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Skanda, The Multifaceted God: Skanda in Korean Buddhism and Beyond

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Summary

This article focuses on the worship of Skanda in Korean Buddhism, particularly Skanda depicted in Sinjung t'aenghwa (the Paintings of the Guardian Deities). In order to contextualize this complex pan-Asian god, the article tackles two different and yet related issues: while it chronologically presents Skanda's transformation in Korean Buddhism, the discussion also weaves Skanda with other Asian traditions to explain the functional aspects of Skanda worship that are cross-culturally found across time. The article demonstrates that even though a sinified version of Skanda worship dominated in Korean Buddhism, Korean interpretations of Skanda made significant connections with the Indian leitmotif of Skanda while adding new local interpretations of the deity. It further shows that the dominant presence of Skanda also indicates the centrality of the celestial deities (Skt. *deva*) in the Korean Buddhist pantheon and beyond.

Keywords

Skanda, Sinjung t'aenghwa, *deva*, Chosŏn Buddhism, Tongjin Posal, East Asian Buddhism, Buddhist mythology

I. Introduction¹⁾

While numerous deities are illustrated in the Paintings of the Guardian Deities (Kr. *Sinjung t'aenghwa* 神衆幀畫), one of the most frequently depicted is that of Skanda (Kr. Wit'aech'ön 韋駄天/違駄天/塞建陀天 Ch. Weituoian or Weituo, Jp. Idaten).²⁾ This deity is also perhaps the most discernible among the large assemblage of gods (Kr. *sinjung* 神衆). Skanda has a distinctive juvenile face, holding a weapon, wearing armor and a helmet garnished with flamboyant feathers. In Korean Buddhism, Skanda is typically known as a protective deity of the Buddhist teachings, or a so-called “guardian deity.” In fact, this protector image of Skanda is visibly communicated through the spatial structure of Korean Buddhist temples and Buddhist halls. For instance, in most of the Main Buddha Halls (Kr. Taeung-chŏn 大雄殿) the *Sinjung t'aenghwa* is found on the right-hand side. This side of a wall is called the middle altar within the threefold division: the upper altar (Kr. *sangdan* 上壇) for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the middle altar (Kr. *chungdan* 中壇) for other deities, and the lower altar (Kr. *hadan* 下壇) for the deceased.³⁾ This system creates a visual hierarchy in the world of the invisibles, in which Skanda and other “guardian deities” occupy a less important position than the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Interestingly, however, there is much evidence suggesting that including Skanda, these guardian deities cannot be simply labeled and discarded as minor divinities in the Buddhist pantheon. Their careers are as equally dynamic as other more prominent Buddhist divinities, if not

1) The author expresses gratitude to anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments (especially the suggestion to look at Skanda's development in Central Asia) on the earlier version of this article.

2) Different texts use different Chinese transcriptions for the deity's name. To list a few: in the *Mahanirvana sutra*, it is written “違陀天” (T374, 12:403c11). In *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經 it is written “違駄天” (T663, 16:350a7) whereas in the *Jin guangming zuisheng wang jing* 金光明最勝王經 it is written “塞建陀天.” (T665, 16:438a11). Peri points out that Weituo 韋駄 is a mistaken sinographic transcription from “Sijiantuo 私建陀,” “Saijiantuo 塞建陀” or “Jiantuotian 建陀天.” (Peri 1916, 42-44).

3) This three-fold system also explains the hierarchical relationships among different halls in a temple complex. In this scheme, those halls that enshrine non-Buddhist deities (mountain spirits and other *sinjung* deities) are belong to the lower section (Kr. *hadan* 下壇). This three-fold system had begun since the Chosŏn period. Chin, Hong-sŏb 1995 (vol. 4), 460.

more. Moreover, at some point in Korean Buddhism, their popularity even surpassed that of the “major divinities.” Toward the end of the Chosŏn period (1392-1910), the paintings that depict these *sinjung* deities enjoyed a sudden surge in popularity. Some may find this rather surprising because conventionally it has been commonly perceived as a time when Korean Buddhism doubly suffered from its continuously marginalized status in Chosŏn, the Neo-Confucian state, and from increasing demands for Buddhist reform and modernization.

This article aims at explaining what role Skanda played in the popularization of the *Sinjung t'aenghwa* tradition of Korean Buddhism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁾ In order to understand this highly complex pan-Asian god, the article addresses two different and yet related issues: while it chronologically presents Skanda's transformation in Korean visual and ritual culture, the discussion also weaves Skanda with other Asian traditions to explain the functional aspects of Skanda worship that are cross-culturally found across time. By doing so, the article argues that even though a sinified version of Skanda worship dominated in Korea, Korean interpretations of Skanda still make significant connections with the Indian leitmotif of Skanda while adding new local interpretations of the deity. The dominant presence of Skanda also indicates the centrality of the celestial deities (Skt. *deva*) in the Korean Buddhist pantheon and beyond. Conversely, it also implies that Skanda functioned as a vector of cultural amalgamation across Buddhist Asia.

Despite the prevalence of their iconography and significance in daily Buddhist ritual, until very recent years the *deva* have been largely neglected by Buddhist scholars as minor gods.⁵⁾ While Skanda has not yet received fuller treatment, there are

4) I acknowledge that painting a large number of Buddhist deities and hanging them on the wall of a Buddhist hall ensured several practical and even economic benefits. The paintings were relatively uncomplicated and less expensive in terms of production. They also economized the limited space of the main Buddha hall and maximized the number of objects of veneration. Furthermore, their flexible combinations of deities added versatility, so that one painting could be used for different types of ritual.

5) Bernard Faure's recent works are pioneering in their examination of the roles of the *deva* deities in medieval Japanese religions. See Faure 2016 (vol. 1 and vol. 2).

two pioneering articles on the deity: the French Japanologist Noël Peri published a French article more than a hundred years ago, in which he outlines the historical and textual development of Skanda in China and Japan. Almost thirty years ago, the French Sinologist and Tibetologist Rolf A. Stein wrote a short but masterful English piece in which he explains the mythic connections of Skanda from India, China, Tibet and Japan.⁶⁾ Other than these two seminal pieces, Iyanaga Nobumi, a Japanese scholar of Asian religion, also extensively discussed Skanda. In his book on the mythological structure of Avalokiteśvara worship, Iyanaga analyzes Skanda in terms of the deity's intricate and intimate relationships with Avalokiteśvara and the deity's mythological development in Japan.⁷⁾ Except for these three very informative works, very few studies have been published on Skanda, let alone Skanda in Korea.⁸⁾ The paucity of scholarship on Skanda seems to reflect a scholarly prejudice against this “secondary” deity.

My own analysis of Skanda is partially built on the methodological work of Stein, as well as that of Iyanaga. In his article, Stein applies a structuralist approach to detect various binary combinations between Gaṇeśa and Skanda. In this approach, what matters is not the individual characteristics of each deity or its historical development in one region, but rather the underlying functions and symbols of deities and the recurring pattern of their employment in a broader transcultural context. For instance, a structuralist approach would lead us to discern that Skanda's pairing with his half-brother Gaṇeśa forms an opposite or complementary relationship, while sharing the common function of guardians of the gate. Informed by Stein, Iyanaga's work also underlines the mythological nebula of these gods. And yet, Iyanaga's Buddhist

6) Peri 1916, 41-56; Stein 1993, 122-36.

7) Iyanaga further explains how Skanda is mythologically connected to various other deities such as Gaṇeśa, Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and other collateral connections to Guhyapada, Hārītī, Mahākāla, Piṇḍola, and Pañcika. Iyanaga 2002 (vol. 2), 10-151.

8) There are a handful of studies on the deity exclusively focusing on the iconographical details and development of the deity. A few Japanese art historians have examined different Skanda images extant in Japan. See Sekiguchi 1984: 38-40; Shimizu 2002, 13-25; Kondo 2008, 88-92; Yamanishi 2009, 59-69. For Korean Skanda, see Kim, Pohyŏng 2001.

mythology recognizes the importance of the historical development of these divinities. Retaining the benefits of the both approaches, my investigation of Skanda will be both historical and structural.

The article starts with the Indian origin of the deity and its transformation in medieval China. This explanation will serve not just as background information, but also as a way to provide anchors for further discussion of the later periods. After the discussion of Skanda in China, the article then moves on to Skanda in *Sinjung t'aenghwa*, advancing a visual, textual, ritual, and mythological analysis of the deity through different types of *Sinjung t'aenghwa*. What follows is a further explanation of how the deity made its rather unexpected way into the Korean Shaman pantheon. The discussion ends with an overall assessment of the worship of Skanda in Korean Buddhism and beyond, as well as the significance of *deva* deity worship in East Asian Buddhism generally.

II. From a Demon to a Warrior God: Indian Origins and Sinicization

One of the main difficulties in understanding the historical origins of Skanda lies in the deity's complexity and diversity. The worship has been developed around countless local variants in different regions over a long period of time.⁹⁾ Any attempt to construct a linear history of this multifaceted deity therefore risks oversimplification of his rich heritage. For heuristic purposes, however, I delineate Skanda's development from ancient India in a diachronic matter below.

