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The Awakened Lord: The Name of the Buddha in East Asia

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The native Japanese name of the Buddha *hotoke* < *poto₂ke₂* has no internal etymology and is likely to be a loanword introduced together with Buddhism. The hypothesis of a link with Korean *pwuche* < *pwuthye* ‘Buddha’ and of their ultimate origin as deriving from a Chinese rendering of Sanskrit *Buddha* makes sense from both a linguistic and historical point of view. Still, the last part of the Japanese and Korean forms has no correspondent in Chinese and has remained unaccounted for hitherto. From the comparison with the pattern ‘Buddha-lord’ for the name of Buddha in several Asian languages, it is hypothesized that the enigmatic final element was originally a word for ‘lord, ruler, king’. This hypothesis is confirmed by the attestation of such a word in toponyms and in nobility titles recorded in ancient Chinese, Korean, and Japanese chronicles.

1. THE JAPANESE WORD FOR ‘BUDDHA’

The Japanese word for ‘Buddha’, Modern Standard Japanese *hotoke*, Early Middle Japanese (EMJ) *fotoke* 3.4, Old Japanese (OJ) *poto₂ke₂* 保止氣,¹ is probably at least as old as the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, which happened in the sixth century according to the official records of the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Annals of Japan, 720). This is confirmed by the existence of Ryukyuan² cognates for this word, which usually also refer to dead spirits and ancestors, as well as to Buddha statues and figurines in general: Yoron *pūtūi* (Kiku and Takahashi 2005: 501), Shuri *ǫtūki* (Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo 1963: 224), Ishigaki *pūtūgi* (Miyagi 2003: 957), Yonaguni *mūtūgi* (Uwano 2009: 24) < proto-Ryukyuan **potoke*^B.

The first vowel of the OJ word is indeterminate, since there is neutralization of the opposition between *o₁* and *o₂* after *p-* in OJ. Nevertheless, no OJ root contains both *o₁* and *o₂* (Arisaka 1934), and we can thus infer that the first vowel was originally the same *o₂* (< **ə*) as in the second syllable. It is thus possible to reconstruct a proto-Japonic³ (pJ) form **pətək[ə]lɨ*

Note on transcriptions. The Old Japanese A-type (*kō-rui*) and B-type (*otsu-rui*) syllables are distinguished by subscript numbers, while numbers and/or letters following Japanese and Ryukyuan forms indicate tonal classes. Ryukyuan forms have been converted to standard IPA. Korean linguistic forms follow the Yale romanization with accents indicating tones, while proper names and the titles of sources follow the McCune–Reischauer system. Early Middle Chinese (EMC) and Late Middle Chinese (LMC) forms are given according to the reconstruction of Pulleyblank (1991) amended by Miyake (2003: 146–149) and converted to IPA. Later Han (LH) Chinese reconstructions follow Schuessler (2009) with superscript B and C tone letters converted to respectively a glottal stop and an *-h*. Old Chinese (OC) reconstructions are from Baxter and Sagart (2011). Other languages are transcribed following either the usual standard or the source consulted when there is none. Alternative reconstructions are indicated by vertical bars, with enclosing square brackets delimiting their scope, i.e., *wxyz* means either *wx* or *yz* while *w[xyz]* means *w* followed by either *x* or *y*, and then *z*.

1. First attested in the *Bussokusekika* 仏足跡歌 (Songs of the stone with footprints of the Buddha, 753), poem #9.
2. Japanese and Ryukyuan split during the first centuries of the first millennium CE, some time before the 8th century (Pellard in press).
3. “Japonic” is the now usual term for the language family including all varieties of Japanese spoken on the main islands as well as the languages spoken in the Ryūkyū and Hachijō islands.

3.4, though the exact origin of the final vowel, *ai or *ai, cannot be precisely determined.⁴ In spite of this, this word is suspicious for several reasons. First, it does not exhibit apophony,⁵ even though the OJ vowel e_2 usually alternates with either a or o_2 (< *ə), especially in final position. Its trisyllabic length is also suspicious and tells us that if it is not a loan, then there are good chances that it is a compound, since most Japonic roots are either mono- or disyllabic.

