

# State-Sponsored Maitreya Cult and the *Shouluo Biqu Jing* A Case of a Transmission of a Heterodoxy to Korea

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**Abstract** In this paper, the author analyses the apocryphal text *Shouluo biqu jing*, centred around the saviour bodhisattva Yueguang Tongzi (Candraprabhākumāra in Sanskrit). It is possible that this text was written in Silla, with some connection with its royalty and the *hwarang* group. This paper confronts this hypothesis with other ones that connect it to some Sui-Tang millenarian movements. Chosen methodology is the historical and philological analysis. The conclusion is that the text was likely written in China, but it possibly circulated in Korean Peninsula. The text is probably the result of composition and manipulation.

**Keywords** Buddhism. Daoism. Millenarism. Maitreya. Candraprabhākumāra. Yueguang Tongzi. Silla. Paekche. Sui dynasty. Tang dynasty. Nanyue Huisi. Dunhuang. Hwarang.

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## 1 Who is Prince Moonlight?

Originally, Candraprabhākumāra was a minor figure, then he shared many characteristics with Maitreya: he became an eschatological character, with a role of a saviour, presented as a guarantor of salvation. Zürcher (1982) made an extensive study of this bodhisattva along with other scholars in a wider perspective (Seiwert 2003). These studies can be summarised as follows: in the early apologetic sutras, this bodhisattva had a minor role, however he later become associated with Maitreya, so that in the end many aspects of the Buddha of the future were translated to him as well. When this happened, Yueguang Tongzi 月光童子 (Skt.: *Candraprabhākumāra*) was so popular in China that some emperors proclaimed themselves to be his rebirth. The reason is that in almost every version of his story it is said he would have returned at the end of times in China as a peace-bringing bodhisattva. However, it was more common that Yueguang Tongzi was adopted by popular, heterodox cults that started violent revolts justified them with full-fledge millenarian movements.

A brief summary of the textual history of this character will follow.

The main source of this character are three texts of Indian origin: the *Yueguang tongzi jing* 月光童子經 (Sūtra on Candraprabhākumāra) of the late third century, the *Shenri jing* 申日經 (Sūtra on Śrīgupta) of the fifth century circa and the *Shenri er ben jing* 申日兒本經 (Sūtra on the Origins of the Śrīgupta's Son), written in year 440. The *Yueguang tongzi jing* was translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (233-310), the *Shenri er ben jing* is a recension by Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394-468), while the *Shenri jing* is anonymous. All these texts are essentially an apologetic tale (*avadāna*) and originally had nothing to do with millenarianism. They all narrate about a son, Candraprabhā, who tried to dissuade his father, Śrīgupta, from hurting the Buddha, ending in a miracle and a conversion. Only later, in the anonymous *Shenri jing*, was added a prophecy about Candraprabhā's future Buddhahood in the lands of Cīn[a] *Qinguo* 秦國.

The second mention we have is an "Ode to Candraprabhākumāra" written by the monk and Xuanxue philosopher Zhi Dun 支遁 (314-366) in his series of thirteen obscure poems. In this ode it is said that Yueguang Tongzi is famous in China ("His handsome appearance flourished in the Indian lands and his fame spread in the Crimson Regions" *yingzi xiu Qianzhu mingbo Chixian xiang* 英姿秀乾竺名播赤縣鄉), but no canonical text among the ones cited before is mentioned.

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That makes us suppose there already was some sectarian cult of sorts, since Candraprabhākumāra is also paired in this mention with Mañjuśrī, Maitreya and Vimalakīrti.<sup>1</sup>

Almost contemporary to Zhi Dun, we can see in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 a fragment of a letter to the famous monk Dao'an 道安 (312-381) written by Xi Zuochi 習鑿齒 in the year 365. In this letter the manifestation of Yueguang Tongzi is mentioned, along with the descent to earth of a supernatural alms bowl ("Yueguang will appear and the sacred alms bowl will descent consequently" *Yueguang jiang chu lingbo ying jiang* 月光將出靈鉢應降).<sup>2</sup> The theme of the sacred alms bowl of Gautama is tied to Maitreya and so in an indirect way to Candraprabhākumāra as well. Without any other previous material, the simplest hypothesis possible is that Zuochi was referring to a version of the *Shenri jing* now lost. There are also some fragments of the lost *Qingjing faxing jing* 清淨法行經, maybe anterior to the last mention: in this text it is said that Yueguang Tongzi was Yan Hui 顏回, one of the pupils of Confucius. This text also provides evidence for how the connection between Candraprabhākumāra and China was already taken for granted.

The rebellion of Faqing 法慶 is likely the most consequential event tied to this figure. According to the *Weishu*, the rebellion started when Faqing, a man of Jizhou 冀州, started preaching heterodox teaching in the 515. Faqing attracted another man of Bohai commandery 勃海: Li Guibo 李歸伯. Faqing was proclaimed by Guibo "bodhisattvas in the stages of the ten abodes" (Skt.: *daśa-bhūmi-sthitā bodhisattvāḥ*, *shizhu pusa* 十住菩薩), "demon-pacifying commander" (*pingmo jun-si* 平魔軍司) and "king who rectify the Han" (*zhenghanwang* 定漢王), while Li Guibo named himself *Dasheng* 大乘 ('Mahāyāna'). The two men gathered many followers in the Hebei and preached that, by killing a man, one would have obtained the grade of 'first abode's bodhisattva', while by killing ten men one would have become a 'bodhisattvas in the stages of the ten abodes'. They also stupefied their followers, so they did not recognise friends and family. During the revolt, they killed monks and nuns, destroying Buddhist temples and scriptures. Their motto was "a new Buddha appeared; he will eradicate the old demons". Although that they succeeded in killing a local lord, they were crushed by the army of Yuan Yao 元遙. The revolt was therefore suppressed and the head of the movement executed. Remnants of the sect tried again a revolt in the year 517, in the city of Yingzhou 瀛州, but they were ultimately suppressed too.<sup>3</sup> The Fa-

1 *Guang hongming ji*, book 15: "Ode to Candraprabhākumāra".

2 *Gaoseng Zhuan*, book 16: section on vows 5.

