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Buddhist Paintings and Suryukjae, the Buddhist Ritual for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land

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Introduction

Suryukjae (水陸齋) is a major Korean Buddhist ritual intended to guide the souls of the departed to Paradise. Performance of the ritual, which had been transmitted to Korea from China during the Goryeo Dynasty (高麗, 918–1392), became widespread in the succeeding Joseon Dynasty (朝鮮, 1392–1910). As indicated by its name, which means ritual for the “deliverance of creatures of water and land,” the Suryukjae ritual brings together entities of opposite nature—the living and the dead, for example, and the enlightened (Buddhas and bodhisattvas) and the unenlightened (sentient beings). A ritual of equality and non-distinction, it features a symbolic, well-developed narrative supported by artistic, musical, and dance elements.

Suryukjae rituals performed early in the Joseon period can be interpreted as attempts by King Taejo (太祖, r. 1392–1398), founder of the Joseon Dynasty, to appease the souls of the Goryeo royal family members that he killed in the process of founding a new dynasty. The rituals also served to promote social cohesion and to solidify the foundations of the nation. For this reason, the Suryukjae ritual was frequently performed on a grand scale by state officials during the early Joseon period. Once Neo-Confucianism had been firmly established as the underlying ideology of the Joseon social order, however, this ritual was performed less frequently under state sponsorship, but it remained popular among the general public. Extant Suryukjae ritual manuals suggest that such texts were actively published throughout the nation from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century.

This article reconstructs the structure and arrangement of the Suryukjae ritual through the examination of relevant Buddhist paintings in the col-

lection of the National Museum of Korea. Most of the related paintings were acquired one-by-one beginning in the 1990s and, though related to the Suryukjae ritual, they are unrelated in date of creation and place of use. Even so, the various types of the Suryukjae-related paintings in the museum collection will play a significant role in future research and exhibitions, as the ritual is gaining renewed popularity today. An examination of those paintings that relate to each step of the Suryukjae ritual will deepen understanding of the ritual itself and the related artworks.

The Procedures and Narrative of the Suryukjae Ritual

Numerous ritual manuals describe the procedures of the Suryukjae ritual. Typically edited by monks, Suryukjae ritual manuals published in Korea are organized differently from those published in China. Major manuals from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include *Suryukjae mucha pyeongdeung jaeui chwaryo* (水陸無遮平等齋儀撮要, *Ritual for Water and Land as an Unobstructed, Equal Ritual*; hereafter “Chwaryo”)¹ and *Cheonji myeongyang suryuk jaeui chanyo* (天地冥陽水陸齋儀纂要, *Ritual for Heaven and Earth, the Netherworld and This World, and Water and Land*; hereafter “Chanyo”).² All of these records tell a similar story and assist in understanding the development of the Suryukjae narrative. Other ritual

¹ This paper relies on the version held by Muwisa Temple (無爲寺) in Gangjin, South Jeolla Province (1571), translated into modern Korean by Kim Dujae.

² This paper relies on the version held by Gapsa Temple (甲寺) in Gongju, South Chungcheong Province (1607), translated into modern Korean by Yim Jonguk.

manuals published in the eighteenth century, such as *Cheonji myeongyang suryuk jaeui beomeum sanbojip* (天地冥陽水陸齋儀梵音刪補集, *Collection of Sanskrit Sounds for the Ritual for Heaven and Earth, the Netherworld and This World, and Water and Land*; hereafter “Beomeum sanbojip”),³ include excerpts from various Suryukjae records. Though not a Suryukjae ritual manual, the nineteenth-century *Jakbeop gwigam* (作法龜鑑, *Model for the Performance of Rituals*) serves as an important historical reference on various Buddhist rituals and the litanies used. The major ritual manual from the twentieth century, *Seongmun uibeom* (釋門儀範, *Rules for Buddhist Rituals*) is similar in composition to *Jakbeop gwigam* but contains separate section on the Suryukjae ritual.

3 This paper relies on the version held by Jungheungsa Temple (重興寺) on Mt. Samgak in Yangju, Gyeonggi Province (1721), translated by Kim Dujae and the woodblock print version presumably from the same temple (1723), translated by Kim Sunmi.



Fig. 1. Siryeon (Ushering in on the palanquin), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

It is difficult to present a single, fixed liturgy for the Suryukjae ritual because procedures differ slightly according to the manual consulted and the chronological period involved (as changes occurred over time). To enhance understanding of the ritual, reference is made to two interpretations of the Suryukjae ritual that have been revived today: the ritual as performed at Jingwansa Temple (津寬寺) in Eunpyeong-gu, Seoul, and the ritual as performed at Samhwasa Temple (三和寺) in Samcheok, Gangwon Province. The procedures and narrative structure of these two contemporaneous interpretations of the Suryukjae ritual are as follows:

1. **Siryeon** (侍輦, **Escorting the deities on the palanquin**): Monks carry a palanquin outside the temple gate in order to escort to the ritual site the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, lonely spirits (孤魂), and other beings invited to participate in the rite (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Daeryeong (Greeting the spirits), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)



Fig. 3. Gwanyokso (Bathing place), Suryukjae held at Samhwasa Temple, Donghae (Author's photograph)



Fig. 4. Gwaebul iun (Setting up the gwaebul painting), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

2. **Daeryeong** (對靈, **Greeting the lonely spirits**): The lonely spirits are invoked and given an offering of tea. These spirits still retain the suffering and karma of past lives, which requires them to wait outside the inner gate of the temple (Fig. 2).

3. **Gwanyok** (灌浴, **Bathing**): Ceremonial cleansing of the spirits of the deceased to signify the washing away of past karma and suffering. Separate bathing places are prepared for male and female spirits, and for those of high rank and those of low rank. Bathing utensils are also laid out, including towels, willow branches (in place of toothbrushes), mirrors, paper clothes, and basins. The ritual manuals indicate that Buddhas and bodhisattvas were ceremonially bathed as a gesture of respect, rather than to wash away the suffering and karma of past lives (Fig. 3).



Fig. 5. Yeongsan jakpbeop (Vulture Peak rite), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)



Fig. 6. Sajadan (Rite for the Messengers of the Four Units of Time), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)



Fig. 7. Orodan (Opening the roads in the five directions), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)



Fig. 8. *Sangdan gwongong* (Offerings to the uppermost altar), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

4. *Gwaebul iun* (掛佛移運, **Transporting the hanging scroll**): In this rite, the *gwaebul* (掛佛), which is a large Buddhist hanging scroll intended for use in outdoor ceremonies, is carried to the ritual site to be installed on the platform, symbolizing both the arrival and the presence of the Buddha as the most important figure in the rite (Fig. 4).