9) Skanda worship is still hugely popular in South Asian regions with different appellations. In Sri Lanka, for instance, Skanda is worshipped under the name Kataragama. The main shrine of Kataragama is arguably the most visited shrine in the country and worshipped by not only Buddhists, but also by Hindus, Muslims, and Christians (Kinnard 2004, 234). Under the name of Kārttikeya or Murugan, the deity is also popularly worshipped among Tamil Hindus in areas with Tamil influences, such as Malaysia and parts of southern India.

Although the earliest written records of Skanda are found in the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 400 BCE and ca. 400 CE) and *Rāmāyaṇa* (ca. 400 BCE), they lack any definitive answers as to the deity's origin: some argue that the worship began in North India, whereas others advocate for its origin in South Asian local *yakṣa* cults.¹⁰⁾ According to Richard Mann, Indian Skanda worship grew from child-attacking or pregnant-women-attacking demons such as Graha (“graspers”) and Mātr (“mothers”) in northern India.¹¹⁾ Skanda was not only a demon who attacked children whose mothers or nurses had not behaved properly, but also a leader of the *grahas* (“grabbers,” “graspers,” or “seizers”)¹²⁾ and sometimes other malevolent spirits such as *pramathas* (“tormentors”), *bhūtas* (“evil spirits”), and *prśācas* (“blood suckers”).¹³⁾ Skanda's role as the leader of the *grahas* was well established in the *Mahābhārata* and even in medical literature, and its iconographical representations could be found throughout India and Central Asia.

Skanda's transformation from a disease-causing demon (mostly afflicting children, which also explains why the deity has a juvenile face, one of his essential visual traits) to a prominent warrior god identified as the son of Śiva/Maheśvara (or sometimes Agni) and significantly his half-brother of Gaṇeśa, happened slowly. It took over half a millennium, from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE, when local Skanda cults were assimilated into the Brahmanical tradition.¹⁴⁾ This development of Skanda, however, should not be perceived as a linear or even homogeneous process. Iconographical evidence from the Dandān-öiliq temple in Khotan (East Turkestan,

10) For more about the origins of Skanda, see Agrawala 1967. The earliest image worship of the deity can even be dated to the third or second century BCE. On this, see Chatterjee 1970, 112. David White argues that it may have begun in South Asia. White 2006, 37.

11) For more about this, see Mann 2012, 49-77.

12) According to Suśruta's *Compendium*, an authoritative Indian medical encyclopedia which dates to the sixth century, Skanda is one of the nine *grahas*. Wujastyk 1999, 260-61.

13) Krishan, *Gaṇeśa*, p. vii. This aspect of Skanda is described in the *Uttaratantra* of the *Susrutasaṃhita*, and also the *Revatikhandā* of the *Kasyapasamhita*. For more discussion of Skanda's association with childhood disease, see Wujastyk 1998; Wujastyk 1999, 256-75.

14) According to Mann, archeological evidence such as coinage, epigraphy, and statuary of Skanda confirms that Skanda's demonic aspect was the source of his popularity in Northern India. See Mann 2012.

Xinjiang Province), for instance, indicates that Skanda was simultaneously linked to Maheśvara and *grahas* as late as the eighth century in Central Asia.¹⁵⁾ Back in North India, once Skanda's demonic character was erased, he lost his vitality, and veneration that was focused solely on Skanda declined during the post-Gupta period (500-750 CE).¹⁶⁾ But his cult kept spreading to South India under the name of Murugan, as is seen in the statue of the deity in Tamil region as early as the seventh century.¹⁷⁾ Today, Skanda is worshipped mostly not in northern but in southern India.

Numerous origin stories of the deity in Indian literature add more complexity to Skanda, making him a composite god. For instance, in the *Mahābhārata* alone there are three different accounts of Skanda's birth. The text begins with Skanda closely associated with child-afflicting demons, reconfirming his demonic origin. However, at the end of the story, Skanda is described as the son of Śiva and Agni, as well as a respected warrior deity. In the *Kumārasambhava* ("The Birth of the War God", fifth century CE), we find more detailed explanations of how Skanda received his name. According to the text, Skanda was born to destroy the *asura* demon named Tāraka ("he who delivers"), who could only be killed by a son of Śiva. He was born of Śiva's sperm, which some say was deposited into the fire god, Agni (or else, Agni threw the sperm into the water). This is why the deity was named Skanda, in this case, meaning "spurt of semen." Skanda has another significant mythological connection with Agni and Ṣaṣṭhī. Svāhā (the personified invocation that accompanies any oblation to the gods) collected Agni's seed six times in her hand and brought it to the White Mountain, covered by a forest of reeds. Skanda was born out of it with six heads that reached adult size by his sixth day of life. Skanda's myth is further elaborated in later periods in the Purāṇa literary works such as the *Śiva Purāṇa*, the *Brahman Purāṇa*,

15) For the more details of the examples, see Lo Muzio 2019, 24-37 (figure 6 and figure 7). Ciro Lo Muzio's discussion with these Khotanese examples is focused on Skanda's archaic association with *grahas*, which can be used as a prominent example to understand the complex relationship between Brahmanism and Buddhism.

16) Mann 2012.

17) Venkataraman 1956, 309-313.

and the *Skanda Purāṇa*, whose texts mostly illustrate the birth of Skanda from Śiva's (or Agni's) sperm and his role as a martial god. Furthermore, Skanda is identified with Kārttikeya ("Son of Kṛttikās"), especially in South India and in South Asia. Skanda is also said to be raised as the son of the Kṛttikās (six wives of ṛṣis), identified as the Pleiades. These stories suggest that Skanda may have been part of an ancient Indian star cult.¹⁸⁾

Skanda's various stories and attributes that emerge from these accounts seem to develop along two familial lines: those that stress his association with the paternal line, and those that favor the maternal line. As a son of Śiva, Skanda's character was immortalized as the leader of the generals, and this became one of his dominant motifs. As a son of numerous mothers, such as the goddesses of the Pleiades (the six mothers who gathered Śiva's sperm), Ṣaṣṭhī (lit. "sixth," known as a goddess of children) or sometimes *Saptamātrkās* (the Seven Mothers Goddesses), his tie with "youth" became stronger.¹⁹⁾ Especially through his connection to Ṣaṣṭhī, who presides over the sixth day after birth, the crucial period for the survival of a newborn child, Skanda established his role on the one hand as a demonic god of childhood diseases and of kidnapping newborn children, but on the other hand came to be recognized as a benevolent deity to whom people pray to have children.

Beyond his inheritance from his father and mothers, we should not forget about his half-brother Gaṇeśa. This elephant-headed older brother shares his role as a guardian of the gate with Skanda, so that Skanda also came to be known as a protector who stands before the gates along with Gaṇeśa. With this functional affinity, Skanda later came to be associated with Vajrapāṇi or the Two Guardian Kings found in East Asian Buddhism, particularly in Japan.²⁰⁾ Another myth about Gaṇeśa and Skanda is important to remember here to understand Skanda's association with swiftness in

18) Mann 2003, 22-3.

19) One of the prominent examples along this line—six-headed Skanda riding on a peacock—from the twelfth-century stone sculpture is currently stored at the Art Institute of Chicago.

20) Stein 1993, 125-26.

later East Asian Buddhism. Śiva and Pārvaṭī (Śiva's wife) told their two sons that whoever ran around the world faster would get married. While Skanda was faster in terms of sheer speed, Gaṇeśa won the race because he ended it with a proper ritual: he finished his salutes to his parents with seven circumambulations.²¹⁾ This fast-running aspect of Skanda as well as his celibate nature become crucial elements of the development of the deity in the later East Asian Buddhist imagination.

Central Asian interpretations of Skanda provide significant clues to explain the transformation of Skanda from an Indic into a sinified form.²²⁾ The fifth-century depictions of Skanda from the caves at Yungang 雲崗 are particularly relevant. This example is in fact the earliest image of Skanda north of Gandhāra that also shows close connections with the images of Skanda from Dunhuang 敦煌 and Khotan.²³⁾ One of the images in the Yungang caves is found in a relief on the eastern doorjamb of the entrance to Yungang Cave 8 (the second half of the fifth century). What is intriguing about this image is that it forms a pair with Maheśvara, who appears on the western doorjamb. There is another symmetrical pairing between the father and son that appears in a relief above the doorway of Yungang Cave 10. These two pairings suggest Skanda's popular role as the guardian of the gate. In these Yungang examples, we can see that sometimes Gaṇeśa and Maheśvara become interchangeable as a partner of Skanda, while Skanda is firmly identified as the god of the gate. This aspect of Skanda became widely spread in China in the later periods.

It is unclear exactly when Skanda was introduced to China. But at least during the Tang period (618-907 CE), the deity was known to Chinese Buddhist circles, although it was not until the Song period (960-1279 CE) that he was fully integrated into the Chinese Buddhist tradition. As Skanda had numerous names in India, the Chinese translation of the deity's name gave rise to multiple appellations. The most

21) Stein 1993, 123.

22) For these, see Mukherjee 1989, 138-41; Lo Muzio 2019, 17-20.