3 *Wei shu*, book 12: Chronicles of Emperors 9: Account of Emperor Suzong (Xiaoming); *Wei shu*, book 22: Biographies 7 - first part: Emperor Jinmu and twelve kings; *Wei*

qing slogan was evidently referring to Maitreya, and his doctrine resembles that of the now lost *Mile chengfo fumo jing* 彌勒成佛伏魔經 (Sūtra on Maitreya Attaining Buddhahood and the Subjugating Demons), text mentioned in the Sui catalogue *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 [T no. 2146, 55.0126c11]. The association of monks and nuns to demons is, on the other hand, directly tied to Yueguang Tongzi: in the *Foshuo famiejin jing* 佛說法滅盡經, a Dunhuang text, it is said that during the *mofa* the demons will transform themselves into monks to destroy the *Dharma*. Another Dunhuang text, the *Puxianpusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩說證明經 says that monks and nuns are in the last category of the “eight kinds of men” and that Maitreya will punish who will try to dishonour the *Dharma*. Generally, the theme of corruption is strictly tied to that of millenarian figures like Candraprabhākumāra (Zürcher 1982, 21-2).

Though indirect, there is also some mentions of this bodhisattva that tie him to the Buddha alms bowl legends. It is worth also noticing that this kind of narratives lies in a limbo, since it is never explicitly said they were either heterodox or orthodox. All the following mentions are contained in the *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集,<sup>4</sup> written by the monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518):

The *Guan Yueguangpusa ji yijuan* 觀月光菩薩記一卷 (Prophecy on the Visualisation of the Bodhisattva Candraprabhākumāra in One Scroll). Now entirely lost.

The *Fobo ji* 佛鉢記 (Prophecy on the Buddha’s Bowl) or *Fobo jing* 佛鉢經 (Sūtra on the Buddha’s Bowl) in the Korean recension. The text is no longer extant, but Sengyou reports that it “prophesies the deluge of the *jianshen* year and the manifestation of the Yueguang the bodhisattva” *ji jianshen nian dashui ji Yueguang pusa chushi* 記甲申年大水及月光菩薩出事. It was also different from the *Jiashen nian hongzaidashui jing* 甲申年洪災大水經 (Sūtra on the Great Calamities and Deluges of the *jianshen* Year), mentioned in the Tang’s *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 [T no. 2154, 55.0673a04(00)].

The *Mile xiao jiao yijuan* 彌勒下教一卷 (Sūtra on Maitreya Descending to Teach [the Dharma] in One Scroll), appendix to the *Boji* 在鉢記後 (Prophecy of the Bowl). This text is now entirely lost too.

Regarding the adoption of this cult by the State, the first case among emperors was Sui Wendi 隋文帝 (r. 581-604): in 583, the emperor commissioned the Kashmiri monk Narendrayāśas 那連提耶舍 (516-589) an interpolation within the *Dehu zhanzhe jing* 德護長者經

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*shu*, book 96: Cruel Officials 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Chu sanzang jiji*, book 3: Newly Collected Doubt Sutras, Forgeries and Miscellaneous Records 3.

(Sūtra on Śrīgupta the householder), one of the original texts that marks the beginning of the Candraprabhākumāra cult. In this interpolation it is said that, during the time of the 'End-of-the-Dharma', Candraprabhākumāra will appear in the lands of Great Sui 大隋國 as a king protector of Buddhism. He will be named Daxing 大行, make the *Dharma* prosper and will honour the Siddhartha Gautama's alms bowl, at the time took from Kashgar to Sui (Shale 沙勒, variation of the more common Shule 疏勒). Daxing will also patronise the translation and diffusion of Buddhist texts in all his kingdom. The direct allusion to the emperor here, lies in the name of the Candraprabhākumāra rebirth: Daxing in the text recalls the name of the temple Daxingshan 大興善寺, the capitol's temple when Narendrayaśas was invited by the emperor to translate the *Dehu zhanzhe jing*. Another direct allusion lays in the character of this mythical king, based on the actions of Wendi himself, who, in 601, built temples all over his empire on the model of Aśoka (Zürcher 1982, 26).

The case of Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705) is even more indicative: as it is well known, the empress tried to create a new dynasty under the name of Zhou 周 or Southern Zhou 南周, legitimating herself as a female bodhisattva. An important tool of this project was the *Mahāmeghasūtra* (Ch.: *Dayun jing*, Kr: *Tae'un-gyōng* 大雲經): allegedly, in 690, the year of the empress coronation, she commissioned a group of *bhadanta* (Ch.: *dade* 大德 or *potantuo* 婆檀陀 'virtuous monks') to write a commentary to this sutra, titled *Commentary on the Divine August Empress Receiving Prophecy of Buddhahood in the Mahāmeghasūtra* (*Dayun jing shenhuang shouji yishu* 大雲經神皇授記義疏). Since probably the empress was identified with Maitreya, or at least believed to be both a saviour bodhisattva and a cakravartin, this was to justify her title. Another interpolation likely commissioned by Wu Zetian was that found in the *Ratnameghasūtra* (Ch.: *Baoyun jing*, Kor.: *Poyun-gyōng* 寶雲經) in the translation of Dharmaruci 達摩流支 / Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (d. 727).<sup>5</sup> In this long interpolation, Candraprabhākumāra appears in Mahācīna 摩訶支那國 (Great China) as a female ruler, she will bring peace to the lands and prosperity to Buddhism, until she'll return to the Tuṣita Heaven along with Maitreya (Zürcher 1982, 26-7; Seiwert 2003, 111-60; Jülch 2016, 7-14).<sup>6</sup>

Until recent times, we had only indirect mentions to the content of texts regarding this bodhisattva and even when the mentions are direct, Candraprabhākumāra is not originally the main protagonist

<sup>5</sup> Not to be confused with the homonym Bodhiruci, the sixth century translator. His previous temple name was Dharmaruci, then changed in Bodhiruci by the Wu Zetian between 693-95 (Forte 1976, 71 no. 5).

<sup>6</sup> The details of the Wu Zetian's case were in-depth analysed by Forte (1976, 3-171).

of the story, nor the text itself is totally built around him. However, all this changed when the Dunhuang grottoes' libraries were discovered. At present time, we can count three primary texts: the *Shouluo biqu jing* 首羅比丘經 (Sūtra on the Monk Shouluo),<sup>7</sup> the *Famiejing jing* 說法滅盡經 (Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma) and the *Puxianpusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩說證明經 (Sūtra on the Realisation of Confirmation of the Understanding Told by Samantabhadra), from here on simply *Zhengming jing*. Among these texts, the *Shouluo biqu jing* - from here on simply *Shouluo jing* - is the only one portraying Candraprabhākumāra as the main protagonist of the narrative, while in the *Famiejing jing* and *Zhengming jing* he is as a helper of Maitreya. The *Shouluo jing* has many elements in common with the other two, but the *Famiejing jing* does not always share common elements with the *Zhengming jing*.