5. *Yeongsan jakbeop* (靈山作法, **Vulture Peak rite**): This rite is a symbolic reenactment of Shakyamuni Buddha's sermon on the Vulture Peak in India. It comprises an invocation of the Buddhas Shakyamuni, Prabhutaratna, and Amitabha, and the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Mahasthamaprapta; a recitation of sutras; and the presentation of offerings to the deities (Fig. 5).



Fig. 9. *Jungdan gwongong* (Offerings to the middle altar), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

6. *Sajadan* (使者壇, **Rite for the Messengers of the Four Units of Time**): In this rite, the Messenger of the Years, the Messenger of the Months, the Messenger of the Days, and the Messenger of the Hours are invoked and implored to spread word to the beings of all levels of existence that the Suryukjae ritual is to be performed (Fig. 6).

7. *Orodan* (五路壇, **Opening the roads in five directions**): The Emperors of the Five Directions (South, North, East, West, and Center) are invoked and beseeched to open the roads in all five directions so that sentient beings of the land can reach the site of the Suryukjae ritual unobstructed (Fig. 7).

8. *Sangdan gwongong* (上壇勸供, **Offerings to the uppermost altar**): Buddhas, bodhisattvas, sages, and the Three Jewels of Buddhism (representing the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, or Monastic Community), who occupy the uppermost altar, are invoked and given offerings of food (Fig. 8).

9. *Jungdan gwongong* (中壇勸供, **Offerings to the middle altar**): The Three Bodhisattvas who occupy the middle altar—Divyagarbhah Bodhisattva and the retinue of heaven; Dharanimdhara and the retinue of earth; and Ksitigarbha and the retinue of the underworld—are invoked and given offerings of food (Fig. 9).

10. *Hadan sisik* (下壇施食, **Offerings to the lowermost altar**): The lonely spirits, who occupy the lowermost altar, are invoked and offered food (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. *Hadan sisik* (Feeding the lonely spirits at the lowermost altar), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

11. *Bongsong hoehyang* (奉送回向, **Dismissal**): When the ceremony has been completed, all the beings participating in Suryukjae ritual are dismissed. This is symbolically expressed by burning spirit tablets, banners, flowers, and other accoutrements used in the ritual (Fig. 11).

Buddhist Paintings and Suryukjae Rituals

Connection between Buddhist Paintings and Suryukjae Rituals

The close connection between Buddhist paintings and Suryukjae rituals is evinced by a number of Buddhist paintings that depict or directly relate to the contents of the ritual. Such paintings are not necessarily devoted exclusively to the Suryukjae ritual, so the Suryukjae ritual must be examined in relation to other Buddhist rituals. *Gwaebul*, the large hanging scrolls usually used in outdoor ceremonies, for example, were used in Suryukjae rituals as well as in such other large outdoor events as the Giujae (祈雨齋, rainmaking ritual), Yesujae (豫修齋, rite for purification of the body and spirit before death), Sasipgujae (四十九齋, rite for the 49th day after death), and Seongdojae (成道齋, commemoration of Buddha's enlightenment) (Lee Youngsook 2003, 42-45). The Amitabha Triad, Seven Buddhas, and lonely spirits who appear in Nectar Ritual paintings (甘露圖, *gamnodo*) are mentioned in Suryukjae manuals, but are also frequently mentioned in manuals for other rituals offering food to the souls of the deceased. It can therefore be assumed that Nectar Ritual paint-



Fig. 11. *Bongsong hoehyang* (Dismissal), Suryukjae held at Jingwansa Temple, Seoul (Author's photograph)

ings were used in Suryukjae ceremonies as well as in offering rituals of smaller scale. In short, not all Buddhist ritual paintings were used in Suryukjae ceremonies, nor were Suryukjae paintings used in all Buddhist rituals.

Suryukjae ceremonies are large in scale, involve numerous individuals, and require significant time and resources. The ritual encompasses many different rites for the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, souls of the deceased, and lonely spirits. An examination of Buddhist paintings in the context of the Suryukjae ritual is thus necessary for understanding Buddhist ritual paintings of the Joseon Dynasty. Apart from paintings, such ritual accoutrements as palanquins and spirit tablets also played an important role in the Suryukjae ritual, as briefly explained below.

Buddhist Paintings and Ritual Accoutrements Used in Suryukjae Rituals

1. Ushering in on the Palanquin (*Siryeon*), Greeting the Spirits (*Daeryeong*), and Bathing (*Gwanyok*)

1) Palanquin

Siryeon is the symbolic ushering in on a palanquin (輦) of the deities and spirits. The inscriptions on extant ritual palanquins—such as “upper jade palanquin” (上位玉輦), “middle palanquin” (中輦), and “lower palanquin” (下輦)—refer to the position of the entity within the palanquin during the rite (i.e., uppermost altar, middle altar, or lowermost altar), and indicate that the palanquins were divided into three types for the different altars, respectively. Although the collection of the National Museum of Korea lacks any such palanquins, a representative example of a

Buddhist ritual palanquin is preserved at Buryeongsa Temple (佛影寺) in Uljin, North Gyeongsang Province; this particular palanquin dates to 1670 (Fig. 12).

2) Painting of the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva

In Buddhist rites, when appropriate to invoke the souls of the deceased, the master of the rites calls to the souls who have been met by the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva (引路王菩薩) and requests that they pay their respects to the Three Jewels. In advance of appearing before the Three Jewels, however, the souls of the deceased require the intervention and assistance of the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva, who eventually will also guide them to Paradise.

Moved by equality, we offer this food without discrimination and hang the banner of the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva and recite the secret words as we invoke the spirits of the dead. We pray that with the power of the supernatural the crowds will gather at this site and taste the nectar and delectable food, and receive the precepts of the Bodhi tree... With one heart we invoke thee three times. With one heart we believe in and invoke the Great Soul-guiding Bodhisattva, carrying a jeweled parasol and wearing a flower garland, who guides clean souls to Paradise and the souls of the dead on the blue lotus platform. We pray that you will take pity on all sentient beings and descend on this site.

