is a really strange and cruel matter. The daughter compensates vicariously for the sins committed by the parents in a painful manner; and this narrative makes absolutely no mention of the parents having feelings of sorrow or performing actions demonstrating a sense of distress.

Karmic retribution in Buddhism is something that arises in accordance with one's personal behavior. According to the *Dirghāgama sūtra* (*Chang aban jing* 長阿含經), King Yama (K. Yōmna, C. Yanluo 閻羅), the ruler of hell, gave the following admonition to sinners:

The sin you are receiving now is neither the fault of your parents nor the fault of your siblings. Furthermore, it is neither the fault of Lord Śakra nor the fault of your ancestors. In addition, it is not because of a mentor, a servant, or social inferior. Also, it is not the fault of either a *śramaṇa* or a *brahmana*. Because you yourself made this mistake, you yourself are receiving this now.²⁷

Receiving individual retribution because of one's personal karma was the guiding principle of karmic retribution in Buddhism. When this theory of karmic retribution was transmitted to China, it became the focus of intense interest in Chinese thought. Chinese people of the time traditionally possessed a conception

²⁵ *Nihon ryōiki*, roll 1, nos. 20 and 27, roll 2 nos. 9 and 32, roll 3 nos. 3, 5, 23, and 26. For an English translation see Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories*, 131–132, 139–140, 173–174, 203–204, 226–227, 229, 252–253, 257–259.

²⁶ In the *Vision of Eucherius*, which was written by Hincmar of Reims who was bishop of Orleans in 858, the author described seeing Charles Martel and his retainers having fallen into hell for using the possessions of the church without permission. See Alan E. Bernstein, "Named Others and Named Places: Stigmatization in the Early Medieval Afterlife," in *Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Isabel Moreira and Margaret Merrill Toscano (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 58.

²⁷ *Chang aban jing* 長阿含經 [*Dirghāgamasūtra*] 19, T 1,1.121b29-127a26 (Shiji jing diyu pin 世記經地獄品).

of karmic retribution. This may be spoken of as the idea that not a person himself, but that person's whole family, bears and passes on retribution and that responsibility over generations of a family reaches later generations.²⁸ This was different than the Buddhist theory that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions. Proponents of Buddhism criticized the traditional Chinese theory of karmic retribution that spread responsibility over successive generations. In his *Essentials of Revering the Dharma* (*Fengfa yao* 奉法要), Chi Chao 郗超 (336–377) of the Eastern Jin 東晉 dynasty (265–420) clarified and criticized the hereditary Chinese theory of karmic retribution: “Although a father commits evil deeds, his son does not receive [punishment] in his place. Although a son commits evil deeds, his father also does not receive [punishment] in his place.”²⁹ Even in narratives affecting to be true stories of Buddhist karmic retribution, the theory that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions was the guiding principle. For instance, there is a story about a man who sought to have his nephew who had embraced the Buddha dharma since his youth receive his own punishment in hell as a substitute but instead was called before the netherworld tribunal and received punishment from its judges.³⁰ This narrative presents a message that clearly rejects the traditional Chinese position that responsibility is borne by the family over successive generations.

In Japanese tales of hell, as well, the general principle that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions is maintained. As we have seen above, according to tale no. 23 in roll 3 of *Miraculous Stories of Japan*, the monk who is the main character of the story was restored to life, but he had died due to the unwholesome cause of his having carelessly used monastery possessions. He was brought back to life because of the wholesome cause of having vowed to copy a sutra. All these things were set down as being the natural consequences of his actions.³¹ In this way, the Buddhist theory of karmic retribution was based on the guiding principle that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions, and rejected the position that causes and effects continued within a family.

²⁸ A passage in the *Book of Changes*, a Confucian classic, says, “In a household that performs many wholesome deeds, auspicious events will be a matter of course to its descendants. In a household that does not perform many wholesome works, many calamities will certainly befall its descendants.” See *Yijing* 周易, “Kun gua pian” 坤卦篇.

²⁹ See Fang Litian, *Zhongguo fojiao zhexue yaoyi* [The essence of Chinese Buddhist philosophy] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2002). For a Korean translation, see Kim Ponghŭi, Yi Pongsun, and Hwang Sŏnggyu, trans. *Chungguk Pulgyo ch'ŏrbak: insaengnon* [Chinese Buddhist philosophy: Theory of human life] (Seoul: Sŏul Pulgyo Taehagwŏn Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2006), 170.