Erich Zürcher (1982) dates the *Shouluo biqu jing* to the sixth century, between 518 and 589, tying it to religious revolts. On the other hand, Seiwert states that the text circulated from sixth century to the end of Tang dynasty among sects of lay devotees. These sects were led by charismatic yet marginal monks, or even not fully ordained lay people, and were initially related to some rebellion, before being tamed by the State repression. Basing on the geographical accounts mentioned in the narratives, Mohan Pankaj (2001) states that the text was written in Silla in the sixth-seventh centuries. The Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma was likely written before 514, basing on the count of its first mention, and was also the only one of the three that was considered canonical until the sixth century: Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) included it extensively in his *Shijia pu* 釋迦譜 [T no. 2040, 50.0001a03-0084b10] and Nanyue Huisi 南嶽慧思 (515-577) cited it in his *Nanyuesi da chanshi lishi yuanwen* 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文 (Woves Text), adding an explicit reference of Candraprabhākumāra rebirth in China (Zhendanguo 真丹國), a detail missing in the current version of the text.<sup>8</sup> The *Zhengming jing* was likely of the seventh century too, between 499-589, and from the Sui monk Fajing 法經's *Zhongjing mulu* onwards it was inserted in every major Buddhist catalogue.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cited as *Shouluo biqu jian Yuanguang Tongzi jing* 首羅比丘見月光童子經 (Sūtra of the Monk Shouluo Meeting with Yueguang Tongzi) in the Sui catalogues, for example in the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, T no. 2146, 55.0126c19.

<sup>8</sup> *Nanyue si da chan shi li shiyuan wen*, T no. 1933, 46.0786b22-792b06: 入末法過九千八百年後月光菩薩出真丹國說法大度眾生滿五十二年入涅槃後 (Entered into the End of the Dharma Period, after more than 9800 years, the Bodhisattva Yueguang Tongzi will rise in the Cina lands and will teach the Dharma to the myriad of living beings, after the end of fifty-two years he will reach Nirvāṇa).

<sup>9</sup> Forte 1976, 159-65; Zürcher 1982, 33-44, 51; Seiwert 2003, 13-80, 103-57; Mohan 2001, 152-71.

Though it is philologically important to take into account all three texts, it is noteworthy that the *Shouluo jing* is the only one with a possible connection with the Korean Peninsula.

## 2 What Is the *Shouluo biqiu jing* About?

In order to analyse the history of the *Shouluo jing*, its content has to be taken into account. The story told by this sutra is the following: in a kingdom called 'Kingdom of the Sage Rulers' (Junziguo 君子國) lives monk a named Shouluo (Skt: *Śūra?* 首羅). The monk dwelled in the Taining monastery 太寧寺, near a mountain with the same name and, even if not said openly, close to the capital. This monk met Daxian 大仙 (Great Immortal) along with his following of five hundred immortals (*xianren* 仙人), in pilgrimage toward the abode of Candraprabhākumāra. Daxian and Shouluo talk about this bodhisattva, calling him the 'King of Light' (Mingwang 明王), the 'Sage of Light' (Mingjun 明君) and the 'Sage of Peace' (Pingjun 平君), enumerating the good qualities of the people who will escape the End-of-the-Dharma disasters. Daxian then reveal to the monk the numbers of the wise men (*xian* 賢) who will assist Yueguang Tongzi and how they hide among humans.

After this new conversation, appears the king of Junziguo along with his court. The text gives no information about this king, as he was already known. Daxian tells the king where he is going, and the king decides then to joins the fellowship. The complete group arrives at the mythical Penglai 蓬萊/蓬萊, the island abode of Candraprabhākumāra, where the bodhisattva lives waiting the end of times inside a cave, along with three thousand saints.

In the cave, king of Junziguo personally asks Yuegunag Tongzi about the future, but he does not accept to reveal it. Only after the king insisted that he does not know anything about the future events, the bodhisattva accepts to describe him the coming disasters and how to avoid them.

The scene changes again: it is not explicitly said, but maybe it came back to the monastery. Here, the king of Junziguo teaches techniques and rites to 'visualise' Candraprabhākumāra, purifying oneself and a pseudosanskrit *dhāraṇī*, trying to convert as many people as possible.

In the following and last section, the text becomes more cryptic and chaotic than the previous ones. This part is essentially an enumeration of omens, signs and prophecies, and there is a section when it is said that Yueguang Tongzi's followers will recognise each other by a *mudrā*. The very last part mentions Vimalakīrti 維摩 and Dīpaṃkara 定光: Vimalakīrti will be a saint and will live under a non-specified emperor, while Vimalakīrti will pretend to live dissolutely. In reality, Vimalakīrti will teach the Dharma in an esoteric way,

in a parallel with the bodhisattva-courtesan Vasumitrā 婆須蜜多女 of *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* 入法界品, chapter of the *Avatamsakasūtra* [T no. 278.716c9-717b27]. Here the text ends abruptly.

As shown, the narrative of the *Shouluo jing* lacks of some cohesion and coherence. In fact, it seems that the main concern of the text is collecting prophecies, mystical practices and descriptions of cosmic events. The fact that these two aspects seem independent to each other, along with the clear discontinuity within the narrative, points to the conclusion that this text is a result of a complicated philological history.

### 3 The Sillan Origin Hypothesis: A Brief Summary

As mentioned before, Mohan Pankaj (2001) dates the *Shouluo jing* to the fifth-seventh centuries. In this section, this hypothesis will be discussed more broadly.

Prof. Pankaj identifies the ‘Kingdom of the Sage Rulers’ with the Korean Peninsula, as it was during the post-Han period. He also adds some further identification: the ‘Weak Waters’ (Rushui 弱水), north of Junziguo, is the Heilongjiang/Amur River, north of Koguryōand Xuantu/Hyōndo (玄兔, 玄兔 and 玄菟), is the commandery long conquered by Koguryō.<sup>10</sup> This last place is mentioned as a refuge during the catastrophes. The name of the character Shouluo may be a wordplay with the Silla Kingdom’s name, and Daxian may be an archetype or prototype of the *hwarangs*. In this context, says Mohan Pankaj, Yueguang Tongzi is said to appear inside the ‘Borders of the Han’ (*Han jing* 漢境), which is again the Xuantu commandery. This because Silla Kingdom had no need to be saved, being already officially portrayed as a Pure Land and a buddha-field (*buddhakṣetra*), while on the other hand, Koguryō, being at war with Silla (551-62), surely needed a saviour figure. On these accounts, Mohan Pankaj ascribed the text to the period of king Chinhūng 眞興王 (r. 540-76).