This word has no accepted internal etymology in Japonic, and most of the traditional etymologies, like those relating *hotoke* < *poto₂ke₂* to *hito-kie* ‘a person vanishes’, *hito-ke* ‘(appearance of) human presence’, *hodoke* ‘interpretation of a *sūtra*’, are far-fetched and do not really make sense, in addition to being phonologically implausible. The only etymology that seems realistic is the one relating the Japonic word to one of the Chinese renderings of the Sanskrit name *Buddha*.

Though OJ *poto₂ke₂* is often compared to Chinese 佛 EMC *but, a shortened form of 佛陀 EMC *but-da ‘Buddha’, this spelling was not commonly used before the Tang dynasty (618–907). The earlier Chinese renderings of Sanskrit *Buddha* (Pelliot 1906: 373) like 浮屠 or 浮圖 LH *bu-da > EMC *buw-do are better matches for the first two syllables of pJ *pətək[əla]i 3.4 than 佛 EMC *but. Since neither OJ nor pJ probably distinguished between voiced and unvoiced consonants,⁶ *bu-da would have been borrowed with voiceless stops. The vowel correspondences are less clear, but the back quality of the second vowel *a might have sounded closer to pJ *ə than to pJ *a, especially since at the time of the borrowing the shift *a > *ə > *o had probably already started in Chinese. If borrowed as *putə, the form *pətə could be the result of assimilation, since pJ *u and *ə do not usually coexist within the same root (Arisaka 1934). This form does not belong to a clearly defined stratum of Chinese loans, and it is not a conventional reading associated with a Chinese character but a nativized word, and in all likelihood it was borrowed during prehistoric times.⁷

Still, the last syllable of the Japonic word has no clear Japonic nor Chinese origin, which weakens the above proposal of a borrowing from Chinese. The hypothesis identifying the final *k[əla]i with the OJ word *ke₂* ‘signs, appearance, spirit’, a loan from Chinese 氣 EMC *k^hij^h, is not particularly compelling. Another source must be sought besides Chinese for the Japonic word, which seems logical if we recall the origins of Buddhism in Japan.

2. THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM TO JAPAN

According to the official records of the *Nihon shoki*, Buddhism was introduced in Japan in 552 from the Korean peninsula when the king Sōngmyōng 聖明 of Paekche 百濟 sent Buddha statues and sutras to Japan. Other records indicate the date of 538, but in any case this only means that Buddhism acquired an official status in the sixth century, though it may have been known earlier through Paekche immigrants.⁸

Although it seems that the Koguryō 高句麗 kingdom was also to some extent involved in the formation of Japanese Buddhism, with for example the introduction of the Three Treatise (Jp. Sanron 三論) school, we know that Paekche was the main source for it (Sonoda and Brown 1993, Best 2005, Grayson 1980). The very first Buddhist schools of Japan (the Satyasiddhi, Jp. Jōjitsu 成實, and Discipline, Jp. Ritsu 律, schools) originate from Paekche, and there are records of Paekche monks teaching in Japan and of Japanese converts traveling

4. See Frellesvig and Whitman 2008, Pellard 2013.

5. This is why, though all instances of OJ e_2 probably come from earlier diphthongs, we cannot decide whether to reconstruct a final *ai or *ai here.

6. The voiced stops of Japanese come from earlier prenasalized obstruents.

7. It thus qualifies as a pre-Sino-Japanese loanword (Miyake 1997).

8. See Sonoda and Brown 1993 on early Buddhism in Japan.

to Paekche in order to study Buddhism in the late sixth century. The first temples are also said to have been built at the initiative of Paekche immigrants and with the help of Paekche artisans. Overall, Paekche has played a key role into the formation of the culture of the early Yamato state.

On the peninsula, Koguryŏ was the first kingdom to adopt Buddhism in 372, closely followed by Paekche in 384. On the other hand, Silla 新羅 did not convert until 527, a date comparable to that of Japan, though here again it may have been in contact with Buddhism before that time. Buddhism was imported directly from China to Koguryŏ and Paekche, while Silla, which did not have an easy route to China, may have received it through Koguryŏ.⁹

3. KOREAN

Since Japanese Buddhism first came from the Korean peninsula and since the Japonic word for ‘Buddha’ is likely to be a loan, the first place to look for the source of this word is Korean, the only surviving language of the peninsula. The similarity of the Japonic word *pətək[əla]i 3.4 with Korean *puche* < Middle Korean (MK) *pwüthyè* ([pütʰjə])¹⁰ has already been noticed,¹¹ but an alternative etymology exists for the Korean word, which is however not without problems.