23) Lo Muzio 2019, 17.

common translation of Skanda in Chinese is Weituo 韋馱, or General Wei 韋將軍 (Ch. Weijiangjun). Initially, he is introduced as the chief general of the Eight Generals of the Four Heavenly Kings (Ch. Sitianwang 四天王).²⁴⁾ Another name for the deity is Dongzhen 童真, the Chinese translation of Kumārabhūta.²⁵⁾ One of the earliest textual appearances of Weituo in Chinese Buddhism is from Dharmakṣema's (385-433 CE) translation of the *Nirvana Sutra* (Ch. *Dabanniepan jing* 大般涅槃經), in which he is listed with other *deva* deities.²⁶⁾ Skanda's name is found in another influential scripture, the *Golden Light Sutra* (Ch. *Jingguangming jing* 金光明經). In this text, he is recognized as one of the protective deities of Buddhism.²⁷⁾ While these texts paved the way for the introduction of Skanda to China, Chinese Buddhists soon began to write about the deity with their own language and imagination, as seen in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T. 2122, a Buddhist encyclopedia compiled by Daoshi 道世 in 668) and the *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* 道宣律師感通錄 (The *Record of the Miraculous Communication to the Vinaya Master Daoxuan* T. 2107, ref. T. 1898 *Lixiang gantong zhuan* 律相感通傳).

The *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* is one of the key Chinese Buddhist texts responsible for the formulation of the legends of Weituo and the spread of his worship in China, as well as to the rest of East Asia in later periods.²⁸⁾ This text is attributed to Daoxuan

24) *Daoxuan liushi gantong lu* identifies Skanda as the chief commander of the thirty-two divine generals that are subordinate to the Four Heavenly Kings. The text says: “韋將軍三十二將之中最存弘護。” T2107, 52: 435c24-c25.

25) Note that Mañjuśrī is also known as Mañjuśrī-kumārabhūta. Due to their similar origin as a deity in the form of a youth, Mañjuśrī and Skanda came to be conflated in India. For more on this discussion, see Mukherjee 1989, 138-41. But this was also the case in China so that both Weituo and Mañjuśrī were called Dongzhen. Several scholars have remarked on the similarities in role and appearance between the two deities. See Iyanaga 2002 (vol. 2), 123-51; The Institute of Traditional Cultures, 1981, 63-107.

26) “若有說言菩薩為欲供養天神故入天祠。所謂梵天自在天。遼陀天迦旃延天。所以入者。為欲調伏諸天人故。……” T374, 12:403c10-c12.

27) “釋提桓因及日月天閻摩羅王風水諸神遼馱天神神品及毘紐天大辯天神及自在天。……” T663, 16:350a6-a9. This list from the *Golden Light Sutra* reappears in the *Bailu* 百錄 (ca. 1131-1162) and, in turn, it was further elaborated in the *Zhongpian zhutianzhuan*. It lists twenty *deva* deities, and among them Skanda is the twelfth *deva* deity.

道宣 (596-667), the founder of the Nanshan school 南山宗 of the Vinaya school 律宗 in China.²⁹⁾ Even if Daoxuan’s association with Weituo is a legend, the text attributed to Daoxuan led to a significant development of Weituo in China. With its unique narrative techniques and perspective, the author(s) of the text established an orthodoxy of the antiquity of Chinese Buddhism by introducing mythic accounts that Buddhism existed in ancient China and that it did not contradict Chinese customs.³⁰⁾ The text gives several mythic accounts related to Weituo and Daoxuan. One of the most noticeable aspects of Skanda’s “conversion” to Buddhism is that he embodies Buddhist austerity. According to the text, Weituo symbolizes the eternal youth of immortality free from aging and, more significantly, that he maintains celibacy in perpetuity, which is expected of Buddhist practitioners. As seen in his earlier Indian myths, Weituo never married. Since celibacy was highly celebrated for the Buddhist monastics and those who advocated the strict observation of *vinaya* or monastic regulations, it would make sense why this particular aspect of Weituo appealed to Buddhist monks. This very association between Weituo and *vinaya* remained strong in the later periods, particularly within the Chan/Zen Buddhist tradition



〈Figure 1〉 Skanda on the Front Page of the *Lotus Sutra*, 1405. Ink on paper. H 28,8 cm, W 30,6 cm, National Museum of Korea, S. Korea

28) These two texts contain very similar content. T2107, 52:435a22–442b18; T1898, 45:874 a16–882a28.

29) For more about Daoxuan and his miracle stories with gods, see Shinohara 2003, 68-107.

30) Liu 2012, 127-70.

Another significant element of the text is Weituo's association with the relic cult. By the Song period, Weituo was widely known as the deity who protected the relics of the Buddha. Weituo's protection extended beyond corporal relics, so the image of the deity was often found on the beginning page of Buddhist sūtras, another form of the relics of the Buddha. For instance, although Weituo has no doctrinal significance in the *Lotus Sutra*,³¹⁾ over time he acquired a very special status in its paratextual aspect (Figure 1).³²⁾ The image of Weituo is often placed at the beginning or sometimes at the end of the printed text.³³⁾ This insertion of the image of Weituo goes well beyond any presumptive decorative and aesthetic effect. Here, Weituo—stepping both inside (as part of the *deva* entourage) and outside of the text (as the protector of the text, or the teachings of the Buddha)—intimately mediates the text and its reception by the viewer. His paratextual presence has both pragmatic and functional influences on the content of the text, with the viewer taking the text to another symbolic level. Considering how *dhāraṇīs* were included in the early Mahayana texts,³⁴⁾ the iconography of the deity operated as an apotropaic power. Functionally, his presence also leads the viewer to see the content as a precious relic and the entire text as a reliquary, a container of the Buddha's teachings. Another legend holds that after Daoxuan wrote a preface (Ch. Hongzhuan xu 弘傳序) to the *Lotus Sutra*, in which he included the image of Weituo, it became a common practice to include the image of Weituo in any newly produced copies of the *Lotus Sutra*.³⁵⁾

During the Southern Song period (1127-1279), Weituo became a prominent deity in Chinese Buddhist liturgical spaces. It is also at this time that he came to be included in the major ritual manuals of the time as well. One such ritual manual, entitled the *Zhongpian zhutian zhuan* 重篇諸天傳 (1173, compiled by Xingting 行霆), states that

31) Skanda appears only one time in Chapter 26. Watson, 1993, 310, n1. But Watson also remarks on Skanda that “this reconstruction of the Sanskrit term from the Chinese transcription is tentative.”

32) On paratext, see Genette 1997; Pellatt 2013, 1-8.

33) *National Palace Museum Bulletin* (1994-1995), 22-3.

34) Copp 2014, xiii.

35) Lee, Seunghi 2004, 1784-85.

Weituo is one of the twenty prominent deities that protect Buddhist rituals.³⁶⁾ The text contains a short section on the deity that recapitulates the stories of Weituo, possibly from Daoxuan's text, and displays a diagram of the ritual of the installment (Ch. *xunxiu daochang* 熏修道場), describing where Weituo fits into the ritual program.³⁷⁾ The ritual was performed for “the Golden Light Offering,” a feast for numerous gods.³⁸⁾ Another significant aspect of the ritual text is that it is one of the earliest accounts of the iconographic details of the deity. According to the text, “[Weituo] is a youth who wears a golden helmet holding his weapon horizontally across his forearms.”³⁹⁾ This indeed is the archetypal image of Weituo.

Before the discussion moves on to Skanda's development in Korean Buddhism, a few iconographical transformations between Indian Skanda and Chinese Skanda should be analyzed. At first glance, the sinified Skanda looks very different from the images found in the Indian subcontinent. While in the Indian examples Skanda can have multiple heads and arms, in the Chinese representation Weituo is a boy with one head and two arms (Figure 2).⁴⁰⁾ Also, the young Indian warrior Skanda holds a spear as his attribute and often rides on a peacock—by far the deity's most distinctive attribute and most noticeable visual change between the two cultural spheres.⁴¹⁾ While the peacock and its feathers have been widely used in Indian religions as a symbol of royalty and wisdom, the Indian peacock was not necessarily the most

36) The text is a revision of an earlier work written in 1158 by Shehuan 神煥, the Southern Song Tiantai master. At the end of the text, Shenhuan performed feats for the deities when his master died in 1129, suggesting that the ritual was done for transferring good merits. X1658, 88:437b4.

37) The particular description of the deity and the ritual diagram from the same text is found in a Southern Song-period painting, “Zhu zhun jihui tu 諸尊集會圖,” currently stored at Manganji 萬願寺 in Kyoto, Japan.

38) Stevenson 1999, 370-80; Stevenson 2014, 377, n72.

39) “頭頂金兜橫寶杵 合十指掌兒童年.” X1658, 88:430b3-c6.

40) Most early images of Skanda have two arms, although in the post-Gupta period, the images usually have four or twelve arms. See Chatterjee 1970, 121.

41) The spear and his affiliation with the peacock may signify the deity's earlier association with exorcism. For instance, it is said that the *Book of the Peacock Spell* (*Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra*) drives demonic venom into the earth. Strickmann 2002, 221, n53.



〈Figure 2〉 Weituo. Qing Period. Ink and color on silk, H 142.5 cm, W 74.5 cm
 Purchased with funds contributed by Edward B. Robinette from the
 Simkhovitch Collection, 1929, Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA

sacred bird for the Chinese mind (except for Yunnan 雲南 province, peacocks are not native to China).