Pankaj, afterward, explains the reason behind the choice of this monarch: Chinhūng is mentioned in the foundation narrative of the *hwarang* 花郎 group reported by the *Samguk Yusa*. The story is reported by Iryōn reports with the title *Mirūk-sōnhwa Mil-lang Chinjasa* 弥勒仙花未尸郎真慈師 (The Story of Hwarang Misi (or Miri or Mil) and the Monk Chinja): in the royal temple of Hūngryun 興輪寺 dwelt

<sup>10</sup> *Sanguo Zhi*, book 30: Book of Wei, Accounts on Puyō/Fuyu: 夫餘在長城之北, 去玄菟千里, 南與高句麗, 東與挹婁, 西與鮮卑接, 北有弱水 (Puyō/Fuyu is on the north of the Great Wall and thousand *li* from Xuantu/Hyōndo, on the south there is Koguryō, while nearby to the east there are the Yilou tribes, on the west the Xianbei tribes, and, on the north, there is the Ru River). Confront also with *Houhan shu*, book 85: Monographies, no. 75: Information on the Eastern Barbarian [Dongyi]: Puyō/Fuyu.



a monk called Chinja 真慈, who prayed for the descent of Maitreya to Silla as a *hwarang*. He then received a vision of an old man telling him to go to the Suwŏn temple of Ungch'ŏn 熊川水源. Ungch'ŏn was, at that time, the capital of Paekche. Arrived in the temple, however, the monk did not recognise the bodhisattva, who took the appearance of a young and well-looking boy. The only thing the bodhisattva told to the monk was that he was from the Silla capital too. Asking for help, the monk was then told by the spirit of the nearby Mount Ch'ŏn 千山 to come back to the Suwŏn temple, but the bodhisattva already disappeared. Chinja, not finding him, decided to go back to Silla, where he asked the king. The king suggested to follow the bodhisattva's words, so the monk started searching inside the capital. Finally, the monk saw the boy under the tree on the northwest of Yŏngmyo temple 靈妙寺, where he was playing. The boy said his name was Mil, and he was orphan. Chinja then summoned a palanquin, taking the boy to the royal palace. The bodhisattva Mil obtained the liking of the king and became a *Kuksŏn* 國仙 (high ranked *hwarang*) and, after seven years, he disappeared.

This myth is similar in many parts to the narratives of the *Shouluo jing*, according to Mohan Pankaj. Although this, he did not make a comparison in detail between the twos to prove extensively this particular point. Mohan Pankaj noticed another common aspect with Maitreya: both have a role of mediator to the commoners and the official otherworldly figure. Thereafter, in Silla the Maitreya cult may have been domesticating tying it to the royal house and making it a medium to the local realities. It follows, concludes Pankaj, that the *hwarangs* would have been an earthly form of Yueguang Tongzi, which is in turn an embodiment of State's Maitreya.

#### 4 Taking into Account the Implications: The Role of Paekche

If the Pankaj hypothesis about a Sillan origin is correct, then the Buddhism practised by the *hwarangs* may have been influenced or derived from that of Paekche kingdom. In fact, Paekche anticipated Silla in propagandising itself as 'buddha-field'. A demonstration Paekche's religious policy is the famous Mirŭk-sa 彌勒寺, which was commissioned by king Mu 武王 (r. 600-41): this temple was built taking as model the descriptions of Maitreya's seat under the Nāgapuṣpa tree and the three assemblies of the Tuṣita heaven, making it an earthly representation of the dwelling of this bodhisattva (McBride II 2008, 36-8).

For a systematisation of this doctrine about an earthly Maitreya abode, we have to look again at Nanyue Huisi, third patriarch of the Tiantai school. This doctrine was likely (re-)introduced in Korea by

the Huisi's disciple: Hyŏn'gwang 玄光 (fl. sixth century). We have a testimony of Nanyue Huisi doctrines' influence in Paekche in the same period of the Mirŏk-sa: following the practice of burying the *Prajñā Sūtras* in order to preserve it from the End-of-the-Dharma period, nearby the said temple a copy of the *Diamond Sūtra on Golden Paper* (*Kŭmji Kŭmgang p'aya-gyŏng* 金紙金剛波若經) was buried. It is worth noticing that Nanyue Huisi himself wrote a version in golden characters of the *Mahāprajñāparamitāsūtra* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經. What differs here is that, even if the practice was used, neither Paekche nor Silla shared the same millenarian motivations of the patriarch (or any millenarism at all), as this would have been useless if not deleterious to their policy of using Buddhism as a way of political legitimisation (Choe 2015, 16-22; McBride II 2008, 36-8).

Knowing that Nanyue Huisi was surely aware about the cult of Yueguang Tongzi and considered one of the sutras about this figure an orthodox text, we should gather the pieces of this puzzle in order to formulate a better hypothesis: if we assume that Nanyue Huisi knew at least a source of the *Shouluo biqu jing*, namely *Famiejin jing*, and we take for good that the *Shouluo biqu jing* may have been written from the sixth century in its archetypal form and to the end of seventh century in the form we have today,<sup>11</sup> we can suppose that Hyŏn'gwang, who lived in the sixth century, may have known this text in an intermediate stage phase, since he may have already known the *Famiejin jing*. It is worth noticing that the *Shouluo biqu jing* makes a mention to the Mount Tiantai, describing it as a refuge from disasters, which can be interpreted as a reference to Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597), one of the most famous disciples of Nanyue Huisi. Therefore, if the transmission of the Tiantai patriarch's teachings to the Korean Peninsula also included any reference to Candraprabhākumāra, we may have a clue on the reason why the *hwarang* myth and this sutra share many similarities and how, without the necessity of hypothesising a total creation from zero in Silla. If any, some possible changes to the text may have been done to better fit the State(s)' narrative(s).

If Silla kingdom ever knew about Candraprabhākumāra, it would be an exaggeration ascribing its entirety to a single king, and therefore deny the complexity of the sutra. If the text was known in Silla, this would make sense only for some parts of it, not for the entirety, due to its complexity. To better understand such complexity, we have to return to the other philological hypotheses on the *Shouluo biqu jing*.

<sup>11</sup> See below for the problem of dating.