“今乃 運平等心 設食無遮 爲汝豎引路神幡 爲汝誦招魂密語 願承呪力 雲集道場 享甘露之羞 受苦提之戒法...謹



Fig. 12. Palanquin at Buryeongsa Temple, Uljin. 1670 (Cultural Heritage Administration)

秉一心 先陳三請 南無一心奉請 手擎寶蓋 身掛花鬘 導清魂於極樂界中 引亡靈向碧蓮臺畔 大聖引路王菩薩 摩訶薩 惟願慈悲 憐愍有情 降臨道場” (Yim Jonguk 2007, 89-90 and 247-248)

Typically symbolized by a ritual banner embroidered with his name (南無大聖引路王菩薩), the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva is occasionally depicted in paintings as well. The collection of the National Museum of Korea includes a painting entitled *Soul-guiding Bodhisattva*, which was acquired in 2010 (Fig. 13). Although usually depicted with a banner to guide the souls, in this painting, the Soul-guiding Bodhisattva clasps his hands together before his chest and is poised to move forward, flanked by the banners carried by the youthful monk and nun. Most of the text originally inscribed on the painting have been lost, but the characters “乾隆” (Qianlong) remain legible, indicating that the work dates to the Qianlong era (1736–1795) of China’s Qing dynasty (清, 1644–1912).



Fig. 13. *Soul-guiding Bodhisattva*. Joseon, 1736–1795. Color on silk, 55 × 37.6cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 14. Votive tablet on the altar, detail from *Nectar Ritual* at Buramsa Temple. Joseon, 1890. Color on silk, 165.5 × 195.0cm. *Buddhist Painting of Korea* vol. 33 (한국의 불화 33) (Seoul: Research Institute of Sungbo Cultural Heritage, 2004, Fig. 61)

3) Spirit Tablets and Votive Tablets

Though identical in appearance, spirit tablets (位牌) and votive tablets (願牌) have different functions. A spirit tablet symbolizes a particular subject according to the name inscribed on it—a deity or the soul of a deceased relative, for example—while a votive tablet is inscribed with prayers and wishes. Both spirit tablets and votive tablets are permanently enshrined on altars or are used in special ceremonies, such as the Suryukjae and other rituals.

According to Suryukjae ritual manuals, all three levels of beings can be symbolized with spirit tablets: the Buddhas and Three Jewels of the uppermost altar, the Three Bodhisattvas of the middle altar, and the lonely spirits and spirits of the deceased of the lowermost altar. Paintings of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lonely spirits could have served the same function, but portable symbolic devices were required in order to permit the subjects of the rituals to be moved for different rites and procedures, such as the invocation and the arrival of the subjects at the ritual, bathing, worship of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the dismissal. *Beomeum sanbojip*, a ritual manual published in 1721 at Jungheungsa Temple (重興寺) on Mt. Samgak, Seoul, contains various instructions indicating that the spirit tablets were physically carried and moved during the proceedings, such as “Take up the tablet of Buddha and enter the bathing room” (奉佛牌 入於浴室), “Take up the tablets of the Tripitaka Bodhisattvas and enter the bathing room” (奉三藏牌 入於浴室) and “Take up the tablet of the lonely spirits and move forward to

the food-offering altar” (侍位板 詣施食壇) (Kim Dujae 2012, 138, 147 and 155).

The National Museum of Korea possesses a tablet inscribed “十方三寶慈尊,” which translates into English as “Three Jewels of the ten directions” (Fig. 15). Often called the “Ritual Tablet of the Three Jewels,” this tablet symbolizes the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), the beings invoked on the uppermost altar in various Buddhist rites as an object of worship. Tongdosa Museum at Tongdosa Temple (通度寺聖寶博物館) in Yangsan, South Gyeongsang Province, has two spirit tablets of the Three Jewels; one is similar in shape to the tablet in the National Museum of Korea, and the other is dated to 1684. The same museum also has a spirit tablet bearing an inscription that reads “十類孤魂等衆,” a reference to the lonely spirits, which indicates that the tablet belonged on the lowermost altar.

Votive tablets often occur in sets of three and bear inscribed prayers for the longevity of the king (“主上殿下壽萬歲”), the queen (“王妃殿下壽齊年”), and the crown prince (“世子邸下壽千秋”). It is assumed that, under normal usage, these tablets were enshrined indoors on the altar and taken outdoors to the ritual altar only for special ceremonies. The 1890 *Nectar Ritual* painting of Buramsa Temple (佛巖寺) in Namyangju, Gyeonggi Province, depicts two votive tablets at the top of the ritual altar; it is assumed that those tablets bear inscribed prayers for the longevity of the king and queen (Fig. 14). The 1892 *Nectar Ritual* painting belonging to Bongeunsa Temple (奉恩寺), Seoul, depicts votive tables on the altar, the tablets offering prayers for the longevity of the king, queen, and crown prince as well as the queen dowager.

The collection of the National Museum of Korea includes the *Votive Tablet with Inscription Wishing for the Longevity of the King* (Fig. 16) and the *Votive Tablet with Inscription Wishing for the Longevity of the Crown Prince* (Fig. 17). An inscription on the underside of the pedestal of the votive tablet for the king dates the tablet to 1701.

2. Moving the Hanging Scroll (Gwaebul iun) and the Vulture Peak Rite (Yeongsan jakbeop)

Large hanging scroll paintings, or *gwaebul*, are featured in two parts of the Suryukjae ritual: the rite of carrying the hanging scroll to the area where the ritual will be performed and the Vulture Peak rite. Manuals devoted to the Suryukjae ritual generally

do not mention or describe these two procedures. Though not necessarily associated exclusively with the Suryukjae ritual, these procedures were performed as preparatory ceremonies before the ritual proper, particularly before the Suryukjae and Yesujae rituals.

The relevance of *gwaebul* paintings to the Suryukjae ritual is demonstrated by the inscriptions on the *Gwaebul* of Jeokcheonsa Temple (積川寺) in Cheongdo, North Gyeongsang Province (dated to 1695), and the *Gwaebul* of the Magoksa Temple (麻谷寺) in Gongju, South Chungcheong Province (dated to 1832). The inscription on the former states that a Suryukjae ritual was performed to commemorate the completion of the painting and that the painting was subsequently used in the rite. The inscription on the latter states that the painting was repaired in 1831 when the first story of the two-story Daeungbojeon (大雄寶殿), the main hall of the temple, was repaired, and that it was taken out again for use in the Suryukjae ritual in the fourth month of the following year (Kim Jeonghui 2004, 18-19). The National Museum of Korea owns the *Gwaebul* (dated to 1684) from Buseoksa Temple (浮石寺) in Yeongju, North Gyeongsang Province (Fig. 18).