What is noteworthy is that feathers became a distinctive feature of the sinified Skanda on his winged helmet (but no peacock mount), an important visual cue to distinguish him from other *deva* deities. The aforementioned Skanda image from Yungang Cave 8 (Skanda holding a cockerel in his lower left hand) is a significant clue to explain how the feather decorations came to be on Skanda's helmet. In early Indian representations, Skanda's most common *vāhana* is a peacock. The deity also

sometimes holds a cockerel in one of his multi-arms,⁴²⁾ and it is mostly from the Gandhara Skanda during the Kushan period (c. 30 CE-375 CE).⁴³⁾ Skanda's lavish feather decorations certainly remind us of those of a peacock rather than a cock, but some might think that the deity's connection to a cock is equally significant to the later winged helmet.⁴⁴⁾ Whether the feathers are from a peacock or cock, what needs to be emphasized is that two associated birds—a peacock and cock—are also known for their apotropaic power. The feathers on both sides of his headgear also highlight the swift speed of the deity, and this volant aspect of Skanda continues to be a recurring motif in later East Asian tradition.

The deity's armor needs further scrutiny as well, for cuirassed Skanda is another prominent visual marker in his sinification process. It is not known when and how Skanda's image underwent such a transformation, but his attire may have paralleled the dress changes of the Four Heavenly Kings (Ch. Si Tianwang 四天王).⁴⁵⁾ In India or South Asia, for example, the Four Heavenly Kings are in a dhoti and wear a turban. When they arrive in Central Asia, however, they are decorated with Central Asian armor. Eventually the deities arrived in Tang China and came to be depicted in Chinese-style armor. Given their similar roles as “protectors” of Buddhism, the image of Skanda may have followed this change of the Four Heavenly Kings. Considering the style of the armor and Skanda's winged helmet from the early Weituo images in China, it is highly possible that the standard image of the deity represents the armor historically used between the late Sui (589-618 CE) and late Tang periods.⁴⁶⁾

42) Debroy 2015, 2631.

43) There are very few examples of Skanda-on-a-peacock holding a cock, and all of these examples come from post-Kushan Gandhara works. Lo Muzio 2019, 19.

44) Benoytosh Mukherjee discusses the possible implications of the cock in Skanda's image. According to Mukherjee, the red-colored cock can be “a cognizance of the solar or sun-like god Skanda-Kumāra, looked upon also as a son of Agni.” Mukherjee 1987, 255. Mann suggests that this cock may symbolize Skanda's agility as a warrior god and could be a Parthian influence. Mann 2012, 124-126.

45) Nakano also notes the visual affinity between Skanda and the Four Heavenly Kings. Nakano 1989, 292.

46) The armor and headgear of Skanda coincides with the general's armor and headgear from the *Wujingcong Yao* 武經總要 (1040-1043). See Lee, Seunghi 2005, 103-5.

Whereas India Skanda holds a spear as one of his attributes, in the Chinese examples, Weituo grabs a *vajra* staff, a sword, or sometimes a trident. In Chinese depictions, sometimes the deity leans on his weapon, and at others he presses his palms together reverently while his weapon lies horizontally across his forearms. This image of Weituo came to be widely reproduced during the Song period and has visually dominated the depiction of Skanda since then, such that this is the typical visual representation of the god found in Korean Buddhism. With these Chinese textual and visual transformations of the deity in mind, I now turn to the juvenile god's long-lasting life in Korea.

III. Multiplication: The Arrival of Sinified Skanda in Korean Buddhism

Known as Wit'aechön 韋駄天 or Tongjin Posal 童眞菩薩 (Bodhisattva Tongjin), the earliest Wit'aechön worship dates from the Koryŏ period (918-1392), possibly due to the frequent commercial and cultural contacts between Koryŏ and Song. The initial Koryŏ worship of the deity was heavy influenced by Chinese practices, such that his visual representation was also analogous to that of the Chinese.⁴⁷⁾ As a protector of the text-relics, we find the deity in two different forms: depicted in the wooden block paintings of Buddhist scripture (Kr. *mokp'anhwa* 木版画, roughly 80 examples extant) as well as in the illustrations of the sutra copying text (Kr. *Sagyŏng pyŏnsangdo* 寫經變相圖, roughly 59 examples extant).⁴⁸⁾ The earliest visual examples

47) Although the dominant visual representation of Skanda in Korea is its sinicized form, there are a few examples, including one from the Koryŏ period that is presently located in North Korea, that refer to Indian representations of Skanda. If we can confirm that this image is indeed Skanda, not Mahāmayūrī, another deity riding on a peacock, then both Indian and sinicized forms of Skanda were known to the Korean audience. For the image, see Kim, Pohyŏng 2001, 157 (fig. 21).

48) Vajrapāṇi also appears as a protective deity of the Mahayana sutra in the late Koryŏ period. But given the number of examples that exist, it seems that Skanda was more popular than Vajrapāṇi for this particular role.

of Wit'aechŏn are found in the wooden block print of the *Lotus Sutra*, which describes the Assembly of Śākyamuni Preaching Vulture Peak (Kr. *Yōngsan hoesang pyōnsangdo* 靈山會上變相圖) and dates from 1286.⁴⁹⁾ Other than the *Lotus Sutra*, the deity is commonly found on the beginning or the ending page of other Mahayana Buddhist texts such as the *Diamond Sutra*, *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and commentaries on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* from the Koryŏ and throughout the Chosŏn periods.

Beyond the deity's function in the Buddhist scriptures as a guardian of the text-relics, the most common depiction of Wit'aechŏn comes in the form of a painting with a crowd of other *deva* deities. While in Chinese examples Weituo is often depicted alone in a painting or paired with another popular divinity in the form of a statue, it is rare to see the deity's stand-alone image in Korean examples.⁵⁰⁾ For instance, in China Weituo frequently appears with Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Guanyin 觀音) as her disciple or spouse (in this case, not a mundane conjugal relationship), or sometimes as a manifestation of the bodhisattva herself, beginning with the Southern Song and throughout the Qing (1644-1911) periods.⁵¹⁾ A series of woodblock prints called the *Fifty-Three Compassionate Manifestations of Guanyin* (Ch. *Guanshiyin pusa Cirong wushisan xian* 觀世音菩薩慈容五十三現, edited by Dai Wangying 戴王瀛, ca. 1662-1722), describes Weituo not only on the first page as a protector of the text, but also as a warrior-god accompanying Avalokiteśvara, indicating the intimate companionship between the two.⁵²⁾ Framing both the bodhisattva and Weituo

49) This is currently stored at the Leeum Museum in Seoul, Korea. For more about the doctrinal significance of the piece and the popularity of the *Lotus Sutra* in the late Koryŏ period, see Lee, Seunghi 2016, 7-32. The image is printed on paper (21.0 cm X 45.6 cm). The earliest extant example of the deity in the sutra copying text (depicting the Assembly of the Vulture Peak) dates to 1294. The text currently belongs to Hōshakuji 宝積寺 in Kyoto, Japan.

50) But there are some limited examples of his statues. For example, it is no longer extant but according to the votive prayers found inside of wooden statues (Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Bhaiṣajyaguru respectively) dating from 1727, Skanda's wooden statue once stood at Tonghwa-sa temple in S. Korea. Kungnip Taegu Pangmulgwan 2009, 262-67.

51) *Zenrin shōkisen* 禪林象器箋. B103, 19:132b9-10.

52) The nineteen images from the text are available online in the database of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The full fifty-three images are digitally available in the database of L'Institut des hautes études chinoises (IHEC). According to Chuin-fang Yü, beginning with the Ming, groups of paintings appeared that depict

exemplifies how Weituo became an integral part of the broader Avalokiteśvara worship in China.⁵³⁾ Another common place to find Weituo's statue is at the gate of Chan temples with the statue of Budai 布袋, the fat, jolly, bald-headed man popularly believed to be a manifestation of Maitreya in China. In this pairing, Weituo usually faces the main Buddha hall and stands back to back with Budai. As we are informed by Stein's analysis, instead of being paired with his elephant-headed brother Gaṇeśa from India, in China the pot-bellied Budai carries out the same function of Gaṇeśa as a guardian of the gate.⁵⁴⁾ Similar to Chinese examples, in Japan Skanda (known as Idaten 韋駄天) is usually presented alone, especially worshipped as a guardian deity in Zen monasteries.⁵⁵⁾ Although Skanda's iconography is far less visible and the number of examples is relatively small compared to that of China and Korea, Skanda enjoyed popularity during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) in Japan, largely among Zen Buddhists due to their direct interactions with Chinese Buddhism at that time.⁵⁶⁾

Guan-yin in five, thirty-two (manifestations based on the *Surangama sūtra* and the *Lotus Sutra*), or fifty-three forms (the *Avatamsaka sūtra*), although they do not bear much resemblance to the scriptural sources. Yü 2001, 14, 88.

53) For the late Qing period cult of Guanyin, see Li 2011.

54) Stein 1993, 126; Iyanaga 2002 (vol.1), 243.