## 5 Other Hypotheses on the *Shouluo biqu jing*

According to Zürcher, the text may have been written between 518 and 589 inside a ‘buddho-daoist’ milieu within the Yangzi regions, then expanded toward northern China. In the Zürcher’s hypothesis, two place mentioned in the text are essential: the ‘Long River’ (Changhe 長河 or 襄河), identified with the Yellow River and the ‘Weak Waters’, identified with the far north or northwest of China. This would have a parallel in the *Zhengming jing* too, where it is said that Maitreya will divide pure persons from impure ones taking them respectively “to east and to the west of the bridge” (*youyuan zai qiao dong wuyuan zai qiao xi* 有緣在橋東無緣在橋西). Therefore, Junziguo is the China northeast and Candraprabhākumāra will appear in the world within these places. Zürcher attributes the text to the Miaoguang 妙光 sect in Yangzhou and the Faquan cult 法權 in Yanling: Miaoguang was a monk, and led a revolt in the year 510, while Faquan set up a sect that venerated an eight-years-old boy, known as Liu Jinghui 劉景暉, calling him ‘the Yueguang Tongzi’. In this text Zürcher also sees some Lingbao influences, specifically in the mention of a ‘willow city’ (Liucheng 柳城) (Zürcher 1982, 41-5).

Seiwert follows Zürcher’s dating, but states in addition that the sutra may have been around until the late Tang period. Seiwert also speculates an origin within Faqing revolt in 499 and the following adoption of a low profile by offspring ramp sects. The cult of Candraprabhākumāra in itself likely began with the 377 Gansu revolt of Hou Ziguang 侯子光, he adds. As for the ‘buddho-daoist’ milieu, Seiwert detailed more extensively its nature: the sects were centred around a marginal or marginalised monk(s), which built their charisma on strict ascetism. Their followers were lay devotees and outcasts of the time like women, poor, farmers, novices and low-grade monks. This kind of sects were largely present in the modern Hebei and had some tie with what historiographers of that time mentions as “vegetarian societies” or “abstinence assemblies” (*zhaihui* 齋會) (Seiwert 2003, 106-11).

These were the main analyses of the *Shouluo jing*. This rises a problem: as we will see, all hypotheses so far analysed are firmly textual-based, but each scholar emphasises some sections of the text over the others. Being the *Shouluo jing* a convoluted text with, some of these hypotheses may be correct only for certain parts of the sutra, and, consequently, for some parts of its formation.

## 6 The Limits of All the Previous Hypotheses

As showed before, there are some contradictions between the hypotheses of Zürcher and Seiwert, about a Chinese origin, and the hypothesis of Pankaj, about a Korean origin. This surely depends on the nature of the object of analysis itself, so it needs to analyse the text directly to solve the puzzle.<sup>12</sup> The columns 110-20 are the main focus of all three analyses, even though they overlooked on the detail within the columns 60-70, about the sacred mountains. In all these hypotheses there is an agreement on the importance of columns 10-15, 120-5 and 210-25, which mention the 'Han territory', likely the northeast of China, thus from Hebei to the Manchurian territories. This limited consensus was inevitable since the text is chaotic, with many variations of the same themes. Being aware of this, the overall logical conclusion is that the extant recensions of *Shouluo biqu jing* are fruit of various re-arrangements. Among the clues that arise this suspicious, the most striking is the title of this is *Sūtra on the Monk Shouluo Meeting with Yueguang Tongzi* (*Shouluo biqu jian Yuanguang Tongzi jing* 首羅比丘見月光童子經) in the Sui catalogues, as in current version the said monk is never explicitly said to have seen the bodhisattva.

To better understand the depth of the issue, we need to explain what we meant by 'variations': the sutra has two versions of a flood prophecy (cols 10-113); at least three versions of the prophecies about a 'golden city' where Maitreya will preach the Doctrine by himself or in form of Yueguang Tongzi (cols 10-89, 233-44 and alluded in 185-200);<sup>13</sup> two versions of the prophecy about the 'Han territory': one mentions the 'Long River' (cols 13-14 and 114-22), while the other names it as the 'Yellow River' (cols 219-33) and five prophecies about a cosmic battle: the first prophecy involving an unknown *deva* from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven called Hetian (赫天 'Crimson' or 'Bright Deva') and his "thirty-six men armed with *vaiḍūrya* axes and *vajras*" fighting Mahāmara (Damo 大魔) and his "*yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*, *piśāca*, *kumbhāṇḍa* and flying *rākṣasa*"; the second prophecy involving some "protectors of the Dharma armed with *vajras*"; the third prophecy involving a mysterious 'Emperor of the Curses' (Exiezhudi 惡邪祝帝) and his "hundred demons"; the fourth prophecy mentioning a character similarly called 'Lord of Darkness' (Anjun 暗君), who will "punish the

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<sup>12</sup> *Shouluo biqu jing*, T no. 2873, 85.1356a12-1358c22; Zürcher 1982, 60-75; Bai Huawen 1990. The column number is based primarily on the work of Erich Zürcher, any minor variations are those mentioned in the work of Bai Huawen.

<sup>13</sup> Here mentions a "great dragon king" saving the believers, which was an indirect mention of the "city of the golden dragon" of the columns 233-44. This is similar to the *Zhengming jing*, where is said that a golden-feathered garuḍa will take the believers in the Tuṣita heaven. See Zürcher 1982, 42.

wicked forces”; and the fifth prophecy says that “one hundred and twenty lord-*arhats*” (*baiershi xianjun* 百二十賢君) will divide good people from the wicked ones (respectively: cols 99-113, 124-45, 223-44, and 278-85).

The narrative framework has problems too: from column 10 to column 70 there is some sort of continuity, although the possibility of being originally two separate texts: one with protagonists the monk and Daxian, and one with the king and Daxian. When the scene changes to that of Mount Penglai (cols 179-234), the presentation of the assemblies has all the characteristics of a chanted liturgical text, and so arises the suspicion that this part was originally a sutra on its own. There the general narration follows that of the *Famiejin jing*. The character of the monk is absent, while Daxian is only mentioned twice: at the beginning (col. 179) and near the end (col. 232). The last narrative section (cols 234-40) shares some continuity with the first one, but not with the central part: the scene comes back to the Taining monastery. First there is a ‘reading’ (*jian* 見) or a ‘vision’ (*xian* 見) of an unknown *Sūtra on Candraprabhākumāra* (*Yueguang Tongzi jing yijuan* 月光童子經一卷), then there is a manifestation of a bodhisattva (‘the Dharma king’ Fawang 法王) preaching under the Nāgapuṣpa tree 龍華樹 in the ‘City of the Golden Dragon’ (Jinlongcheng 金龍城). The scene is a clear reprise of *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* and to the *Zhengming jing*’s themes, such as the city, and the flying golden beast.<sup>14</sup> After the vision, the king of Junziguo makes a sermon to the assembly of the followers, explaining its meaning, the practices and the prophecies tied to this mysterious text. Being an enumeration of visions, omens, unintelligible phrases and meditative techniques, this last section is the most chaotic of the entire sutra, to the point that Zürcher uses the term “oracular language” for its obscure wording (Zürcher 1982, 33-4, 34 fn. 3). There is also a clear contradiction with the previous section, as it is stated that one can see Yueguang Tongzi only by the means of meditation (cols 270-5). The redundancy of the text suggests that some non-narrative parts may have been added to it by the time, when the millenarian wave was wading down and thus are later additions.