The Korean word for ‘Buddha’, like its Japanese counterpart, has no internal etymology, and several scholars (e.g., Kim 1971: 99–101, Yu 1996: 868–69) consider MK *pwüthyè* to be a borrowing from Chinese 佛體 LH *but-tʰei? > EMC *but-tʰej? > LMC *ffut-tʰiaj? ‘body of Buddha’, a word attested in the *Pohyŏn sibwŏn ka* 普賢十願歌 (Songs of the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra) composed by the monk Kyunyŏ 均如 (923–973).¹² The existence of a variant MK form *pwüthyëy* makes this hypothesis look plausible (Miller 1996: 181), but in that case the loss of the final -y in *pwüthyè* requires an explanation. Since none seems to exist, the reverse hypothesis is therefore more likely, namely that the form *pwüthyëy* is just another case of incorporation of the suffix -i, a phenomenon well attested in Korean (Martin 1992: 553, Lee and Ramsey 2011: 173–174).

This Chinese etymology suffers from other problems which cast reasonable doubt on it. First, MK *pwüthyè* is not a regular Sino-Korean reading, which should be *pwülthyéy* according to the colloquial, non-prescriptive, readings of the *Hunmong chahoe* 訓蒙字會 (Collection of characters for training the unenlightened, 1527). Since the introduction of Buddhism in the peninsula goes back to the fourth or sixth century CE, we can expect MK *pwüthyè* to perhaps date from that period. It thus predates the formation of Sino-Korean during the Unified Silla period (668–935, Lee and Ramsey 2011: 68–69, Miyake 2003: 110–17), which might explain the discrepancy between the tones of *pwüthyè* and those of the expected Sino-Korean *pwülthyéy*.

Still, the use of both Chinese aspirates and unaspirates without distinction to transcribe the same words in the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (History of the Three Kingdoms, 1145) and the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Vestiges of the Three Kingdoms, 1285) indicates that aspiration was most likely not distinctive in the language(s) of the Three Kingdoms (Mabuchi et al. 1978, 1979, 1980, Eom 1994, Miyake 2000), and MK *pwüthyè* should thus not have an aspirate *th*. The lack of both a final yod -y in the second syllable of *pwüthyè* for 體 EMC *tʰej? < LH *tʰei? ‘body’ and of a coda in the first syllable for 佛 EMC *but < LH *but ‘Buddha’ is even more problematic and requires an explanation. If the MK word is indeed a prehistoric loan from Chinese, this might explain the absence of a final -l corresponding to Chinese *-t, but

9. See Grayson 1980 and Sonoda and Brown 1993 on the beginnings of Buddhism in the peninsula.

10. Attested several times in the *Wŏrin sŏkpo* 月印釋譜 (Imprint of the moon and record of Śākyamuni, 1459).

11. E.g., Murayama 1984, Ramsey 1991: 221.

12. Songs 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 in Yu 1996.

then we would expect a *-t* in Korean, and certainly not zero. There is thus little support for the hypothesis that Chinese 佛體 ‘body of Buddha’ is the origin of MK *pwüthyè*, and it is better rejected.

Importantly, it is now well established that the Korean aspirates are a late development from clusters involving **k* or **h* and a stop or affricate, and that such clusters in turn come from the syncope of one of the two proto-Korean (pK) minimal vowels **i* (> MK *u* [i]) or **ə* (> MK *o* [ʌ]).¹³ The aspirate *-th-* of MK *pwüthyè* has thus the following possible origins: **tik*, **tək*, **tih*, **təh*, **kit*, **kət*, **hit*, or **hət*. The late character of the aspirate is confirmed by the Manchu borrowing of this word as *fucihi* < **pućiki* (Vovin 2005, 2006, 2007a), which testifies that the MK aspirate is not original and enables us to circumscribe the above possibilities to those following the **tVC* pattern. Since pre-Manchu did not possess a distinction between *k* and *h*, we cannot use the Manchu form to decide whether we should reconstruct **tVk* or **tVh*.