3. Rite for the Messengers of the Four Units of Time (*Sajadan*) and the Rite for the Emperors of the Five Directions (*Orodan*)

Preparatory procedures performed before the Suryukjae ritual proper, the Rite for the Messengers of the Four Units of Time (*Sajadan*) and the Rite for the Emperors of the Five Directions (*Orodan*) are described in all Suryukjae manuals. Many extant paintings depicting the Messengers and the Emperors, the subjects of these rites, likely were used in the Suryukjae rituals.

The Messengers of the Four Units of Time bear a superficial resemblance to the Messengers from the Underworld—Jikbusaja (直符使者) and Gamjaesaja (監齊使者)—and thus the Messengers of the Four Units of Time have been perceived as messengers sent from the underworld to the homes of the dead to evaluate and confirm their deeds in life. Even so, the Messengers from the Underworld are usually depicted as a pair, while the four messengers always appear as a group in Suryukjae ritual manuals, suggesting that the Messengers of the Four Units of Time actually are distinct from the Messengers from the Underworld. In the litanies of Suryukjae rituals, the Messengers of the Four Units of Time are addressed as follows:

With one heart we call on the Messenger of Heaven and the Years,
With one heart we call on the Messenger of the Air and the Months,
With one heart we call on the Messenger of the



Fig. 15. Ritual Tablet of the Three Jewels of the Ten Directions. Joseon. Wood. Height: 41cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 16. Votive Tablet with Inscription Wishing for the Longevity of the King. Joseon, 1701. Wood. Height: 86cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 17. Votive Tablet with Inscription Wishing for the Longevity of the Crown Prince. Joseon, 1701. Wood. Height: 79.6cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 18. *Gwaebul* from Buseoksa Temple. Joseon, 1684. Color on silk, 925 × 577.5cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 19. *Messengers of the Four Units of Time*. Joseon, 1687. Color on silk, 110 x 120.5cm (National Museum of Korea)

Land and the Days,
With one heart we call on the Messenger of the
Underworld and the Hours.

“一心奉請 年直四天使者 一心奉請 月直空行使者 一心奉請 日直地行使者 一心奉請 時直琰魔使者” (Kim Dujae 2011, 584).

The Messengers of the Four Units of Time...have become messengers bearing a secret message from heaven to the human world... We ask that you now carry this notice to the underworld, riding on the clouds, and quickly convey the message.

“執天上之符文 作人間之捷使...更請從容 文牒幸謝於 賚持 雲程願希於馳赴” (Kim Dujae 2011, 522 and 524).

As we send this document we pray that with the power of the Three Jewels you will travel all over the world and do as we ask with all the sincerity of your hearts.

“發送啓文 願承三寶之威光 歷徧十方之世界 凡當所請 盡達至誠” (Yim Jonguk 2007, 41 and 290).

The Emperors of the Five Directions are the deities who control North, South, East, West, and Center. In

the litanies of Suryukjae rituals, they are addressed as follows:

With one heart we call on the Emperor of the East,
With one heart we call on the Emperor of the South,
With one heart we call on the Emperor of the West,
With one heart we call on the Emperor of the North,
With one heart we call on the Emperor of the Center.

“一心奉請 東方句芒輔弼 太皞之君 一心奉請 南方祝融 輔弼 炎帝之君 一心奉請 西方蓐收輔弼 少皞之君 一心奉請 北方玄冥輔弼 顓頊之君 一心奉請 中方飛廉輔弼 黃帝之君” (Kim Dujae 2011, 585-586).

If by chance the roads in the five directions are



Fig. 20. *Emperors of the Five Directions*. Late Joseon Dynasty. Color on silk, 87.2 x 61.2cm (National Museum of Korea)

not opened, we are concerned that it will be difficult for all sundry spirits to gather here... As the human world and heaven and hell, devils and asuras have not yet reached the level of saints, how can they possess majesty and divine powers? It is our concern that they will face obstacles and problems at every pass... We pray that as the deities controlling the five directions you will open wide all the doors leading to enlightenment.

“若不開於五路 恐難集於萬靈 由是 謹具香燈 先伸供養 切以 入天地獄 鬼畜修羅 未登聖位之流 豈有威神之力 經歷分野 慮有障違...惟願五方地主 五位神祇 大開方便之門” (Kim Dujae 2011, 526; Yim Jonguk 2007, 43 and 287-288)

As indicated by the texts above, at the beginning of the Suryukjae ritual the Messengers of the Four Units of Time carry a message to the underworld announcing that the ritual will be performed. Their names—Messenger of Heaven and the Years, Messenger of the Air and the Months, Messenger of the Land and the Days, and Messenger of the Underworld and the Hours—are symbolic of time and space. Also at the beginning of the ritual, the Emperors of the Five Directions open the roads in the five directions in order to enable all beings invited to the rite to attend freely. The five directions are symbolic of all directions. Therefore, the Messengers of the Four Units of Time and the Emperors of the Five Directions symbolize the universal and open characteristics of the Suryukjae ritual.

Paintings of the Messengers of the Four Units of Time and of the Emperors of the Five Directions were used in two preparatory procedures of the Suryukjae ritual: *Sajadan* and *Orodan*. Paintings on these themes first appeared in written records from the sixteenth century, but the oldest extant examples are the *Messengers of the Four Units of Time* and the *Emperors of the Five Directions*. Preserved at Gaesimsa Temple (開心寺) in Seosan, South Chungcheong Province, the two paintings, both of which date to 1676, were designated as Korean National Treasures in 2012. In general, each of the four messengers and five emperors is represented in a separate scroll; however, as with the Gaesimsa paintings, they are sometimes depicted in groups.

The National Museum of Korea possesses a paint-



Fig. 21. *Three Bodhisattvas*. Joseon, 18th century. Color on silk, 214.5 x 213cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 22. *Nectar Ritual*. Joseon, 16th century. Color on hemp, 240 x 246cm (National Museum of Korea)

ing titled *Messengers of the Four Units of Time*, which depicts all four figures together in one composition (Fig. 19). The scroll has sustained damage, and some pigment has flaked off; even so, it is not difficult to imagine the painting's original appearance. Infra-red photographic analysis of the traces of ink at the bot-

tom revealed an inscription reading “康〇二〇六年歲在丁卯七月日造成也,” which indicates that the painting was produced in 1687, using the Chinese Kangxi era (康熙, 1662-1722) for dating purposes. This is the earliest known painting representing the Messengers of the Four Units of Time; its grouping of all four messengers in a single composition further underscores its rarity. The National Museum of Korea collection also includes a painting of one of the Five Emperors, though the identity of the emperor depicted is uncertain (as it lacks both inscription and identifying attributes) (Fig. 20).