³⁰ *Fayuan zhubin* 91, T 2122, 53.958a27-b24 (Jin Sunzhi 晉孫稚).

³¹ *Nihon ryōiki* 3, no. 23.

Nevertheless, it was not easy for people in East Asia, where the family was the primary unit of society, to accept an Indian religion in its original form and the thought that the salvation or liberation of an individual is his or her goal in life.³² Therefore, the Buddhist guiding principle that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions sometimes broke down within the conceptual hedge or fence of “the family.” In fifth-century China, Buddhist nun Zhitong 智通 (d.u.) of the Liu-Song, after violating the precepts, made clothes for her son from silk on which sutras had been written. His whole body disintegrated, and he died.³³ This is a story in which a son immediately received an evil retribution in the present life because his mother committed the unwholesome act of handling the sutras carelessly. In Japan, there is a story (said to have taken place in the eighth century) that a certain person went hunting and speared a young fox to death. The mother fox took the form of an old woman and likewise speared the hunter’s suckling son to death.³⁴ In the Silla narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life,” the woman Sōnyul meets is suffering punishment in hell in the place of her parents who have misappropriated monastery land. This kind of story reflects the thought that the cause and effect of crime and punishment is borne within the family and, in particular, that there is a close relationship between parents and children. These kinds of narratives seem to reflect the feature of compromise while colliding with the traditional way of life and thought in a society suffused with fundamental Buddhist teachings.

III. SALVATION FROM HELL AND BUDDHIST MEMORIAL SERVICES FOR THE DEAD

It was not that disregard for the general principle that the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions could have only arisen in a social milieu that placed importance on the family. That kind of logic had already begun to develop in Buddhism itself. A case in point is the issue of Buddhist masses for the dead (*ch’usōn* 追善, lit. “to pursue wholesomeness”). Sōnyul received the request of the woman he met in hell to pray for her so that she could be saved from the torment of hell. Her suffering in hell was eradicated when she received assistance from another person.

³² Ōsumi Kazuo, “Sōron: Inga to rinne wa megufu Nihonjin no shūkyō ishiki,” [General remarks: The religious sense of Japanese people regarding cause and effect and reincarnation], in *Inga to rinne: kōdō kiban to takaikan no genre* [Cause and effect and reincarnation: Principles of codes of behavior and views of the other world] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1986), 50.

³³ *Fayuan zhubin* 18, T 2122, 53.418c15–22 (Songni Shi Zhitong 宋尼釋智通).

³⁴ *Nihon ryōiki* 2, no. 23; for an English translation see Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories*, 191–192.

The more people comprehend that anyone can fall into hell and the extent of the torments there, the more people will seek methods of escaping that fate. This kind of endeavor can be found in ancient Egypt, where the concept of hell originated. The Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom (2160–1580 B.C.E.) show that, irrespective of the moral quality of a person's life, he sought to guarantee the quality of life after death through prepared incantation when he was buried.³⁵ In fact, efforts to secure a better quality of life after death have existed from the early stages of human culture without reference to the concept of hell. In many societies, the performance of an appropriate funeral is considered an important procedure in ensuring a comfortable life after death. Such people thought that offerings of the living that continue even after death likewise preserve the life of the deceased after death. Therefore, in many instances, it is thought that people who die in foreign lands, by drowning, or by being eaten by wild beasts, or in such a manner that a proper burial is impossible because no corpse remains, or without descendants to make offerings to them after death cannot secure peaceful repose after death.³⁶

People who accept the notion of hell have always considered the provision of an appropriate funeral ceremony and abundant votive offerings relying on traditions of long-standing formal practice an important means of alleviating the suffering of hell. Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions, which considered forgiveness for the deceased to be realized according to how many votive offerings were provided to the temple or whether money was given to the ferryman or whether appropriate grave goods were prepared for the living to improve the situation of the deceased, were important influences on the concept of hell in Christianity.³⁷ In Christianity, vicarious prayers, including litanies, masses, and almsgiving on behalf of the deceased, are carried out through the church, and these were important tools promoting the authority of the church in the Middle Ages.³⁸

The Ullambana ceremony (K. *Uranbun* 盂蘭盆, commonly referred to as the “Ghost Festival” in Anglophone scholarship) is a representative memorial service

³⁵ S. G. F. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: The Idea of Life After Death in the Major Religions* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 21–22.