The laws of vowel harmony would require to reconstruct the syncopated vowel as **i* (> MK *u*), but if vowel harmony is indeed a post-Old Korean development, as argued by Martin (2000) and Vovin (2000b), then the vowel could have been originally **ə* (> MK *o* [ʌ]) and only subsequently harmonized to **i*. This would match the vowel **a* > **ə* > **o* in the second character of 浮屠 LH **bu-da*. If we accept the loan hypothesis, it is natural to expect the form to have been nativized and consequently harmonized, whatever the original vowel was. Indeed, the trisyllabic shape of the pK form suggests that it is either a loan or a compound, since Korean roots are either mono- or disyllabic. The Low-Low pitch pattern of *pwüthyè* also suggests that it is a loan since the Low-Low class is a minor one that mostly consists of Chinese borrowings and other cultural words (Ramsey 1991, 2001).

From all the above, the first part of *pwüthyè* can be reconstructed as **put[ilə]-*. Since earlier Korean did not distinguish voiceless stops from voiced ones, this makes the reconstruction **putə-* a close match for LH **bu-da* > EMC **buw-do*, but also for the first part of pJ **pətək[əla]i* < ?**putək[əla]i* 3.4. On the other hand, the last syllable does not seem to be of Chinese origin, but it is shared by the Korean, Japonic, and Manchu forms. The initial can be reconstructed as a back obstruent **k* or **h*, and its nucleus MK *ye* as either **e* or **je* in Korean (Frellesvig and Whitman 2008: 36–37, Whitman 2012). This agrees well with the Manchu form *-hi:* front **e* would be borrowed as *i* rather than *e*, a central or back vowel in Manchu.¹⁴

The Japanese *ke₂* < **k[əla]i* seems more difficult to reconcile with the Korean form, but OJ *e₂* may have been a falling diphthong **əj* or **ej* (Miyake 2003, Frellesvig 2010: 31). The problem is thus rather one of chronology between the time of the borrowing and the exact timing of monophthongization in Japonic. It is worth mentioning that a similar correspondence MK *ye* :: J. *e* is also found in borrowings such as MK *tyél* > EMJ *tera* 2.2 ‘temple, monastery’ (see below), though we cannot determine the exact origin of the first vowel of the Japanese word. This also compares well with the correspondence of MK *syēm* ‘island’ with Paekche *sema* ‘id.’¹⁵ or of Chinese readings with a nucleus EMC **ej* > LMC **iaj* with *ye* in Sino-Korean (e.g., ‘West’ 西 EMC **sej* > LMC **siaj* :: MK *syè*, ‘blue’ 青 EMC **ts^hejŋ* > LMC **ts^hiaj^h* :: MK *chyèng*).¹⁶

The Korean origin of this word also fits well with the existence of other nativized Buddhist words which have similarly travelled from India to Japan via China and Korea: EMJ

13. See Ramsey 1986, 1991, I 1991. I follow the pK vowel reconstruction of Whitman 2012.

14. See the summary of the topic and of the relevant references in Gorelova 2002: 77–78.

15. Attested as a phonetic annotation for *dǎo* 嶋 ‘island’ in the *Nihon shoki*, vol. 14, 6th year of the reign of Emperor Yūryaku 雄略.

16. See also the correspondence of EMC **æ* :: MK *ye* :: EMJ *e* in ‘temple’ below.

fati 2.3 ‘(Buddhist monk’s begging) bowl’ < MK *pàlì* ‘id.’ < 鉢 EMC *pat < LH *pat ‘id.’ < Skt. *pātra-* ‘vessel, cup, bowl’, MJ *tera* 2.2 ‘temple, monastery’ < MK *tyél* ‘id.’ < 刹 EMC *tṣʰæt < LH *tṣʰat ‘id.’ < Skt. *kṣetra-* ‘land, domain, sanctuary, precinct’ (Martin 1991, Miyake 1997). There can thus be little doubt that the Japonic form *pətək[ə]ji 3.4 is related to Korean *put[ilə][klh](j)e. It is likely that the Korean word is ultimately related to Sanskrit via Chinese, but here again the final syllable *[klh](j)e remains unaccounted for, since there is no such suffix in Korean. The Korean form may have been itself borrowed from another language, and then transmitted to Japonic, or both languages could have borrowed it independently from the same donor.