55) The Chinese master Lanxi Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (Jp. Rankei Dōryū ca. 1213-1278) who arrived in Japan in 1246 and taught Chan Buddhism to Japanese Buddhists seems to be one of the key figures in the dissemination of Skanda worship in Japan. Lanxi was the one who ushered in the concept of the "temple guardian god (Jp. *garanshin* 伽藍神)" to the Zen Buddhists in Japan. Considering Skanda's association with monastic regulations and his role as a temple guardian, it is possible that Lanxi was aware of the worship of Skanda back in the Chinese Chan monastery. It was the Japanese Buddhist monk Shunjō 俊苒 (1166-1227) who brought the first Skanda painting from China to Japan after his twelve years' study of *vinaya*.. He also established Sennyūji 泉通寺 in Kyoto in 1218, following the architectural style of the Song Buddhist monastery. Tankai 湛海 (fl. thirteenth century), Shunjō's disciple, was the *vinaya* master who officially gets credit in terms of the introduction of the Skanda worship to Japan. Tankai brought the first statue of the deity along with teeth relics of the Buddha from Bailianjiao-si 白蓮教寺 in 1255 from his second sojourn to China. Here, a small wooden statue of Skanda became part of a reliquary set—a stūpa-shaped reliquary in which the tooth relic of the Buddha is supposedly enshrined, and two protectors of a similar size: Skanda on the right-hand side and Gatsugai chōja 月蓋長者, putting his palms together and creating a visual parallelism with Skanda who also puts his staff across his joined hands.

56) There are a handful of known examples in Japan: some paintings in ink and wash paintings (for the name and current location, see Sekiguchi 1984, 74), a color image on silk stored at Sennyūji, wooden statues found in Sennyūji, Chōryūji, Chionin, Kōzanji, Myōshinji 妙心寺, Ryōanji 龍安寺, Jōchiji 淨智寺, Osshinji 乙津寺, Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nagasaki and Manpukuji 萬福寺. Statues from Chōryūji, Sennyūji, and Manpukuji are considered to be of Chinese origin. There is also a Nanbokuchō period (1336-1392)

Compared to these Chinese and Japanese examples, a large assemblage around Korean Skanda becomes unique. This particular group of paintings, *sinjung t'aenghwa*, is part of a larger category of “*t'aenghwa* 幀畫” paintings. This *t'aenghwa* painting appears in the early Chosŏn period in Korea but enjoyed its highest popularity in the later Chosŏn period.⁵⁷⁾ Possibly influenced by the Tibetan *thangka*, *t'aenghwa* can take the form of hanging scrolls, framed pictures, wall-paintings, or an extremely large-scale painting that could only be hung outside in the temple courtyard.⁵⁸⁾ In Chosŏn Buddhism, *t'aenghwa* became the dominant form of Buddhist artifact and was used in various rituals.

Wit'aechŏn is prominently featured in almost all *Sinjung t'aenghwa*. Considering Wit'aechŏn's relationship with other paired deities, we can categorize four different types of *Sinjung t'aenghwa*. The first is the earliest group in which the deity makes an appearance, the Paintings of the Three Bodhisattvas (Kr. *Samjang t'aenghwa* 三藏幀畫). This painting was produced for the rite of the Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land (Ch. *Shuilu fahui* 水陸法會, Kr. *Suryukchae* 水陸齋), a ritual originating in the Song period of Chinese Buddhism. The main beneficiaries of the ritual were water spirits and hungry ghosts, and the ritual enjoyed enormous popularity in the Chosŏn period. During the first half of the Chosŏn, the ritual was grandiosely conducted with the support of the royal court. In the second half of the period, it was carried out at local temples by individual donors.⁵⁹⁾ The painting portrays three bodhisattvas of the three realms: Heavenly-Store Bodhisattva (Kr. Ch'onchang Posal 天藏菩薩) in the middle of the frame, Earth-Holding Bodhisattva (Kr. Chiji Posal 持地菩薩) on the

example from a personal collection in Shizuoka Prefecture. For the Idate statues from the Ōbaku Zen at Kōfukūji and Manpukūji, see Kyūshū Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2011, 65, 141.

57) Different periodization coexists in the historiography of Chŏson. But it is commonly divided into two, the early Chŏson and the later Chŏson, delineated by the Imjin War (1592-1598).

58) The possible connection between *thangka* and *t'aenghwa* needs to be examined further.

59) For more about this type of painting see Tak, Hyōngyu 2011. According to the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (Kr. *The Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄), the last state-sponsored ritual took place in 1606. For more details about the ritual in China, see Stevenson 2001, 30-70.

right-hand side, and Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva (Kr. Chijang Posal 地藏菩薩) on the left-hand side, each of which represents the heavenly realm, hell, and the human realm, respectively. In the painting, Wit'aechōn appears as one of the acolytes of the Earth-Holding Bodhisattva at the right corner. Despite his lesser visual dominance, his inclusion in this picture is significant in that the paintings were used for the Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land. Skanda was needed here because the deity was invoked as a protector of the ritual, a practice already begun in China. We can find his name in the foremost *shuilu fahui* ritual manual, entitled *Ritual Proceedings for the Cultivation of the Feast of the Dharmadhātu Holy and Worldly Water and Land Majestic Assembly* (Ch. *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiu zhai yigui* 法界聖凡水陸勝會修齋儀軌), authored by Zhipan 志磐 (ca. 1220-1275).⁶⁰⁾ The text states that Wit'aechōn along with other *deva* deities was invited at the beginning of the ritual to protect it, ensuring its success and efficacy. Interestingly, this particular text was widely circulated along with the production of the Paintings of the Three Bodhisattvas in Korea. Several editions are extant, with the earliest dating from 1515 and numerous examples from the sixteenth century as well.⁶¹⁾

Wit'aechōn's presence is not as dominant as other paintings in *Sinjung t'aenghwa*, suggesting that he had a minor role in the ritual. However, considering the prevalence and frequency of the ritual, his inclusion in this group is noteworthy because it indicates that he was included in the main ritual scene by the sixteenth century in Korea. His inclusion in the ritual also allowed the deity to gain more worshipful followers, leading him to become an essential member of the divinities in *Sinjung t'aenghwa* from the sixteenth century onward. Consequently, the deity's name continues to appear in the ritual manuals such as Paekp'a Kūngsōn's 白坡亘璇 (1767-

60) “十大明王同穢迹 華嚴海會眾天王 梵王帝釋四門天 功德辨才摩理制 密迹散脂韋駄等 樹神善女及堅牢 藥叉 鬼母大天神 至此俱稱為護教 八部天龍聞法者 二十八類顯威雄 十方無量大權天 於此一時俱供奉” X1479, 74:795c8-c15.

61) The edition is from Unmun-sa temple in Kyōngsang Province and is currently stored at the Central Library of Dongguk University in Seoul, Korea.

1852) *Standard Protocols of Rituals* (Kr. *Chakbōb küigam* 作法龜鑑, 1826) and An Chinho's 安震湖 (1880-1967) the *Manuals of the Buddhist Rituals* (Kr. *Sōngmun ūibōm* 釋門儀梵, 1935), liturgical texts published for more organized and standardized rituals for an individual monastery.⁶²⁾

The second type of *Sinjung t'aenghwa* captures Skanda's pairing with Indra (and this seems to be a prototype for the triad of Skanda, Indra, and Brahmā). The pairing between Wit'aechōn and Indra is the most favored combination during the Chosōn period and one of the earliest *Sinjung t'aenghwa* in which Wit'aechōn is presented as the central figure.⁶³⁾ The Vedic warrior god Indra (Kr. Chesōkch'ōn 帝釋天) is not only closely related to the origin story of Skanda, but also is one of his rivals.⁶⁴⁾ In Korean Buddhism, Indra acquired an unusually elevated status since the Koryō period. In traditional Buddhist cosmology, Indra was perceived as the ruler of the heaven of Thirty-Three Gods on the Peak of Mount Sumeru. This heavenly sovereign image merged with the indigenous cult of the Ruler of Heaven (Kr. Hwanin 桓因) in Korea.⁶⁵⁾ During the Koryō period, Indra enjoyed royal support because the deity was believed to have the power to protect the nation. As a result, Indra was often invoked in esoteric Buddhist rituals when the court faced a crisis.⁶⁶⁾ Framing Skanda and Indra together makes sense, given both gods' character as a leader of warriors, but it also implicitly suggests that Skanda came to be highly considered so that his godship could match the status of Indra.

62) The lists of the deities enumerated in these two Korean editions are not exactly the same as the list found in the *Fajie shengfan shuilu shenghui xiu zhai yigui*. Also, see Paekp'a 2016, 109. An, Chinho 2009, 261.

63) Kungnip chung'ang pangmulgwan 2013, 8-11.

64) In *Mahābhārata*, for instance, accounts for Indra's desire to get rid of Skanda, the son of Agni. But Indra's attempt to kill Skanda resulted in a birth of another god from Skanda's body and the frightened Indra eventually sought refuge to Skanda. Debroy 2015, 2637-38.

65) The relationship between Hwanin in *Sanguk Yusa* and Chesōkch'ōn 帝釋桓因/釋提桓因 in Korean Buddhism needs to be further studied. Yun, Sōngch'an argues that the two are very different gods although the same appellation was resulted from either a borrowing or a possible phonetic confusion. Yun 2016, 73-91.

66) During the invasion by the Khitan and the Mongol, for instance, Koryō kings visited Kōnsōng-sa 乾聖寺 temple frequently and performed rituals to drive away enemies with the help of Indra. Kungnip chung'ang pangmulgwan 2013, 10.