³⁶ For the case of ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Greece, see Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead*, 52, 79–81. For the case of Korea, see Na Hüira, *Kodae Han'gugin üi saengsagwan*, 91–92.

³⁷ Jeffrey A. Trumbower, “Early Visions of Hell as a Place of Education and Conversion,” in *Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano (Surrey U.K.: Ashgate, 2010), 29.

³⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). For a Korean translation see Jacques Le Goff, *Yönok üi t'ansaeng* [The birth of purgatory], trans. Ch'oe Aeri (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisöngsa, 1995), 40–42.

for the dead in the Buddhist tradition. The Ullambana ceremony, which has its origin in India, entered China and, while combining with customs that gave serious consideration to thought on filial piety and mourning and funeral rites there, flourished as a means of praying for a comfortable posthumous life for one's ancestors from the Northern and Southern Dynasties forward.³⁹ According to the *Ullambana Sutra* (*Yulanben jing* 盂蘭盆經), the foundational scripture for the Ullambana ceremony, the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana is anxiously worrying how to save his mother who has been reborn as a hungry ghost and is the recipient of suffering. He begs the Buddha for assistance, and the Buddha makes the following statement:

Because your mother's sin is so deep-rooted, although you are filially obedient to your parents and your cries shake heaven and earth, it is beyond your own individual power to alleviate it. Even the gods of heaven and earth, evil spirits, brahmans, bodhisattvas, and the spirits of the Four Heavenly Kings can do nothing about it. But she can be delivered by drawing upon the divine power of the monks.... When the monks end the summer retreat on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, you should fill a tray with the finest delicacies, along with foods of rich variety and taste, and offer it to the monks.⁴⁰

In the Buddha's words, salvation from the suffering of hell is not evoked by relying on penitent confession and an individual covenant with a deity, but is possible through a ritual performed in a monastery with the mediation of the monks.

Aside from the Ullambana ceremony, the weekly abstinence ceremonies for the dead held seven times on every seventh day (*ch'ilch'ilchae* 七七齋) and the assembly for freeing creatures of water and land (*suryukhoe* 水陸會) are performed as Buddhist masses for the dead. These were rituals for the sake of the deceased. However, the advance funeral ceremony (*yesujae* 預修齋), which is held beforehand in this life to isolate bad rebirths in the future, appeared and was performed with great fervor in premodern East Asia.⁴¹ Such ceremonies served to connect believers with the postmortem world, while monks and monasteries played the role of intermediaries. Similar to how the Roman Catholic Church controlled Christians in medieval Europe, the Buddhist orders in medieval East

³⁹ Ogawa Kan'ichi, "Mokuren kumo henbun no genru," [The source of the transformation tale "Mulian saves his mother"] in *Jigoku no sekai* [The world of hell], ed. Sakamoto Kaname (Tokyo: Keisusha, 1990), 312–313.

⁴⁰ *Yulanben jing* 盂蘭盆經, T 685, 16.779a–c.

⁴¹ Michihata Ryōshū, *Chugoku Bukkyō shisōshi no kenkyū*, 99.

Asia disseminated the concept of hell and controlled the imagination of people regarding life after death and their life in this world through ceremonies memorializing the deceased.

Of course, extravagant ritual procedures were not the only things that guaranteed a peaceful life after death. The possession of a sincere heart and the observance of individual precepts were more important than anything else. The copying, verbal recitation, and acceptance and maintenance of sutras were important actions displaying one's personal belief. People who kept these well did not fall into the unwholesome paths of rebirth (animal, hungry ghost, denizen of hell) and were able to go on to rebirth in the Pure Land (*chōngt'o* 淨土). Furthermore, verbal recitation of the Buddha's name and the making and possession of Buddhist images were just the same. However, these were completely individual as well, and were not only issues of faith in which one's inner self was not exposed. On the whole, monks and monasteries intervened even in individual belief.