Though it is uncontroversial that the language of Silla is the direct ancestor of Middle Korean (Lee and Ramsey 2011: 48), the exact linguistic situation of the Korean peninsula in ancient times is hard to establish. Whether the inhabitants of the three kingdoms of Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla spoke different varieties of Old Korean or completely different languages is a still ongoing debate.¹⁷ In any case, given the fact that Buddhism was introduced in Koguryō and Paekche first, and only after that in Silla, the Silla ancestral form of MK *pwūthyè* is likely to have been borrowed not directly from Chinese but from either Paekche or Koguryō. We should thus follow that lead and examine the data on the language(s) of these two kingdoms. Unfortunately, such data are sparse and the name of the Buddha in the languages of the Three Kingdoms is not known to us. A survey of the name of Buddha in other East and Central Asian languages will nevertheless provide an important clue.

4. THE NAMES OF BUDDHA IN EAST ASIA

The word *burqan* for ‘Buddha’ shared by Old Turkic and Middle Mongolian is a compound. The first element *bur* appears to be a borrowing of Chinese 佛 EMC *but ‘Buddha’, while the second element is *qan*, the Asian *Wanderwort* ‘king, ruler, lord, chief’, also used for the names of divinities in Turkic and Mongolian (Clauson 1972: 360–61). A similar pattern ‘Buddha + lord’ is also found in Tocharian A *ptāñkāt* and B *pañakte* (*pudñakte* in poetry), which are built upon the borrowed Indic root *budh* followed by *ñakte* ‘god, lord’ (Pinault 2008).

The designation of a divinity as ‘lord’ or ‘king’ is not surprising in view of the abundance of such terms in many religions. See for example Sanskrit *Īsvara-* ‘lord, controller’ in Hinduism, Hebrew *ādōnāy* ‘my lord’ and *Méleḳ hamməlākīm* ‘King of kings’ in Judaism, Greek *Kύριος* ‘the Lord’ and *βασιλεύς βασιλέων* ‘King of kings’ in Christianity, Arabic *Al-Malik* ‘the King’ in Islam, etc. In any case, we must recall that the Buddha Gautama was the heir of the king of the Śākya realm and is sometimes called *Dharma-rāja* ‘Lord of the Law’ in Buddhism.

Since we have already established that the first parts of the Japonic and Korean forms are probably borrowings of the Chinese transcription of ‘Buddha’, we can envisage that these words might follow the same structural pattern as in Turkic, Mongolian, and Tocharian. This would be confirmed if we could find a donor for *k[ə]ji ~ [klh](j)e ‘king, lord’, preferably near the Korean peninsula and in an area known for its old Buddhist tradition.

5. THE LOST LANGUAGES OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Our search for such a word will not take us far but actually back to the Korean peninsula, since the ultimate source of the mysterious final element in the Japonic and Korean forms can be traced back to the fragmentarily attested languages of the Three Kingdoms.

17. See Vovin 2005 and Unger 2009.

The *Samguk sagi* chronicles contain a list of toponyms from Silla and the conquered kingdoms of Koguryō and Paekche that were standardized to Chinese names in the year 757 by order of King Kyōngdōk 景德王 of Silla. Alongside the new Chinese name, the *Samguk sagi* records in a phonetic Chinese transcription the original name of each location, of which the new name is usually a semantic equivalent in Chinese. This enables us to recover some lexical material and to take a glimpse at the linguistic past of the peninsula, though the interpretation of the data is not always straightforward.¹⁸

Among the different Koguryō place names, we find three attestations in two different toponyms of the word ‘king’ transcribed with the same character:

- (1) 遇王縣本高句麗皆伯縣 (*Samguk sagi* XXXV.4)
‘king-meet’ county was originally county EMC *kɛj-pæjk
- (2) 王逢縣一云皆伯 (*Samguk sagi* XXXVII.6)
‘king-meet’ county, also called EMC *kɛj-pæjk
- (3) 王岐縣一云皆次丁 (*Samguk sagi* XXXVII.6)
‘king-mountain pass’ county, also called EMC *kɛj-tsh^h-tejn

This leaves little doubt about the existence of a word ‘king’ whose pronunciation was close to that of the Chinese character *jiē* 皆 ‘all’. The reconstructed pronunciation of 皆 as LMC *kja:j < EMC *kɛj < LH *kɛi matches rather well both pJ *-k[ɔla]i and pK -*[kɫh](j)e and allows us to make sense of the final suffix in the Japonic and Korean form.