The pairing between Wit'aechōn and Indra can be further understood in the context of the relic cult with which both Skanda and Indra came to be associated in the East Asian Buddhist tradition. A story from the *Dabanniepanjing houfen* 大般涅槃經後分 (Latter Part of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*) provides an indirect connection between the two. According to the text, at the cremation site of the Buddha, Indra shows up and asks to take the relics of the Buddha, stating that he wants to take them to the celestial realm and store them in a stūpa there. When Indra is about to take a pair of tooth relics of the Buddha, two light-footed disease-causing *rākṣasa* (Ch. Jieji loucha 捷疾羅刹), or malignant demons, steal them from Indra.⁶⁷⁾ The text does not state anything regarding who took back the relics, leaving room for further story development. Stories around the relics of the Buddha sparked the imaginations of Buddhists such that numerous variations are found in different texts. For example, in his diary, Ennin 円仁 (794-864), the Japanese Tendai monk who traveled to Tang China, records that Nezha 那吒 delivered one of the four tooth relics of the Buddha to Daoxuan.⁶⁸⁾ Although Daoxuan and the worship of Skanda are intimately connected, and Daoxuan wrote extensively about the miracle stories of relics, for a while Skanda had nothing to do with restoring the relics of the Buddha. But at some point in Song China, Skanda becomes associated with the relics of the Buddha, replacing Nezha.⁶⁹⁾ It could have been confusion or a careful merging that resulted from the similarity between Nezha and Skanda, or their common connection to Daoxuan.⁷⁰⁾ The *Commentary on Zen Implements* (Jp. *Zenrin shōkisen* 禪林象器箋, 1741, compiled by the Rinzai Zen monk, Mujaku Dōchū 無著道忠 1653-1744) provides us with another version.⁷¹⁾ While Mujaku clarifies that it is not Skanda but Nezha who restored the relics of the Buddha, Mujaku also refers to Skanda protecting and venerating

67) T377, 12:910a17-24.

68) Reischauer 1955, 302.

69) Lee, Seunghi 2005, 96.

70) For more specifics about Nezha in Chinese Buddhism, see Shahar 2015.

71) Although the text comes from a much later period, this encyclopedic compendium pertains to Chinese Chan practices during the Song period and becomes a valuable reference point here.

Buddha's tooth relics.⁷²⁾ In the later Japanese text, *Taiheiki* 太平記 (fourteenth century), however, the swift deity who catches the demons and returns the stolen relics to Daoxuan is Skanda.⁷³⁾ This suggests that although Skanda may have nothing to do with the story found in the *Dabanniepanjing houfen* (and yet, the light-footed disease-demon reminds us of the demonic origin of Skanda in India), Skanda eventually came to be perceived as the protector of the relics of Śākyamuni by the fourteenth century. Going back to our discussion of the pairing between Wit'aechŏn and Indra, we see that both of them have a strong connection to the narrative of missing Buddhist relics.

The duo developed into a triad sometime in the eighteenth century, as seen in the example below (Figure 3). Brahmā (Kr. Pŏmch'ŏn 梵天), the Hindu origin god residing in the form realm (Skt. *rūpa-dhātu*), joins Skanda and Indra in this one. This combination became one of the most widely produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁴⁾ In this pairing, Indra and Brahmā stand in the rear row, while Skanda stands in the front row, creating an inverted triangular shape. Also, it should be noted that Brahmā is often perceived as a male deity, whereas Indra is depicted (or at least perceived) as female with the face of a noblewoman. While the visual representation does not mark this difference, there is a noticeable distinction between Brahmā and Indra. In Buddhist cosmology, Indra is a god from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three gods (Skt. *Trāyastriṃśā*), which belongs to the desire realm, a celestial realm below the form realm in which Brahmā resides. Although it is hard to imagine that this Indian mythological knowledge was known to Korean worshippers of this time period, this combination certainly presents an interesting lingering mythical logic from the ancient

72) B103, 19:130a1-136b17.

73) *Taiheiki* (vol. 1), 274. Skanda's story of recovering Buddha's relics further made it to the Japanese performing arts tradition, the noh known as the "Relics (Jp. Shari 舍利)." The noh play is staged in Japan even today and Sennyūji has hosted the performance as well. In 2017, for example, the noh "Shari" was performed at Sennyūji as part of the temple's annual relic ceremony. I am indebted to Prof. Abe Yasurō for this information. Also, see Iyanaga 2002 (vol. 2), 46.

74) Kungnip chung'ang pangmulgwan 2013, 30.

past; Brahmā and Indra also represent fatherly and motherly symbolism, reminding us of Skanda's original family triad—his father Śiva and his mother Pārvatī—while Skanda remains the same, ever a young boy between two male and female gods.



〈Figure 3〉 Sinjung T'aenghwa (Indra, Brahma, and Skanda). 1855. Color on silk, H 159.1 cm, W 170.6 cm. National Museum of Korea, S. Korea

The third type of Skanda's inclusion in *Sinjung t'aenghwa* is the pairing between the Eight Devas (*deva* 天, *nāga* 龍, *yakṣa* 夜叉, *gandharva* 乾闥婆, *asura* 阿修羅, *garuḍa* 迦樓羅, *kiṃnara* 緊那羅 and *mahoraga* 摩睺羅伽) and Wit'aechōn as the leader of the Eight Devas. There are several variations on this pairing such that not all of the Eight Devas are presented, and sometimes there are four or six *devas* along with

Wit'aechŏn. But in this group, Wit'aechŏn is always the leader of the cluster and is placed in the middle or the front, thus dominating the frame. Due to a lack of textual references, it is hard to explain how this pairing came to be, but given the protective roles of the Eight Devas and how Skanda was venerated in Chan/Zen monasteries, the paintings were very likely used for rituals that ensured all-encompassing protection of Korean Sŏn 禪 Buddhist temples. For instance, during the Song period in China, the *Sūtra chanting for Skanda* (Ch. *Weituotian fengjing* 韋駄天諷經) was composed and recited in front of the deity's image. It was believed that the ritual removed obstacles and brought about various mundane benefits. The same ritual was transmitted to Japan. Known as *Idaten fūkyō* 韋駄天風經, the ritual was regularly performed at the Sōtō Zen 曹洞禪 monasteries on the third day of each month. According to *Keizan's Rules of Purity* (Jp. *Keizan oshō shingi* 瑩山和尚清規, authored by Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 1268-1325), one of the core elements of this Chinese origin ritual is reciting the *dhāraṇī*, called the "Wondrous and Auspicious Dharani for Removing Hindrance" (Jp. *Shōsai Myō Kichijō Darani* 消災妙祥吉陀羅尼).⁷⁵⁾ In this ritual, Skanda was invoked as a divinity to avert disaster, providing good fortune to the monastery and the monks.

Wit'aechŏn's generic protection may have helped the large production of this grouping, but it seems to assure a more particular type of protection as well against conflagration, one of the major problems with which wooden buildings in Buddhist monasteries always contended. A closer visual analysis of this grouping yields a clue to something more specific to Korean Buddhist practices. In the prototype, what stands out is the *nāga* (serpents/dragons) king, as seen in the example from the Taejŏk-sa 大寂寺 temple in Ch'ŏngdo, South Korea (Figure 4). Proportionally, the *nāga* king is portrayed as bigger than other members of the entourage, suggesting a more significant role for him, namely controlling the water. Often temples built of wood were subject to the threat of fire, and having the dragon king in the guardian

75) *Keizan Oshō shingi* 瑩山和尚清規, T2589, 82:428.

painting was one of the ways to prevent fire. Interestingly, for instance, when Tonghwa-sa 桐華寺 temple in Taegu, a major Buddhist temple in South Korea, was burnt down to the ground in 1725, one of the first acts of restoration was to reproduce the paintings of the guardian deities, in which Wit'aechŏn is dominantly portrayed.



〈Figure 4〉 Skanda in Ch'ŏnryŏngdo (Taejŏksa temple, Ch'ŏngdo). 1765. Color on silk, H. 77.3 cm, W. 68.8cm. National Museum of Korea, S. Korea

The fourth type is Skanda's joining with numerous other deities such as Maheśvara, Ucchuṣma, and others, as many as 104 (or sometimes 124), as seen in this example (Figure 5). In Hindu mythology, Maheśvara (Ch. Dazizaitian, Kr. Taechajaech'ŏn 大自在天), also known as Śiva or Īśvaradeva, is the king of the *devas*. In Buddhist cosmology, Maheśvara resides in the highest heaven in the form realm (Skt. Akaniṣṭhāḥ), making Maheśvara the highest *deva* god, although he is not necessarily



〈Figure 5〉 Skanda in the Painting of 124 Guardian Deities, 1862. Color on silk, H 348 cm, W 315,5 cm, Haein-sa temple, S. Korea

the most popular divinity in the *Sinjung t'aenghwa* pantheon. Maheśvara often appears together with Indra, Brahmā, and Skanda along with the retinues of each god. When Maheśvara is portrayed with Indra and Brahmā, all three are depicted similarly with the face of a nobleman or noblewoman. However, when Maheśvara becomes part of the greater group of deities, he is depicted as an Indian Śiva riding on a white bull. Although there is no visual communication between Skanda and Maheśvara when they are framed with numerous other deities, it is intriguing to see the rejoining of father and son in a rather unexpected context.