IV. BUDDHIST CEREMONIES AND NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE

Let us now return to the narrative "Sōnyul comes back to life." The Silla woman who was suffering in hell entreated Sōnyul, who received an order to be restored to life and was returning to this world, to save her from her afflictions and had him tell the woman's parents to return the monastery land they had stolen. She had Sōnyul sell the oil and cloth she had laid up during her mortal life to pay to create the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* that Sōnyul had to complete in this life. She said that if he lit a lantern to the Buddha for her it would benefit her in the netherworld and that she would be freed from her suffering. Sōnyul returned to this life and did as she had requested. The woman's spirit came and said that, "owing to Sōnyul's favor," she had been freed from torment. The Silla woman who was suffering afflictions in hell informed Sōnyul how her own personal suffering could be extinguished. Sōnyul put into practice those things and obtained the results she sought.

A narrative in which a person dies, is hauled before the netherworld tribunal, receives recognition for good works done in this life, receives a decision that he should be restored to life, and when he returns to this world meets a person who is suffering in hell and receives a request for a memorial service to be performed for that person is a motif that appears commonly in Chinese and Japanese stories of hell. In one such narrative, Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou dynasty 周武帝 (r. 560–578), who persecuted Buddhism (574–578), fell into hell and received torment there due to that unwholesome action. There was a person returning to

this world, and he requested that this person extend a request to Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty 隋文帝 (r.581–604), the august ruler in this world, to supplicate for meritorious virtue on his behalf. This person came back to life and informed Emperor Wen. Emperor Wen issued an order to several monasteries in the country to hold an abstinence ceremony for three days and read the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang bore jing* 金剛般若經) on behalf of Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou dynasty.⁴² The following narrative is set in Japan in the second half of the eighth century. A certain person went before the netherworld tribunal and was allowed to return to life. Another person who was suffering in hell for the bad karma of excessive tax collection in life implored him to seek blessings for the deceased by copying the *Lotus Sutra* (*Fabua jing* 法華經). The person who was restored to life reported these circumstances to the imperial court, and the Japanese emperor ordered a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* to be made, and as soon as it was completed, a dharma assembly was held to expound the sutra (*kanggyōng pōphoe* 講經法會) and supplicate for the deceased person's happiness in the netherworld.⁴³ Narratives regarding hell during the time when Buddhism played a social role as an official religion that received patronage from the state were not handled as issues or problems from the dimension of a simple individual. Unwholesome actions causing one to fall into hell had to be handled from a social dimension, and their resolution was an official problem. Institutions that mediated the concept of hell were connected to the state and exercised authority that joined this world and the netherworld.

Sōnyul made a pilgrimage to hell and met a woman from his homeland undergoing torment there, and the circumstances were communicated to him. He returned to this world and conveyed these things to the people. Because he was a Buddhist monk with exclusive possession of the imagination of hell at the time, the verbal evidence he presented concerning the specific time, place, and person were probably considered to be genuine. The monk testified that the woman he met in hell said that the way for her to be saved from suffering in hell was to make an offering to the monastery, to light a lamp to the Buddha, and complete the copying of the sutra. The method of salvation from hell was presented through the mouth of an ordinary and pitiable woman. The people who heard this tale piteously considered the ordinary woman to be like themselves and made offerings for the production of sutras just as the woman guided them while

⁴² *Jingang bore jing jīyan jì* 金剛般若經集驗記 [Record of collected marvels on the Diamond Sutra], vol. 2, in *Xuzangjing* 續藏經 [Hong Kong reprint of *The Kyoto Supplement to the Canon (Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經)] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Association, 1967) (hereafter X, vol., page, register, and lines), X 87.461b7–464c15 (Gongde pian di wu 功德篇第五).