The last section may also imply some relationship between Daxian, here absent, and the king of Junziguo. Since there is some sort of continuity between these two figures, it is possible that in the archetype the relationship was different: Daxian and the king may have been originally one character, or they may have had a teacher-follower relationship. The sequence of dialogues in the first (*Shouluo-Daxian* and *Daxian-king*) and the last section (*king-assembly*) may be a remnant of an original unitary plot. In this version, the text could

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<sup>14</sup> See the analysis of prophecies before.

have been transmitted to someone at the of the story. Either Daxian was revealed as the bodhisattva all along, or Yueguang Tongzi manifested himself to the monk. In both way, this could explain the alternative title given by the Sui catalogues, and the strange fact that the *Shouluo jing* gives more space to the king. This last element is in itself a sort of contradiction, because the text is named after the monk. In the current form, the king gains information from the followers of Daxian, and both the king and Daxian are instructed on the Doctrine directly from the bodhisattva. After the king clearly but implicitly obtained Buddhahood, he manages to interpret a manifestation of Yueguang Tongzi, preaching Dharma. In all this, the monk appears in a dialogue with Daxian only to vanish completely from the central section onwards, maybe a remnant of the original plot, where he has maybe gained buddhahood along Daxian-king. Therefore, the archetypical story was likely more focused on the monk and Daxian, and, as suggested by the Seiwert's work, more millenarian than the extant recensions.

## 7 Final Considerations

Briefly summarising the previous paragraph: the most logical conclusion is that the *Shouluo biqu jing* was originally a collation of at least two different texts, while the central part of the sutra was substituted with another one. The archetype was more centred on the monk Shouluo, the main core of the narrative. The dialogues and the situations in the current version led to a more archaic conclusion where Daxian should have been revealed being a bodhisattva or a soon-to-be one, maybe together with the monk. In this version, the king may have had the role of transmitting the text itself.

The current recensions have a more mystical tone. Following Seiwert, is reasonable to hypothesise that a more ancient form of the text would have been more millenarian. If the calculations made by Zürcher and Seiwert are correct, it can be argued that the archetype may have been written between 518 and 589, while sixth and seventh centuries would be the time during which the central sections and other minor part were collated, since it is the same period where mysticism overcame pure millenarianism (Seiwert 2003, 124-41, 145). In the text there are surely influences of Lingbao Daoism, as Zürcher noticed, but there could be also influences of Tiantai Buddhism as well, and maybe Huayan Buddhism too, as in columns 274-85 and columns 294-306.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In this part, a character that is a clear allusion to Yueguang Tongzi is said to meet with Yueguang Tongzi, such doubling strongly reminds Huayan doctrine about Gautama

As for its origins, the text was probably written in China. However, the mentions to the Xuantu commandery as well as to a north-eastern city like Gudu 固都 (cols 115-20)<sup>16</sup> suggests a large range of dissemination, giving strength to Pankaj Mohan's hypothesis. Therefore, it can be said that the sutra was transmitted to the northern part of China, hence the designation of all the northeast of the continent as a sacred place, maybe including Korean Peninsula. Another allusion to Korea may be seen in the columns 55-60, where it is said that the devotees will have to follow Yuegunag Tongzi crossing the 'East Sea' and the 'Rushing River', going to the 'Divine Region' (*xin du tu-di Haidong liu chengchuan Xunchuan zhi Shenzhou* 信都土地海東流乘船汎川置神州). Assuming the text so far was set from Nanjing to Hebei, this seems to be a nonsense, however: crossing the sea from there is not needed. Moreover, the term 'Divine Region' was taken from the *Tiandi yundu jing* 天地運度經, where it identifies all China (Zürcher 1982, 33).<sup>17</sup> If so, by the name of Mount Penglai the text was alluding there to a vast region. A similar observation can be made about the hypothetical connection between the 'Weak Waters' and the 'bridge' of the *Zhengming jing* made by Zürcher: pointing to an east-west axis, the *Zhengming jing* brings a more sinocentric perspective, where the Amur is indeed in the northeastern China. But, even in the assumption that the *Zhengming jing* is a source of the *Shouluo jing*, it remains that the *Shouluo jing* differs in this detail taking a north-south perspective, which is more fitting for the Korean Peninsula. A fact that accords better with Pankaj's hypothesis (Zürcher 1982, 38-9, 39 no. 78; Pankaj 2001, 167-70). This makes more credible the possibility of an alteration by Koreans, rather than a creation from zero.

Two scenarios are possible: one is assuming that the text was introduced to Silla either during the conquest of the Han basin during the second half of the sixth century, when, due to wars, the Korean population felt the precarity of life and therefore was more prone to millenarian and/or salvationist cults.

The other scenario is assuming the text was introduced during the conquest of the Kaya and Paekche kingdoms from the mid-sixth to the second half of the seventh century. In the first case, this would better fit with the narratives about the foundation of the *hwarang* and to the thesis of prof. Mohan Pankaj, this may also explain the Huayan and Pure Land influences inside the text, since these two schools

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Siddhartha and Mahāvairocana.

**16** Mentioned in the *Wei shu* as a city in the Liaoning: 魏書, 卷一百六上, 志二上第五, 地形志, 營州 [Weishu, book 106 - first part: Treaties 2: first part, Geography: Yingzhou]. In the same region there were two cities named Liucheng (柳城 and 大柳城) as well, maybe the same of the text, if not a mythical city of Lingbao school.

**17** The *Tiandi yundu jing* is a strictly Daoist millenarian text. It contains some cores beliefs of the Yueguang Tongzi faith.

were the most popular at the time. In this first scenario, the text may have been even arranged from the sources or either modified to better suit it to the political landscape of the kingdom. In the other case, the Huayan and Tiantai influenced would be explained as well, but, if so, it is more likely the text was forged in some minor sections than entirely arranged from some scattered collection of sources.