4. Uppermost Altar Rite (*Sangdan gwongong*)

The uppermost altar of the Suryukjae ritual is centered on the triad of Vairocana, Rocana and Sakya-muni Buddhas, as indicated by numerous *gwaebul* paintings featuring this triad. The uppermost altar rite focuses on worship of the Buddha, though there is some overlap with the Vulture Peak rite (*Yeongsan jakbeop*), which focuses on Shakyamuni. *Gwaebul* paintings featuring Shakyamuni’s sermon on Vulture Peak show the influence of the Vulture Peak rite. Occasionally, more than four Buddhas appear in one *gwaebul* painting, which likely reflects the people’s desire to include as many as possible of the diverse Buddhas that appear in the litanies of the rituals. The *Gwaebul* from Buseoksa Temple in the National Museum of Korea features numerous Buddhas, with Vairocana, Shakyamuni, Amitabha, and Bhaisajyaguru as central figures.

5. Middle Altar Rite (*Jungdan gwongong*)

The middle altar of the Suryukjae ritual depicts the Bodhisattvas of the Three Realms and their retinues. According to Suryukjae ritual manuals, the triad comprises Divyagarbhah (天藏菩薩, Heaven-store Bodhisattva), Dharanimdhara (持地菩薩, Earth-holding Bodhisattva), and Ksitigarbha (地藏菩薩, Earth-store Bodhisattva).

Suryukjae ritual manuals demonstrate that the following litany was recited after invoking the names of the Three Bodhisattvas (Kim Dujae 2011, 534 and 536; Yim Jonguk 2007, 68 and 269):

I take refuge in Divyagarbhah.
I take refuge in Dharanimdhara.
I take refuge in Ksitigarbha.



Fig. 23. *Nectar Ritual* from Boseoksa Temple. Joseon, 1649. Color on hemp, 220 × 235cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 24. *Nectar Ritual*. Joseon, 18th century. Color on hemp, 200.7 × 193cm (National Museum of Korea)

“南無天藏菩薩 南無地持菩薩 南無地藏菩薩” (Kim Dujae 2012, 145 and 150).

The painting of the Three Bodhisattvas is placed on the middle altar. The earliest known Korean painting of these bodhisattvas is *Divyagarbhah* dated to 1541, which is preserved at Tamon-ji Temple (多聞寺) in

Higashikurume, Tokyo, Japan. Some sixty Joseon-period paintings of the *Three Bodhisattvas* are known. In 2010 the National Museum of Korea acquired one work titled *Three Bodhisattvas* (Fig. 21). Any inscription that originally might have been associated with the painting has disappeared, so the exact date of production is impossible to know from textual sources, but the painting’s style and composition suggest that it likely was produced in the eighteenth century. Following the usual compositional organization, Divyagarbhah is featured in the middle, Dharanimdhara to the right, and Ksitigarbha to the left.

6. Lowermost Altar Rite (*Hadan Sisik*)

1) Nectar Ritual Painting

The Nectar Ritual painting is the one most closely associated with the lowermost altar. Many studies have examined Nectar Ritual paintings in relation to the litanies of the Suryukjae ritual. Descriptions in ritual manuals of the lowermost-altar subjects in the Suryukjae ritual reveal the close relationship to the iconography of Nectar Ritual paintings. The subjects of the lowermost altar listed in the *Chanyo* mostly coincide with the subjects found at the bottom of Nectar Ritual paintings (Yun Eunhui 2003, 29-32). Aside from those at the bottom, other iconographic elements in other areas of the paintings also show a close connection with the content of Suryukjae ritual manuals, making it clear that the Suryukjae ritual played a decisive role in establishing the iconography of Nectar Ritual paintings (Kim Seunghee 2009, 113-

154).

The National Museum of Korea owns three Nectar Ritual scrolls: a *Nectar Ritual* presumed to date to the sixteenth century, donated by Ejima Kodo (江島孝導) in 2010 (Fig. 22); a *Nectar Ritual* from Boseoksa Temple (寶石寺) in Geumsan, South Chungcheong Province, which bears an inscription dated to 1649 (Fig. 23); and a *Nectar Ritual*, believed to date to the eighteenth century (Fig. 24).

2) Paintings of the Five Buddhas and the Seven Buddhas

The Five Buddhas and the Seven Buddhas appearing on the uppermost altar of Nectar Ritual paintings are represented by banners depicting the same figures in the Suryukjae ritual. References to the invocation of the Five Buddhas and the Seven Buddhas occur in all ritual manuals and litanies for offering food to the spirits at the lowermost altar. The role of these deities is to provide nectar to lonely spirits in order to save them and to lead them to rebirth in Paradise. Their names and functions are listed in the table below.

The Five Buddhas painting preserved at Tongdosa Temple and the Seven Buddhas scroll preserved at Namjangsa Temple (南長寺) in Sangju, North Gyeongsang Province, are exceptional examples of full sets of Buddhas. The National Museum of Korea has separate paintings of several of the Buddhas but does not own a full set of either group. The museum collection includes one *Gwangbaksin Buddha* (Fig. 25), and one each of *Boseung Buddha* (Fig. 26) and *Ipo-oe Buddha* (Fig. 27) from a set of the Seven Buddhas. In 2008 the National Museum of Korea purchased a painting of *Myosaeksin Buddha* (Fig. 28), and in 2013 it acquired the 1806 painting of *Dabo Buddha* (Fig. 29) from the same set of Seven Buddhas. These two paintings are of the approximately same size and style as the painting of *Boseung Buddha* (Fig. 30) in the Tongdosa Museum. The inscriptions on the paintings prove that the same artists were involved in the production of all three works, thus confirming that these three paintings, all found in different places, originally belonged to the same set. The inscription on the newly acquired *Dabo Buddha* indicates that it was produced in 1806.