⁴³ *Nihon ryōiki* 3, no. 35; see Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories*, 271–273.

imagining their own fates. As a monk, by bearing witness to what he experienced personally as a hell narrative, Sōnyul exercised control over the imagination of hell and, by so doing, played a role that in reality connected people to Buddhism and monasteries.⁴⁴

In conclusion, the narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” says that misappropriating monastery property is a sin and that one will be punished for such crimes; however, one should revere and believe in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha and make offerings of such things as possessions to Buddhist memorial services in order to receive salvation from the retribution deriving from these actions. The organizational elements like those listed above for the tale “Sōnyul comes back to life” appear repeatedly in narratives of hell in contemporary China and Japan. In the period when Buddhism was disseminated and put down its roots in East Asia, it is worth understanding that sin, judgment, and discipline were converging regarding Buddhism in Buddhist stories of hell. Concentrating on the imagination of hell as it was related to Buddhism, which itself brought with it a concept of hell, was something that seized the power of influence in this world. In particular, in the expansion of Buddhist influence, the economic power of monasteries was important. Monasteries, through the concept of hell, were able to draw in the offerings of ordinary people, not only the patronage of the royalty and nobility. A monk called Huikuan 惠寬 of the Tang period became extremely popular as an edifying preacher of stories of hell in his time and monasteries competed to invite him to their precincts. It is said that wherever he went, the offerings were piled high as a mountain.⁴⁵ When Sōnyul was restored to life and told the experience of his pilgrimage to hell, the people of the time heard him and were amazed. There was no one who did not marvel, and they assisted him in completing his copying of the sutra. The narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” drew in the offerings of people for the production of sutras in monasteries.

That being the case, how and when was the story “Sōnyul comes back to life” transmitted to people and moved the hearts of people? The tale is verbal evidence of what Sōnyul experienced. The protection of monastery property and the giving of donations to make offerings to the Buddha or for the production of sutras are emphasized in the narrative. Accordingly, this story was probably created by monks from the standpoint of Buddhism. If Sōnyul was an actual person, it would be fine to call him Sōnyul.

⁴⁴ Concerning how the testimonies of people who have experienced the next life are regulated or controlled by the reality of narratives, see Le Goff, *Yōnok ūi t'ansaeng*, 192.

⁴⁵ *Xu gaoseng z'chuan* 續高僧傳 [Further lives of eminent monks] 25, T 2060, 50. 600b29–601b29 (Shi Huikuan 釋惠寬).

The narrative formed in this way was not transmitted from the mouth of one person to another person as everyday idle chatter. According to the last part of the story, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* that Sōnyul completed was preserved in the library of the Office of Monastic Affairs in Kyōngju, the old capital of Silla, at the end of the thirteenth century in the Koryō dynasty when *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, which contains this narrative, was compiled. It also says that the sutra had been read every year in spring and autumn, and a ceremony for driving away calamities had been performed until that time. This narrative also describes an original legend of a Buddhist ceremony for coursing in a sutra that spanned from the Silla to the Koryō period. This indicates that the story “Sōnyul comes back to life” was transmitted through a Buddhist ceremony of coursing in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

Dharma assemblies for expounding sutras (also called “sutra-chanting” [*tokkyōng* 讀經] and “coursing in a sutra” [*chōn’gyōng* 轉經]) were frequently performed during the Silla and Koryō periods as some of the principal Buddhist ceremonies. In dharma assemblies for expounding sutras, monks would not only solemnly lecture on a sutra reading aloud and analyze difficult passages of the sutra, they would also give a secularly oriented lecture (*sokkang* 俗講) that conveyed the contents and meaning of the sutra in a simple and interesting manner to the general masses. In the secular lecture service, the interest of the people was aroused and brought to a climax through amusing and entertaining preaching of the dharma garnished by stories, songs, and dance.⁴⁶ In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, preaching the dharma in this form was called “preaching [to people] to lead them [to conversion]” (K. *ch’angdo*, C. *changdao* 唱導). The performance of this preaching to lead people to conversion is expressed well in the following passage depicting what kinds of intense feelings were stirred up in those participating in the dharma assembly.