Ucchuṣma or the Vajra-being of Impure Traces (Ch. Huiji jin'gang 穢跡金剛, Kr. Yejök Kūmgang) is another deity that appears together with Wit'aechōn' in the larger group of deities. Ucchuṣma is one of the Wisdom Kings (Ch. *mingwang* 明王, Sk. *vidyārāja*) central to the esoteric Buddhist tradition.⁷⁶⁾ Despite its outstanding status in Chinese and Japanese esoteric Buddhism, Ucchuṣma was never fully appreciated in Korean Buddhism. However, when the deity's story and iconography were introduced through the *Life and Activities of Shakyamuni Buddha Incarnate* (Ch. *Shishi yuanliu yinghua shiji* 釋氏源流應化事蹟, Ming period) that describes the life of the Buddha, the deity came to be better known, as he appears as one of the manifestations of the Buddha. The illustrated text has been widely circulated since the fifteenth century in Korea and even served as a pictorial reference for Buddhist figures, including Ucchuṣma.⁷⁷⁾ However, Ucchuṣma receives more ritual attention when he joins the group of deities in *Sinjung t'aenghwa* from the nineteenth century.⁷⁸⁾ According to the *Standard Protocols of Rituals* (Kr. *Chakbōb kūigam*), a *dhāraṇī* dedicated to this deity was recited at the beginning of the rituals for the Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land, indicating that inviting Ucchuṣma was standard for the success of the rite.⁷⁹⁾ Among numerous *Sinjung t'aenghwa* in which Ucchuṣma is presented, the image from the Yongju-sa 龍珠寺 temple in Hwasōng, South Korea particularly interests our discussion here because of the clear visual and symbolic connections between Ucchuṣma and Skanda: Skanda is the symbol of purity and Ucchuṣma, the quintessential representation of impurity. It further reminds us of Skanda's pairing with his original counterpart Gaṇeśa, who possesses the opposite qualities of Skanda and yet shares the same functions.

The much bigger group in which Wit'aechōn appears in *Sinjung t'aenghwa* can

76) For the Chinese case, see Yang 2013.

77) Kungnip chung'ang pangmulgwan 2013, 43.

78) Kim, Hyōngjung 2010. The earliest example of the iconography of Ucchuṣma is from 1819, and there are 32 examples in existence.

79) Kungnip chung'ang pangmulgwan 2013, 44.

comprise thirty-nine deities and as many as 124 deities. The group of thirty-nine deities is from the section of “The Wondrous Adornments of World Rulers” from the *Avataṃsaka sūtra* (Kr. *Hwaṓm kyōng* 華嚴經), visualizing a doctrinal connection to the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*. Not all of the thirty-nine deities from the text made it into the group of 124 deities’ painting. The massive congregation raises its members from the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*, but also includes deities found in Confucius, Daoist, and other folk religious traditions.⁸⁰⁾ What is noteworthy is that Skanda came to be associated with strong and steady devotional practices around the *Avataṃsaka sūtra* in Korean Buddhism.⁸¹⁾

Wit’aechōn’s grouping with other deities can already be seen in several mural paintings from the Yuan and Ming periods in China, but its diversity, elaborate usage, and wide popularity confirms that Skanda played an essential role in the evolution and enrichment of the *Sinjung t’aenghwa* tradition. During the late Chosōn period, there were no direct exchanges between Chinese and Korean Buddhism. However, some Chinese artbooks still containing illustrated images of Buddhist figures from the Ming and Qing periods were circulated in Korea, and this limited access to Buddhist images, possibly allowing painters and artisans to apply their own imaginations and interpretations to *Sinjung t’aenghwa*. Colophons of the *Sinjung t’aenghwa* confirm that most of the works were commissioned by both monastic and lay people for various reasons, such as earning merits for rebirth in the Pure Land, healing, health, longevity, and prosperity.⁸²⁾

The rise of Wit’aechōn paralleled the high demands of Buddhist rituals and devotion around the *deva* deities. Indeed, from the seventeenth century on, we witness the explosion of the production of Buddhist ritual manuals by an individual temple.⁸³⁾ Even if the Neo-Confucian regime officially banned Buddhism in the

80) For the full list of the names of these one hundred four deities, see Paekp’a 2016, 106-111.

81) For more discussion on the painting of the one hundred four deities, see Kim, Jung-ok 2010.

82) Songch’ōn et. al. 2011, 644-809. The volume contains all the records such as donors, votive text, production date, and holding institution of the entire *Sinjung t’aenghwa*.

83) Kim, Pang-ryong 2008, 41-51.

country, Buddhist rituals were carried out more frequently than ever and still garnered local and individual support in late Chosŏn Buddhism. Individual temples organized various kinds of rituals for local elites and individual donors as a way to secure steady revenue when they could not rely on support from the central government. Up until 1950, more or less similar rituals were performed before *Sinjung t'aenghwa*. After the Pong'amsa movement (Kr. *Pong'am-sa kyŏlsa* 鳳巖寺結社), the reactionary reform campaign led by two conservative Buddhist figures, Ven. Sŏngch'ŏl 性徹 (1912-1993) and Ch'ŏngdam 靑潭 (1902-1971), rituals for guardian deities were drastically simplified. The continued leadership of the two monks, as well as their favoring meditation over devotional practices, ushered in huge change and a long-lasting impact on the perceptions of and rituals for the *deva* deities. It was Ven. Sŏngch'ŏl who taught that instead of offering fuller ceremonies to the guardian deities, one could simply recite the *Heart Sutra*.⁸⁴⁾ Since that time, although rituals for the guardian deities have become more systematized, the significance of these “guardian” deities has been significantly diminished.

IV. Skanda on the Move: From a Buddhist Divinity to a Shaman God

Skanda is always on the move, even moving beyond Buddhism. At some point in the late Chosŏn period, Skanda stepped outside of his usual Buddhist assemblies and assumed a different role as a mountain god (Kr. *sansin* 山神). As part of ancient mountain worship locally developed in Korea, a shrine dedicated to *sansin* (Kr. *sansin-gak* 山神閣) had been widely incorporated into the Korean Buddhist circle.⁸⁵⁾

84) Song, Hyŏngju 2008, 72-3. In his ethnographic account of daily life at Songgwang-sa 松廣寺 temple, Robert Buswell records that after the Sŏn master's short prayer “for the protection of the monastery and the nation, after which all the participants turn toward the painting of the dharma-general Wit'a (Wei-t'o) on the left wall and recite the *Heart Sūtra*.” Buswell 1992, 39.

Among many other roles, *sansin* was believed to bring good health, longevity, and prosperity to worshippers. Although the cult itself has a longstanding tradition, its integration into the Buddhist temple complex peaked around the eighteenth century (the earliest *sansin-gak* example dates as early as the seventeenth century), as the number of shrines dedicated to *sansin* has grown since then. While the most common image of *sansin* is an old, white-bearded man with tiger(s), there are two intriguing examples of Skanda identified as *sansin*: one at Ko'un-sa 孤雲寺 temple (1820) and another at Yeungnam University Museum (1821).⁸⁶⁾ In both examples, while what it depicts is Skanda, a cartouche indicates that the main deity depicts the image of *sansin*.⁸⁷⁾ It is not entirely clear how Skanda came to be perceived as *sansin* in these examples. These examples, however, evidently demonstrate Skanda's assimilation with Korean local culture and his wider appeal to different groups of people.

Another momentous example of Skanda's transformation is found in Korean Shamanism.⁸⁸⁾ Among many other names of the deity, shamanic tradition prefers the name "Bodhisattva Tongjin (Kr. Tongjin Posal)." According to one local tradition, this deity is even regarded as the first shaman.⁸⁹⁾ In modern-day Korea, Tongjin Posal's image is frequently found on the walls of shamanic shrines as a single object of veneration or as part of a larger group of other divinities.⁹⁰⁾ As shown in the mandalic image from the shamanic tradition, Tongjin Posal often forms a group with the four generals, constituting an essential part of the shamanic pantheon (Figure 6).

85) The earliest ritual manual to invoke *sansin* is included in sixteenth century edition of the *shuilu fahui* ritual manual written by Zhipan.

86) These two paintings are very likely produced by a same artisan. For the two images, see Kim, Young-ja 2005, 195-96.

87) The cartouche from Koun-sa temple reads: '大權山王之影.' The cartouche from the Yeungnam museum reads: '南無大權山 王大神之影.'

88) When Skanda made his way to the Shamanic pantheon is not certain due to the lack of written records. Besides, its visual examples date relatively late, primarily from the twentieth century. This may suggest that Skanda's entry into the Shaman pantheon could have happened in this time period, although this needs further examination.

89) Covell 1993, 30-33.

90) Indra is another deity that made its way into the Korean Shamanistic pantheon and became a major object of worship.