It is difficult to exclude Koguryō from this chain of transmission: the text does not give any definite proof about this possible passage, due to the ambiguity of the placename. Although being likely, it may have not been forced stop to Paekche, geographically close to China.

Discussing more broadly about any possible passage through Koguryō, the most likely hypothesis is to assume that the version available to the people of the northern kingdom was an archetypical one, if not directly some of its sources, either collected in one manuscript or not. Cautiousness is due in any case: since we lack proofs of any royal involvement, this kind of transmission was probably only on the popular and/or local level. Another difficulty lies in the lack of any detailed reconstruction of the Koguryō Buddhism in its whole.

Besides, a possible connection to Yueguang Tongzi and Koguryō appears only during Sui period, before the kingdom unified the region, when it circulated a prophecy tied to the same milieu of cult Candraprabhākumāra in the northern part of China. This prophecy stated that a “Son of the Heaven with a White Banner” (Baiqi Tianzi 白旗天子), also called “White-robed Son of Heaven” (Baiyi Tianzi 白衣天子), would have come from the “Eastern Sea”, thereafter, the Sui emperor would have always worn white clothes to avert this fate.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noticing here that ‘Eastern Sea’ is an ambivalent wording that may refer either to a vast region including northeastern China, Manchuria and Korea, or to the Korean Peninsula itself, including part of Manchuria. It is possible, therefore, that Chinese people were projecting this kind of millenarian expectation to a foreign land. But this does not proof that the said cult was already arrived inside Koguryō, since the habit of wearing white cloths was a peculiarity of Korean people even before the introduction of Buddhism.

It needs to be remembered in this case of the emperor Wen of Sui, who presented himself as a rebirth of Yueguang Tongzi, forged a relationship with Silla thanks to the monk Wōn'gwang 圓光 (d. c. 690), a fact that makes this hypothesis even more muddled.

Summarising the conclusions so far: the *Shouluo jing* was likely written in China in the period between 518 and 589, and was revised in the late sixth and seventh centuries. The text may have been known in a transition stage between the archetypal and the

<sup>18</sup> 全唐詩, 卷八百七十五, 唐受命讖 (Quan Tang Shi, book 875, Prophecies on the Tang's Gaining of the Heavenly Mandate), as in Seiwert 2003, 150-4.



extant version by Tiantai patriarch Nanyue Huisi. Therefore, the transmission to Korea may have been possible thanks to his disciple Hyōn'gwang in the sixth century. If there was any passage to Silla of the text and the cult, it was through Paekche, since the kingdom officially adopted Nanyue Huisi's Tiantai doctrine and practices. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that in all its hypothetical passages to Korea the text was not altered, due to the references to the Peninsula in the current form.

This kind of transmission may have been reflected in the *hwarangs'* origin narrative. However, comparing the two stories, we have seen they are not quite identical. There is a similarity in the overall plot: both stories present a monk, a holy figure and an authority figure. In both stories, the monk has a vision regarding the holy figure and after a long search and a long talk with an authority, the monk finally sees the bodhisattva, with an uplifting conclusion told by the bodhisattva itself. This analogy may have been even more evident in the archetypical version of the sutra, where the monk sees Yueguang Tongzi in person ascending then to the bodhisattva level, the same fate of monk Chinja. This because the king of Junziguo only is mentioned in the end of the story. Another common point is the reliance on both Buddhist and Daoist sources, such as the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*.

Regarding the perception of the faith inside the *hwarangs*, the tie with Yueguang Tongzi was not reflected in the official narrative. Therefore, any cult centred specifically on Candraprabhākumāra would have been internal to the *hwarangs*, while at the official level this bodhisattva would have been identified with Maitreya, as in China. Unfortunately, we cannot have any definitive proof, since we lack of doctrinal document written for *hwarangs* by *hwarangs*. The only common point, the habit of fasting, is also the more controversial: assuming the group may have participated in the Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions (*p'algwanhoe* 八關會) like Koryŏ sources may suggest, *hwarang* group too may have had some dietary restriction, and so being in this alike to the 'abstinence assemblies' in China. But even in this case, we cannot rule out that any practice of fasting may be a later Chinese influence, since the only sure case is that of the group tied to Kim Yusin 金庾信 (595-673), who made vow to rebirth in the Maitreya paradise.<sup>19</sup> Another aspect without proof is the use by the *hwarangs* of any wording specific to the Candraprabhākumāra cult, such for example 'Sage of Light'.

Summarising the problem of dating and its transmission to Silla kingdom: a probable temporal range is between fifth and sixth centuries, since it is the time when Silla conquered the Han River basin.

<sup>19</sup> McBride II 2008, 20-1, 40-1; 2010, 160-3; Tikhonov 1998, 73-8, 319-20, 326 fn. 17; Choe 2015, 25-7.

Another possibility are the sixth-seventh centuries, during the conquest of Paekche and Kaya. Since the *hwarang* origins' narrative is similar but not quite identical to the content of the sutra, it is more cautious to hypothesise an indirect transmission before those aforementioned times, maybe with the help of the Sillan royalty but not by of Paekche royalty, since the Suwŏn temple was not a royal site. Even if these periods cannot be confirmed, the last known chance of contact may have been around the ninth-tenth centuries. In this last case, it is easier to assume the text was already in the current form. This does not necessarily exclude the other ones.

Regarding the possible latest dating, Richard McBride II (2004) noticed a connection between the cult of this bodhisattva and the pretences of Buddhahood by Kungye 弓裔 (d. 918). This may explain why the *Samguk Yusa* lacks of any real direct reference to this cult: in the hypothesis it was effectively arrived to Silla, its millenarian use by the ex-monk may have been censored by the sources uses by Iryŏn or by Iryŏn himself to avoid any direct reference to this case.