The person preaching to lead people to conversion ... made the bodies and hearts of the people who heard him shake with fear when he spoke of the transience [of mortal life], and he made them shake with fear and cry when he told them of hell. He made it seem just as if they saw directly with their own eyes their past deeds when he elucidated the causes and conditions of their former lives, and it was just as if he already showed them the events of the future when he laid bare the retribution they will receive hereafter. He made them overflow with feelings of love and break out in joy when he

⁴⁶ Kim Chinyōng, “Pulgyogye kangch’ang munhak ū yōnhaeng yangsang,” [The aspects of the performance of literature for use in lectures and preaching/chanting in the Buddhist world] *Han’guk ōnō munhak* 43 (1999): 23–44, esp. 26.

spoke of pleasures, and he made them shed tears when he related sorrows.⁴⁷

Monks who specialized in preaching and leading people to conversion introduced the fundamental Buddhist doctrines of the karma and the cycle of rebirth and death, and induced and aroused the interest of the masses by using appropriate karma tales and parables.⁴⁸ In this time, it seems that tales of karmic retribution, like tales of hell, were employed frequently.

When seen this way, we can infer that the narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” was performed as a karma tale in a secular lecture held for common people participating in a dharma assembly for coursing in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* held at a monastery in the Silla period.⁴⁹ The people attending this meeting, while not only making gestures and vocal sounds, but sometimes singing and dancing, and while looking at the performer telling the story, probably felt as if hell was right before them at that very moment and that the suffering of the pitiful woman was their own personal suffering. When she was saved from hell, they were probably happy just as if they were receiving future salvation. Through this kind of process, people understood that they would receive retribution and fall into hell if they used the possessions of the monastery without permission. However, even if they did fall into hell, they knew that they could be saved. The monks communicated to the people politely and plainly that making offerings to the Three Jewels and making donations of their possessions to the monastery could save them from the frightful torment of hell. People thoroughly caught up in the lively tale of hell contributed their personal possessions and riches to the monastery for the sake of their own futures.

V. CONCLUSION

Many stories of hell were told in China, Korea, and Japan since the transmission of Buddhism, and played an important role in the dissemination of Buddhism to ordinary people. In narratives about hell, the Buddhist teaching that if one

⁴⁷ *Gaoseng zhuan* [Lives of eminent monks] 高僧傳 13, T 2059,50. 417c7–418a7 (Changdao dishi lun 唱導第十論).

⁴⁸ Cho Myōnghwa, *Pulgyo wa Tonhwang ūi ch’angdo munhak* [Buddhism and the literature for lecturing and preaching at Dunhuang] (Seoul: Iho, 2003), 119–130.

⁴⁹ Scholars conjecture that monks created a considerable number of narratives on the basis of stories and teachings from Buddhist sutras to use in dharma assemblies for lecturing on sutras (*kanggyōng pōphoe* 講經法會), which were in vogue from the Silla through the Koryō period. See Sa Chaedong, *Pulgyogye sōsa munhak ūi yōn’gu* [Research on narrative literature of the Buddhist lineage] (Seoul: Chung’ang munhwasa, 1996), 102–105.

performs unwholesome actions, one will go to hell and receive agonizing punishment was communicated by bringing on the scene actual people in real space and time and was just like a true story to the people who heard or read it.

The narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” departs from being a tale of hell of the Silla people, who adopted the Buddhist concept of hell in the Unified Silla period. This story is, for the most part, endowed with elements that constitute the concept of hell, such as the subject matter of wholesome and unwholesome actions, judgment in the underworld tribunal where the fate of people after death is decided, punishment for unwholesome actions in hell, opportunities for being restored to life for wholesome actions, and salvation from hell. This narrative, however, shows the offspring of the perpetrators of the unwholesome actions, not the evil-doing parents themselves, receiving punishment in hell vicariously. I think that the solidarity of the family community, which was a powerful social principle in East Asia, and the concept of filial piety that bolstered it speak to circumstances of continual negotiation and mediation, while it collided with the Buddhist principle that “the self is the cause and the self bears the fruit of actions (*chain chagwa* 自因自果).”⁵⁰ Not only are there narratives emphasizing the principle that one bears the fruits of one’s actions in Chinese and Japanese tales of hell, but there are also diverse stories of offspring receiving punishment due to the evil actions of their parents just like the case from Silla Korea.

Furthermore, this narrative expresses the view that punishment in hell is not eternal and that one can be saved through the performance of memorial services for the dead. Memorial services for the dead are done by making offerings to the Three Jewels by giving one’s possessions to monasteries. The story “Sōnyul comes back to life” seems to have been created by monks and circulated among the ordinary people as a karma tale of a Buddhist ceremony for the production of sutras and appreciating the teachings of the sutra, which was the initiative in the monastery. People sympathetic to this lively story, which was performed along with songs and gestures in the course of the Buddhist ceremony were able to contribute their hearts and their wealth willingly to the Buddha, the monks, and the monastery for their own futures.