〈Figure 6〉 Tongjin Posal in the Shaman pantheon, ca.1950–1991, Gold paint on cloth, backed with paper, H 137 cm, W 113 cm, The British Museum, UK

Tongjin Posal has multiple roles. While his Buddhist origin and visual characteristics had not been fully forgotten, the deity gained new mythical accounts and therefore new identities in Korean Shamanism. Firstly, the god came to be identified as one of the Five Directional Generals (Kr. Obang shinjang 五方神將) who protect the central direction. Second, he is associated with the General of the Blade (Kr. Chakdu shinjang 斫刀神將), whose role empowers shamans during the *chakdu* ritual, the rite of walking on a sharp blade during a trance, as seen in this example (Figure 7). Thirdly, he is identified as the famous Chinese general Guan Yu (Kr. Kwan-wu 關羽). The worship of the general was introduced in Ming China during the Japanese invasions of Chosŏn (1592-1598), when the Ming army arrived on the peninsula to offer aid.⁹¹⁾ Although Tongjin Posal always appears as a youth in his armor and with



〈Figure 7〉 Tongjin Posal as the General of Blade, 1900. Color on paper, H 90,5 cm, W 56,3 cm, Kōndŭl Pau Museum, S. Korea

a weapon, in the shamanic tradition, his rendering as a middle-aged general with a beard is more common.⁹²⁾ Due to the low social status of Shamanism in the late Chosŏn period, these paintings were often produced by low-skilled artisans, so that they are not necessarily considered high art. However, this is one of the more prominent examples of the hybridity of Skanda worship in Korea.

One last example of “hybrid Skanda” between Buddhism and shamanic traditions is his talismanic role (Figure 8). This woodblock print (date unknown, although it appears to be around the nineteenth or twentieth centuries) indicates that the figure on top is Wit’aechŏn (Tongjin Posal). This Skanda follows a typical Buddhist representation of Skanda. Given the popular usage of woodblock prints in Buddhism in this time period, it is highly likely that it may have originated and been produced in a

91) Guan Yu (Kwan-wu) is the legendary Chinese general from the late Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), who is also widely known from the fourteenth-century historical novel, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Ch. *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義). Due to the confusion with Guan Yu, he sometimes is depicted as a general with a long beard, which contradicts Skanda’s identity as a youth.

92) More on the Korean Shaman painting and its material dimension, see Kendall et.al. 2015.



〈Figure 8〉 Skanda/Tongjin Posal Talisman, d.u. Ink on paper. H. 33 cm, W. 11.5 cm.
The National Folk Museum of Korea, S. Korea

Buddhist temple. The bottom half displays four talismans, which match some of the talismans (out of twenty-four talismans in total) included in the woodblock of the catalogue of the *Tripitaka Koreana* (Kr. *Pulsŏl Palman Taejang kyŏng mongnok* 佛說八萬大藏經目錄, c. 1251).⁹³⁾ These talismans were continuously reproduced throughout

93) On the backside of the woodblock, the three falcons are inscribed. These falcons remind us of the three-headed falcon talisman that has been popularly used for preventing three calamities. Some of the *Tripitaka Koreana* talismans were also found inside of a stūpa at Yongju-sa 龍珠寺 temple. These talismans were enshrined in the stūpa in 1268.

the Chosŏn period, as seen in the *Chechin'ŏn'jip* 諸眞言集 (*Collections of various dharani*, Ansim-sa 安心寺 edition, compiled in 1569) or the *Ilyongjip* 日用集 (edited by Chŏnghaeng 井幸, compiled in 1882). Starting from the upper left corner and going clockwise, these four talismans stand for wish fulfillment, becoming a person of high social status, preventing heat stroke, and an all-powerful one that ensures conjugal love, familial concord, and longevity. Remembering Skanda's role as the protector of the relics of the Buddha, as discussed above, Skanda's presence certainly reiterates his protective power. Yet at the same time, considering that the entire *Tripitaka Koreana* itself functioned as a talisman, Skanda's material presentation, depicted with red ink on a paper, a typical material composition of a paper talisman, along with the four talismans in this example, may have meant that Skanda's image itself was used (or at least perceived) as a talisman.

All these examples of Skanda suggest that he is not merely a Buddhist deity; these examples also suggest that the cult of Skanda in Korea lies at the crossroads of negotiations, conflations, and sometimes even confusions. Continuing its travel from India to China, and again from China to Korea, Skanda took different turns, and at the same time served similar mythological functions and communicated with local audiences in a distinctive visual language.

V. Conclusion

This article has shown that the rise of Skanda worship in the *Sinjung t'aenghwa* tradition during the late Chosŏn period was part of a long transformation across different times and spaces, from India and China all the way to Korea. The numerous boundary crossings and reincarnations of Skanda can be best examined in the context of Skanda worship's long-standing popularity across East Asia, as well as its connection with ancient Indian mythology and demonology. Some of the earlier aspects of the Indian or Chinese Skanda are translated into the Korean context,

representing trans-temporal and cross-cultural symbolic values. However, there are other elements that have been deemed untranslatable, and the local-specific imagination fills the temporal and spatial gap. The various examples of Skanda discussed above are not a matter of simple localization, but rather a constant process of cultural negotiation. Each step of the transformation of Skanda should also be understood as part of a long process of acculturation that lasted over two millennia and spanned the eastern half of Asia. In these infinite transformations and transpositions, the cult of Skanda gained vitality and is still vibrant in many parts of Asia and other parts of the world. With the increasing influence of Asian immigration, for instance, the statue of Skanda is commonly found in Chinese or Vietnamese Buddhist temples located in Asian immigrants' neighborhoods in major American cities like New York and Philadelphia. All these findings seem to suggest that Skanda worship functioned as a convergent force linking diverse religious ideas, as well as a point of divergence into heterogeneous cultural practices. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate the utility of a more nuanced transcultural approach to the study of Buddhist deities throughout East Asian Buddhist networks.

This analysis of Skanda is ultimately a case study to advocate for the significance of the *deva* deities as a crucial vector of different religious ideas and practices. Despite its seemingly “minor” status, Skanda freely cuts across different religious systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, shamanism and local religious traditions, constantly creating new facets and faces. Although they are often overlooked, when compared to bodhisattvas and other lofty beings, the *deva* deities were much closer to ordinary people, more appealing in terms of their promised power to guarantee worldly benefits than any of the other “major” divinities in traditional Buddhism. Mediated through iconography, these *deva* deities shape and are shaped by a network of ideas, symbols, and beliefs, creating a wide spectrum of identity and reality. More specifically, this analysis of Skanda lies not in the bipartite model often found in the traditional approach to the study of deities, such as Buddhist deities versus Hindu deities, or Buddhist deities versus local deities, or buddhas versus *kami*. The

versatility and plasticity of Skanda worship can be best described not by a binary framework, but rather in the tripartite approach whereby the interconnectedness of these three groups of deities—Buddhist divinities, Hindu gods, and local gods—highlights their underlying symbols and recurring functions as manifested in different times and places. To achieve this goal, focusing on the iconographical representations of deities has several compelling methodological advantages.

The spread of Buddhism across East Asia is closely linked to the circulation of sacred images. In the study of Buddhist deities, iconographic sources often are key, largely because an image is a portal through which symbols are expressed in one direction and religious ideas enter the image from the other.⁹⁴⁾ While operating as visual containers of Buddhist ideas and practices, images allow multiple cultural and religious influences to converge and create a unique, localized grouping of religious symbols and meanings. Mediated through images and rituals, as I have tried to show in the case of Skanda, these *deva* deities played a central role in a network of beliefs in East Asian Buddhism.

94) Except for a few studies, between the “image versus text” and “image as text” approaches, the “image as text” approach has not been fully recognized and explored in Buddhist Studies. For the major discussions on the centrality of Buddhist iconography in Buddhist Studies, see Faure 1998, 718-813. Also, Sharf 2001, 1-18. For a broader discussion of the function of image in religious contexts, see Morgan 2005, 48-74. For more theoretical analysis of the relationship between images and texts, see Mitchell 1986; Mitchell 1994.

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위태천의 다양한 변모: 한국불교 그리고 보다 넓은 아시아적 관점에서

김수정

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본고는 조선후기 신증행화에서 중요하게 부각된 위태천의 도상을 중심으로 하여, 한국 불교에서의 위태천 신앙에 대해 고찰한다. 보다 구체적으로, 한편으로는 한국 불교 내에서 어떻게 위태천 신앙의 변모해 왔는지에 대해 살펴보고, 이와 동시에 또 다른 한편으로는 지역적, 시간적 영역을 교차하며 위태천의 성격이 어떤 종교적 상징성을 갖고 기능해 왔는지를 다른 아시아 지역에서 보이는 스칸다의 예를 살펴봄(인도, 중앙 아시아, 중국, 일본) 비교 고찰한다. 이와 같은 분석을 통해, 공시적 관점에서 중국화된 위태천 신앙이 한국의 위태천 신앙과 도상에 큰 영향을 끼쳤고 조선시대 신증행화에서 중요한 성격으로 변모하는데 기여를 했지만, 통시적 관점에서 보았을 때는 고대 인도 스칸다에서부터 찾을 수 있는 위태천의 상징성과 종교적 역할 또한 조선후기 신증행화 속에서 찾을 수 있음을 밝힌다. 또한 이 논문은 위태천이 단순한 호법 신중의 하나로 기존에 이해되어 온 것과는 달리, 불교 뿐 아니라 한국의 다른 종교 전통, 그리고 아시아에서의 불교 전통 전체에서 볼 때, 중요한 신앙의 한 축을 이루었음을 살핀다.

주제어

위태천, 신증행화, 천부, 조선 불교, 동진보살, 동아시아 불교, 불교 신화

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