Acquired in 2010, the most complete set in the National Museum of Korea includes four of the Seven Buddhas—Boseung, Gwangbaksin, Ipo-oe and

Category		Name	Function
Seven Buddhas	Five Buddhas	Dabo Buddha (多寶如來, Prabhutaratna, Abundant Treasures Buddha)	Helps lonely spirits break the chain of greed and receive the Buddha's teachings as blessings and virtue
		Myosaeksin Buddha (妙色身如來, Surupakaya, Fine Form Body Buddha)	Removes the ugliness from lonely spirits so that they may obtain a perfect appearance
		Gwangbaksin Buddha (廣博身如來, Vipulakaya, Broad and Extensive Body Buddha)	Helps sentient beings still in the samsara cycle of transmigration, or birth and rebirth, to free themselves of their bodies and realize that they are free and unobstructed beings
		Ipo-oe Buddha (離怖畏如來, Abhayamkara, Buddha Freed from Fear)	Removes all fears so that the lonely spirits may have the joy of reaching Nirvana
		Gamnowang Buddha (甘露王如來, Amrtaraja)	Opens the mouths and throats of lonely spirits so that they may taste the nectar
		Boseung Buddha (寶昇如來, Ratnaketu, Jewel-born Buddha)	Leads spirits to leave unwanted paths as they will on the cycle of transmigration
		Amitabha Buddha (阿彌陀如來)	Enables sentient beings to reach Nirvana and enter Paradise as they will

Table 1. Names and Functions of the Five Buddhas and the Seven Buddhas



Fig. 25. *Gwangbaksin Buddha*. Late Joseon Dynasty. Color on paper, 120 x 48.5cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 26. *Boseung Buddha*. Late Joseon Dynasty. Color on paper, 102.7 x 48.2cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 27. *Ipo-oe Buddha*. Late Joseon Dynasty. Color on paper, 100.3 x 46.1cm (National Museum of Korea)

Gamnowang Buddhas (Figs. 31-34). The inscription on *Gamnowang Buddha* (“八金剛四菩薩”) shows that the Seven Buddhas were painted at the same time as a set of the Eight Vajra Guardians and that of the Four Bodhisattvas.

3) Eight Vajra Guardians and Four Bodhisattvas

The Eight Vajra Guardians are mentioned in the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛般若波羅蜜經) as guardians of people upholding and reciting the sutra. Among the Buddhist ritual paintings discovered at Gaesimsa Temple, *Eight Vajra Guardians* produced in 1772 bears an inscription that, in part, translates “When this *gwaebul* was painted, among the guardian deities Brahma, Sakra Devanam Indra, the Eight Vajra Guardians, and the Four Bodhisattvas...” (“掛佛幀造成時 擁護神衆 大梵帝釋 八大金剛 四位菩薩...”), which

indicates that smaller paintings of these guardian deities were produced at the same time as the *gwaebul* for large-scale outdoor rituals like the Suryukjae ritual. In 2010, the National Museum of Korea acquired three of the Eight Vajra Guardians: *Hwangsugu* (Vajra of All Wish Fulfillment) (Fig. 35), *Baekjeongsu* (Vajra of Removing All Troubles) (Fig. 36), and *Jeokseonghwa* (Vajra of Penetrating Brightness) (Fig. 37). These three paintings appear to be part of the same set as the painting of an unnamed vajra deity in the collection of Dongguk University Museum, Seoul (Fig. 38). The National Museum of Korea also houses two paintings from a set of the *Eight Vajra Guardians* (Figs. 39 and 40) and two from a set of the *Four Bodhisattvas* (Figs. 41 and 42).



Fig. 28. *Myosaeksin Buddha*. Joseon, Color on silk, 1806. 139 x 68cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 29. *Dabo Buddha*. Joseon, 1806. Color on silk, 122 x 58cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 30. *Boseung Buddha*. Joseon, 1806. Color on silk, 122 x 62cm. Tongdosa Museum (*Buddhist Painting of Korea* vol. 2 (한국의 불화 2) (Seoul: Research Institute of Sungbo Cultural Heritage, 1996, Fig. 75)

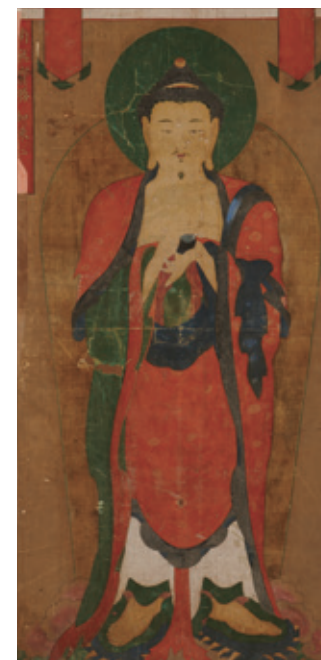


Fig. 31. *Boseung Buddha*. Joseon, 18th-19th century. Color on silk, 110 x 54cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 32. *Gwangbaksin Buddha*. Joseon, 18th-19th century. Color on silk, 110 x 54cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 33. *Ipo-oe Buddha*. Joseon, 18th-19th century. Color on silk, 110 x 54cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 34. *Gamnowang Buddha*. Joseon, 18th-19th century. Color on silk, 110 x 54cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 35. Eight Vajra Guardians (Hwang-sugu). Joseon, 18th–19th century. Color on paper, 99 × 60cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 36. Eight Vajra Guardians (Baekjeongsu). Joseon, 18th–19th century. Color on paper, 99 × 60cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 37. Eight Vajra Guardians (Jeok-seonghwa). Joseon, 18th–19th century. Color on paper, 99 × 60cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 38. Eight Vajra Guardians. Joseon, 18th–19th century. Color on paper, 100 × 61cm. Dongguk University Museum. *Buddhist Painting of Korea* vol. 18 (한국의 불화 8) (Seoul: Research Institute of Sungbo Cultural Heritage, 1996, Fig. 47)

Reconstruction of the Suryukjae Ritual

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the Suryukjae ritual was performed in the Joseon Dynasty and how it might have appeared; even so, it is possible to reconstruct, at least to some extent, the arrangement of the ritual site according to charts found in ritual manuals and temple layout plans from the time the

Suryukjae ritual was most widely performed.