⁵⁰ At the height of the wars between the Three Kingdoms in the seventh century, some generals of Silla counseled their own sons who had followed them to the battlefield to fulfill the demands of loyalty (*ch’ung* 忠) and filial piety (*hyo* 孝) and to make a name for themselves by performing a glorious deed (*kongmyōng* 功名) by penetrating the enemy line, fighting, and dying. Young sons did not disobey their father’s words, rushed the enemy position, and died. The people of Silla’s attitude of setting high value on a son’s act of dying instead of (or for) his parents can also be seen here. See *Samguk sagi* 47: 450 (Kim Yōngyun 金令胤) and 451 (Kwanch’ang 官昌).

The monk Iryōn, who was at the center of the Buddhist world at the end of the thirteenth century, took notice of the Buddhist ceremony that was performed in Kyōngju, the old capital of Silla, and its karma tale,⁵¹ recorded it in prose, and put it as an item in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, which he himself compiled.⁵² Furthermore, he expressed his own impressions at the end of the story. Here he had no worries about the measuring stick of the original guiding principle or universal ethics of the Buddhist concept of hell in which a person who commits sins must receive punishment, and he made reference to karmic cause and effect from an institutional standpoint related to the production of sutras and monastery possessions. Even from the perspective of an eminent monk of the late Koryō period, the instructions the Silla tale of hell gives were probably thought to encourage the making of offerings and donations to the Three Jewels and the protection of monastery possessions. Sutra-copying, one form of Buddhist faith at the time, was practiced widely, and ceremonies related to it were held frequently. Iryōn, who wanted to maintain the power and influence of the religious order through the proliferation of Buddhist cult practices and ceremonies, found in this story from the past a basis for vindicating the performance of sutra-copying and dharma assemblies, which required abundant finances. From this standpoint, the narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” was a “chosen” story that reflected the position of the Buddhist world of the late Koryō period.⁵³ Because of that, we can say that it remained as a narrative representation of stories of hell in Silla. Probably, this perception of the Buddhist world was one reason why Buddhism

⁵¹ Iryōn was interested in conversion of the lay masses through the preaching of the dharma. While he travelled far and wide between monasteries and the world in the center and provinces, he probably observed directly both named and nameless dharma masters preaching approaches to the dharma to the masses in several Buddhist services (*pōpsōk* 法席) and indirectly heard, read, and recorded such activities. These endeavors were probably the basis of his compilation of the *Samguk yusa*. Much of the material related to Buddhism in the *Samguk yusa* comprises narratives that are interesting and easy for the masses to understand, and constructed as songs to evoke emotion, which are related with this. See Sa Chaedong, *Pulgyogye sōsa munhak ūi yōn'gu*, 100.

⁵² Since most of the eulogies (*ch'an* 讚) in the *Samguk yusa* are believed to have been composed by Iryōn, it is not wrong to see the narrative “Sōnyul comes back to life” as having been selected and recorded by Iryōn. With respect to most of the eulogies in the *Samguk yusa* being composed by Iryōn, see Richard D. McBride II, “Preserving the Lore of Korean Antiquity: An Introduction to Native and Local Sources in Iryōn’s *Samguk Yusa*,” *Acta Koreana* 10 (2007): 36.

⁵³ There are many narratives on the Silla monk Chinp’yo’s transmission of the divination sticks (*kanja* 簡子) and the divination dharma assembly (*chōmch'al pōp* 占察法) in the *Samguk yusa*. This is material selected reflecting the interest of the Koryō Buddhist world in this popular divination dharma assembly. See Nam Tongsin, “*Samguk yusa* ūi sasō rosō ūi t’ükching.” Ultimately, we can say that these aspects are evidence of how Iryōn reproduced earlier materials according to the circumstances of the time. On this issue, see McBride, “Is the *Samguk Yusa* Reliable?”

was criticized by Confucian intellectuals, who sought to define ethical issues based on realistic and social dimensions.

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