Kungye was an ex-monk, allegedly of noble origins, who established a kingdom during the last part of Silla dynasty. This new kingdom was first named Majin 摩震 in 904, then changed in T'aebong 泰封 in 911. Kungye also called his two sons 'Green (or Blue) Light Bodhisattva' (Ch'ŏnggwang Posal 青光菩薩) and 'Divine Light Bodhisattva' (Sin'gwang Posal 神光菩薩), claiming he had composed twenty sutras. He also made public appearances mounting a white horse, wearing monk attires and a golden headgear. Emulating the Buddhist processions, boys and girls with banners, parasols and incense opened his path, while more than two hundred monks chanted hymns in Sanskrit. According to the official records, Kungye felt rapidly into a deep paranoia: citing his 'Maitreya method for seeking the mind-heart' (*Mirūk kwansimbŏp* 彌勒觀心法) as a proof of their disloyalty, the ex-monk executed his own wife and sons. But not long after, one of his generals rebelled and killed the tyrant Kungye after being accused treachery by the king's 'Dhyana absorption's method' (*sŏnjŏng* 禪定). That general was Wang Kŏn 王建 (r. 918-43), who then reunified the Peninsula under Koryŏ.<sup>20</sup>

In this story, the tie to Yueguang Tongzi and Kungye is explicated by Kungye himself: as far as we known, there is no presence in the orthodox Buddhism of any 'Green Light Bodhisattva' and 'Divine Light Bodhisattva'. In addition to this, there is not in any canonical text a single mention to any 'Maitreya method for seeking the mind-heart', but it resounds in the practices shown in the *Shouluo jing*. Moreover, the same name of the kingdom, Majin, seems a shortened form

20 三國史記, 卷第五十, 列傳 第十, 弓裔 (Samguk Sagi, book 50: Monographies, 10: Kungye); 高麗史, 卷一, 世家 卷第一 et alibi (Koryŏsa, book 1, households, 1).

of *Mahajindan* 摩訶震旦, the Sanskrit Mahācīnasthāna ‘Great China’: as we have seen, a place strictly tied to Candraprabhākumāra.

Another proof of this tie lies in the *Ancient Traces of the Haein Temple of Kaya Mountain* (*Kayasan Haeinsa kojōk* 伽倻山海印寺古蹟), referring to Wang Kōn as ‘our T’aejo’, but its colophon reports 943. The text says that, at the end of Silla kingdom, the monk head of the Haein-sa, Hūirang 希郎 (fl. 875-927), had obtained the ‘*Samādhi* of the divine *Avatamsakasūtra* assembly’ (*Hwaōm sinjung sammae* 華嚴神衆三昧). At that time, T’aejo was fighting with a Paekche prince named Wōlgwang 月光. Wōlgwang was treacherous with his soldiers on the Misung mountain 美崇山. Wang Kōn was able to defeat him only with the Hūirang’s help: the monk gave him instructions for the war and sent him an army of heavenly soldiers. Wōlgwang, then, seeing gilded armours covering the sky, knew T’aejo had arrived and surrendered. Hūirang was recompensed having the old mountain monastery rebuilt.

We do not have any trace of a Later Paekche 後百濟 (892-936) prince named Wōlgwang, so we can argue that this Wōlgwang is actually the homonym Yueguang Tongzi. As for the reference to Paekche, this simply may be a mention to the previous ties with the Korean kingdom and also to the fact that Kungye effectively dominated a part of its former territories, where the Maitreya worship survived and was even reinvigorated by the political precariousness and the new millenarian tendencies among the arising Sōn schools. This text, thus, clarifies what was implicit in the historical sources, giving us a clue about what Kungye words were referring to, and making evident the connection to the monk and Candraprabhākumāra as well his possible aim to expand his kingdom to Manchuria, i.e. the former Koguryō lands and the ‘Han territory’ of the *Shouluo jing* (McBride II 2004, 37-53; McBride II, Insung Cho 2016, 8-10, 18-23). Therefore, it can be argued that the end of Silla (ninth-tenth centuries) is the outer limit for a transmission of the *Shouluo jing* in Korea.

It is worth noticing here that Kungye officially proclaimed himself Maitreya, pointing to an identification of Yueguang Tongzi and the Future Buddha. But even in its identification, not everything is totally clear: in the Silla kingdom a self-proclaimed *cakravartin* like King Chinhŭng called its sons with the names of the prerogatives of its role, ‘Golden Wheel’ (Kōmryun 金輪 or Saryun 舍輪) and ‘Brass Wheel’ (Tongryun 銅輪), and this makes a clear analogy for this case. In the case of Kungye, we can either assume that the ‘Green Light Bodhisattva’ and the ‘Divine Light Bodhisattva’ may have two helpers of Yueguang Tongzi, in the Kungye’s vision, or two of his characteristics. The fact that those two names resemble the titles of Candraprabhākumāra shows that there is not a clear relationship between the two characters even when we assume that the *Shouluo jing* was taken as a basis for the cult. This keeping in mind that

Kungye was presenting himself as Maitreya. Therefore, it is easier assuming a ‘fluid’ identification of these two bodhisattvas, rather than a rigid one, at least when it comes to Kungye.

In the end, it is likely that Candraprabhākumāra was seen as an aspect of Maitreya, or that Candraprabhākumāra was presented to the commoners as such. This would also have an analogy in the Chinese context, where there was not any clear distinction between the two figures, who often overlap, as Zürcher and Seiwert noticed.

## 8 Conclusions

In this paper, the author analysed the apocryphal *Shouluo biqu jing*. We tried to analyse this text, evaluating the correctness of the hypotheses of Zürcher, Seiwert and Pankaj about its origin.

To reach this scope, we first summarise the history of the Candraprabhākumāra faith and its characteristics. Then, we dissected the various hypotheses around the *Shouluo jing*, either ascribing it to China or Korea. The various hypotheses were then sifted through a philological analysis of the *Shouluo jing* itself.

The conclusion is that the archetype of the *Shouluo jing* was likely written in China between 518 and 589 by some millenarian syncretistic sect, and was revised in the late sixth and seventh centuries. During the revision, it probably lost the central part and acquired a more mystical tone. It is possible that the text was altered in Korea, since it shows some allusion to the Peninsula. This opens to different scenarios: the first scenario is that the faith was transmitted through Paekche in the sixth century by the monk Hyōn'gwang, passing through his master Nanyue Huisi. The second scenario is that the sutra was transmitted during the Silla conquest of the Han Basin in the second half of the sixth century, through the local population. The third scenario is a transmission during the Silla conquest of Kaya and Paekche from the mid-sixth to the second half of the seventh century. The last scenario is a transmission of the text during the Kungye revolt of the ninth-tenth centuries. In the first scenarios, it is possible that the *Shouluo jing* was rearranged, in the last scenarios only little changes are probable. All these explanations are not exclusive.

The *Shouluo jing* shows many analogies with the foundation myth of the Sillan *hwarang* group. If the first scenario of a sixth century transmission is true, this can be an explanation of these analogies, also due to the *hwarang* ties with Paekche. However, it is not possible to have the details about the Candraprabhākumāra faith within the group, but the version used by the *hwarangs* was likely more archaic than the extant version. The Sillan Candraprabhākumāra faith was likely embedded within the State-sponsored Maitreya cult.

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