The following organizational charts from the *Beomeum sanbojip* represent the basic source of information: “Organizational Chart of the Seventeen Altars for Suryukjae Over Three Days and Three Nights” from the 1721 version of Jungheungsa Temple and “Organizational Chart of the Twelve Altars for Suryukjae Over Three Days and Three



Fig. 39. Eight Vajra Guardians. Joseon, 19th–20th century. Color on paper, 123 × 67cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 40. Eight Vajra Guardians. Joseon, 19th–20th century. Color on paper, 123 × 67cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 41. Four Bodhisattvas. Joseon, 19th–20th century. Color on paper, 118 × 67cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 42. Four Bodhisattvas. Joseon, 19th–20th century. Color on paper, 118 × 67cm (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 43. Uppermost, middle and lowermost altars in “Organization Chart of the Twelve Altars for Suryukjae over Three Days and Three Nights” (志磐三晝夜十二壇排設之圖). Joseon. *Compilation of Buddhist Rituals and Relevant Records of Korea* vol. 3 (한국불교의례자료총서 3권) (Seoul: Samseongam, 1993, p. 102)

Nights” from the 1739 version of Dorimsa Temple in Gokseong, South Jeolla Province (Fig. 43). In these charts, the uppermost, middle, and lowermost altars are all labeled as such. Though the deities in the middle altar differ from the Three Bodhisattvas typically associated with the middle altar of the Suryukjae ritual, the charts show consistency with the traditional arrangement of Buddhist ritual altars: uppermost altar in the north, middle altar in the

east, and lowermost altar in the south, with the “inner gate” placed in the center and dividing the space. The uppermost and middle altars are inside the inner gate and thus are located in the purified world. Outside the inner gate are the altar of Ucchusma Vajra, where the unclean are purified, as well as the altars of guardian deities, such as the Vidyaraja (明王, Wisdom King), the Four Heavenly Kings, Indra, and the Eight Classes of Divine Beings (八部衆), all encir-

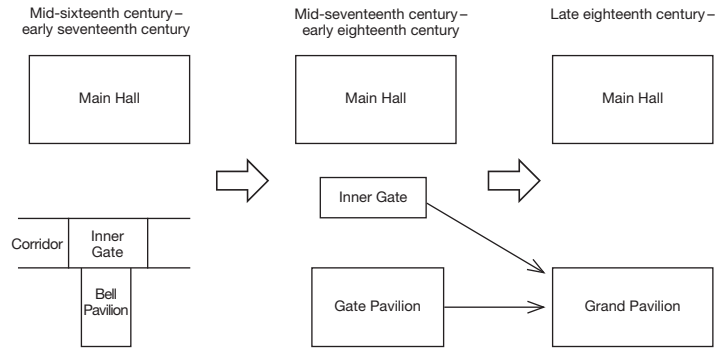


Fig. 44. Changes in the arrangement of the central temple area in the Joseon Dynasty according to changes in outdoor rites. *Nature and Significance of Buddhist Architecture of the Second Half of the Joseon Dynasty* (조선후반기 불교건축의 성격과 의미) (Seoul: Yonsei University, 2010, Fig. 36)

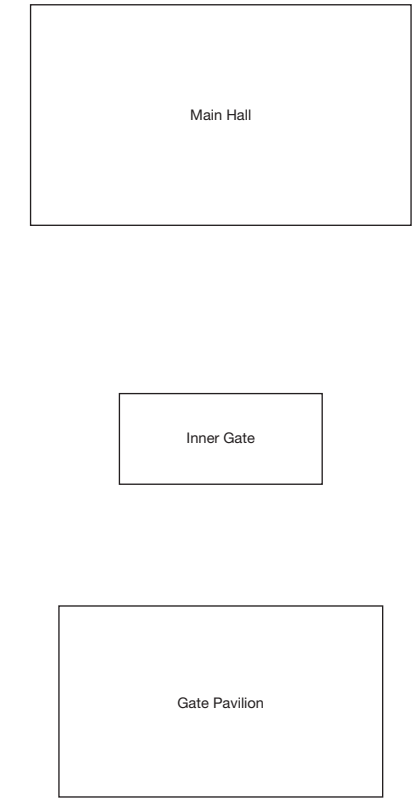


Fig. 45. Heungguksa Temple with an inner gate in front of the main hall: 1) Daeungjeon (main hall); 2) Beopwangmun Gate (1642); 3) Bonghwaru Pavilion (1729); 4) Cheongwangmun Gate. *History of Architecture* (건축역사연구) 62 (Seoul: Korean Association of Architectural History, 2009, Fig. 5)

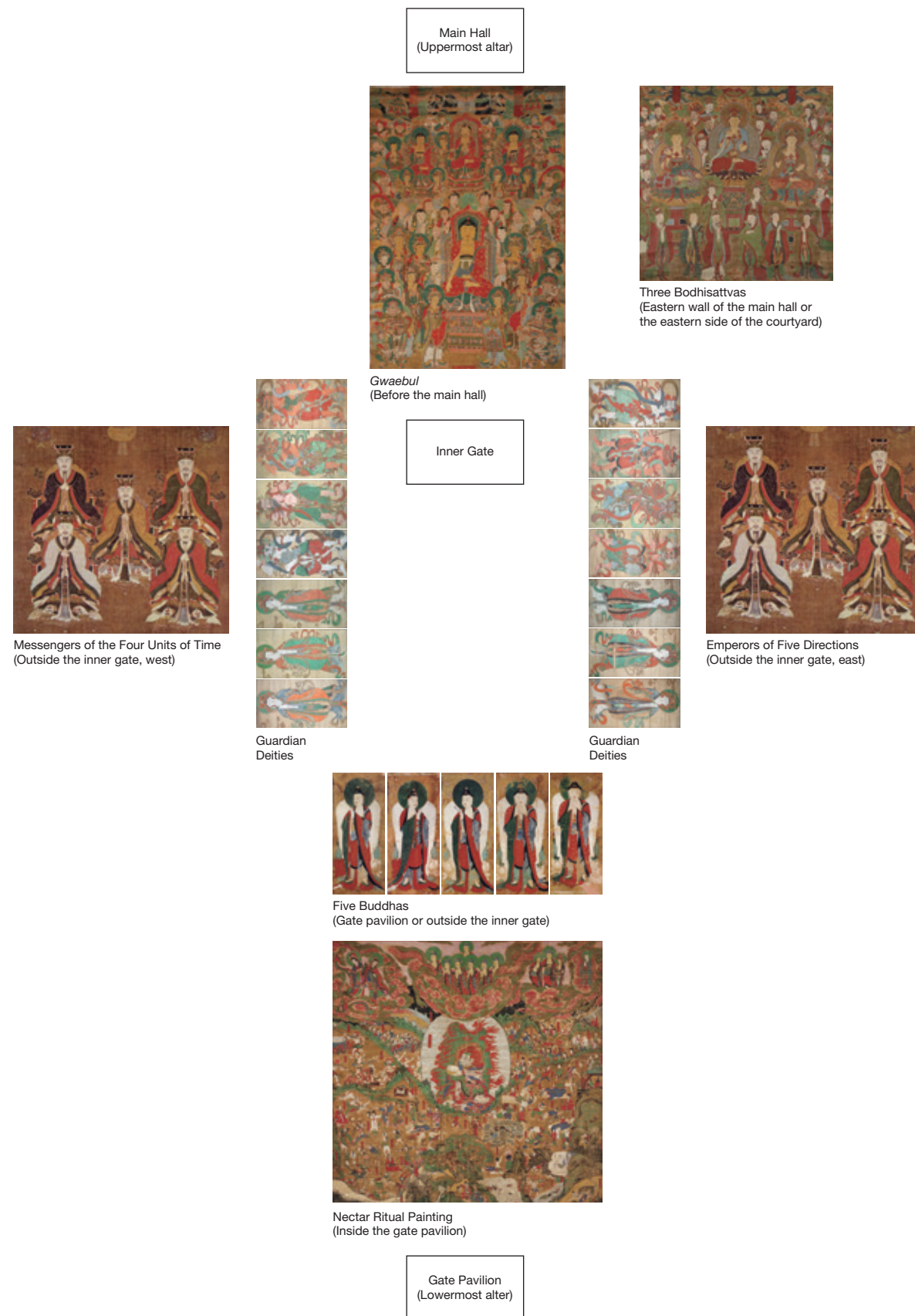


Fig. 46. Recreation of the Suryukjae ritual site

cling the central space. Outside the inner gate and to its left and right are the altars of the Messengers of the Four Units of Time and the Emperors of the Five Directions. To the south is the lowermost altar, which is inscribed with a phrase that translates “All the lonely spirits in the world who died an unfortunate death before their time” and is flanked by altars for parents and for members of the royal family, bearing inscriptions stating “spirits of parents” and “spirits of kings and queens,” respectively. This indicates that the deceased parents and the deceased members of the royal family were counted among the lonely spirits of the lowermost altar, that they needed guidance to reach Paradise, and that they may have comprised part of the lowermost altar as indicated in Nectar Ritual paintings.

In these organizational charts, only the central courtyard of the temple is recognizable, and the names of the temple halls are barely seen. The inner gate at the center may be key to understanding the structure of the ritual site. Research in architectural history indicates that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a gate—a gate not found in contemporary Buddhist temple layouts—stood in the central courtyard in front of the main hall when Suryukjae rituals were performed, and that the main hall, inner gate, and gate-pavilion were all aligned one behind the other (Figs. 44 and 45) (Hong Byeonghwa 2010, 43-76 and 116-131). A representation of the Buddha likely appeared in the main hall, or perhaps a *gwaebul* painting was suspended in front of the main hall, that arrangement constituting the uppermost altar; the eastern wall of the main hall or the eastern side of the courtyard served as the middle altar with a painting of the Three Buddhas; and the gate-pavilion with a Nectar Ritual painting served as the lowermost altar (Fig. 46).

When used today, Nectar Ritual paintings typically appear in the main hall of a temple, but records show that they were also hung in elevated pavilions or in bell pavilions in the past. For instance, a *Nectar Ritual* painting (dated to 1741) was hung in the Bonghwangru (鳳凰樓, Phoenix Pavilion) of Heungguksa Temple (興國寺) in Yecheon, Gyeonggi Province; a *Nectar Ritual* painting (1765) was hung in the Manseru (萬歲樓, Pavilion of Ten Thousand Years) of Bongjeongsang Temple (鳳停寺) in Andong, North Gyeongsang Province; such a painting (1896) was hung in the Jonggak (鐘閣, Bell Pavilion) of Dongh-

was Temple (桐華寺) in Daegu; and a *Nectar Ritual* painting (1900) was displayed in the Manseru (萬歲樓) of Tongdosa Temple. These records also indirectly indicate the location of the lowermost altar at these temples during the performance of the Suryukjae ritual and other large outdoor ceremonies. The Buddhist painter Seokjeong (石鼎, 1928–2012) said, “These days, Nectar Ritual paintings are hung on a side wall of the main hall, but in the past they were hung on the elevated pavilion facing the main hall. If the hall was small, the rites were held on the elevated pavilion facing the main hall and the lonely spirits were led to Paradise with a Nectar Ritual painting on the side wall of the pavilion.” His statement also helps in determining the location of the Nectar Ritual painting at the Suryukjae ritual site (Seokjeong 1995, 245).

Outside the inner gate, the altars to the left and right feature paintings of the Messengers of the Four Units of Time and the Emperors of the Five Directions. There is no exact correlation between the names of the guardian deities on the charts and the figures on extant Buddhist paintings: even so, it can be assumed that paintings of Indra, the Eight Vajra Guardians, and the Four Bodhisattvas surrounded the area outside the inner gate. Because the Five Buddhas and Seven Buddhas were invoked at the lowermost altar, paintings of them would have hung in the elevated pavilion outside the inner gate where the lowermost altar was located or in another part of the courtyard outside the inner gate.

Conclusion

The article examined the connection between Buddhist paintings and the Suryukjae ritual, one of the major Buddhist rituals for guiding souls to heaven; the study was based on works in the collection of National Museum of Korea. In addition, it reexamined the role and placement of the paintings used in the Suryukjae ritual in light of charts in ritual books and temple layout plans.

The Suryukjae ritual is both a religious ceremony and a majestic artistic performance with a structured narrative that could last for several days and nights. In this ritual, Buddhist paintings helped participants visualize the mutual exchanges between the invisible spirits and deities. The varied Buddhist paintings,

each representing a distinct subject, are unified in the context of the Suryukjae ritual to create a holistic narrative. This interesting and useful perspective on Joseon Buddhist paintings offered by the Suryukjae ritual is expected to increase the opportunities for further research. ㄸ

TRANSLATED BY CHO YOONJUNG

This paper is an abridged and revised English version of “Suryukjae Ritual and Buddhist Paintings from the Collection of the National Museum of Korea,” previously published in 2014 in *Dongwon Academic Essays* (동원학술논문집), 15.

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