The two locations that interest us are situated in an area that has been under the alternate domination of both Paekche and Koguryō, and only later of Silla (Toh 2005). Though the identification of the language(s) represented by the toponyms described in the *Samguk sagi* is problematic, we can suppose that the word ‘king’ was probably from Koguryō or Paekche rather than from Silla.

Another word in Chinese and Japanese chronicles points to Paekche as the source for ‘king’. The vol. XLIX of *Zhōu Shū* 周書 (Book of Zhōu, 636) notes that the title of the king of Paekche is 於羅瑕 EMC *ʔo-la-ɣæ ~ *ʔið-la-ɣæ, and that this means ‘king’ in Chinese. The phonetic annotations in *kana* added to the quotes from the *Paekche annals* (*Paekche pongi* 百濟本紀) in the *Nihon shoki* preserve what seems to be the same word as *orikoke*.¹⁹ It would make perfectly sense if the final syllable *ɣæ ~ *ke* was the same root as *Samguk sagi*’s ‘king’ *kɛj.²⁰

However, the quote from the Paekche annals actually refers to the king of Koguryō and not to that of Paekche, who is never called *orikoke* but either *kokisi*²¹ or *konikisi*.²² This corresponds to the word 韃吉支 EMC *kian-kjit-tcið, the form said in the vol. XLIX of the *Zhōu Shū* to be used by the commoners instead of the above *ʔo-la-ɣæ 於羅瑕 to refer to the Paekche king. It thus may be the case that *ʔo-la-ɣæ ~ *orikoke* was borrowed from Koguryō.

On the other hand, the *Nihon shoki* (vol. XV) records the name of several Paekche officials that end with the character 解 EMC *kæj’ ~ ɣæj’, e.g., 古爾解 *ko’-ɲið’-kæj’, 適莫爾解 *ciəjk-mak-ɲið’-kæj’, 內頭莫古解 *nuəj^h-dəw-mak-ko’-kæj’. This last name is particularly interesting since we also find similar names without a final 解: 莫古 *mak-ko’ (NS IX), 灼莫古 *tciak-mak-ko’ (NS XVII), 鼻利莫古 *bjj^h-li^h-mak-ko’ (NS XIX). This allows us to analyze the former names as compounds or suffixed elements and to segment *kæj’ 解.

18. See Beckwith 2004, Pellard 2005, Vovin 2005, Unger 2009: 73–82.

19. *Nihon shoki* vol. XIX, year 7 of the reign of Emperor Kinmei 欽明.

20. See Vovin 2005: 122–23 about possible etymological connections concerning the first part.

21. NS IX, X, XIV, XVII, XIX, XX. Also used for the Kara (Mimana) (NS VI) and Koguryō (NS X, XX) kings.

22. NS IX, X, XI, XV, XVII. Also used for the Koguryō (NS XIV), Kara (Mimana) (NS VI, IX, XIV), and Silla king (NS VI, IX, XIII, XIX).

I propose that this last syllable *kæj' is a title meaning 'sir, lord', which matches perfectly 'king' *kɛj.

6. FURTHER CONNECTIONS

There is also a possible link of *kɛj 'king' with the element 加 EMC *kæ < LH *ka < OC *k'raj attested in titles of the Puyō 夫餘 and Koguryō people, e.g., 古鄒加 LH *kaʔ-tʂu-ka or 大加 LH *das-ka to cite only the most frequent ones, in the *Wèi shū* (Book of Wei 魏書) of the *Sān guó zhì* (Records of the Three Kingdoms 三國志, 3rd century) and in the *Samguk sagi*. It is therefore possible that the word 'king, lord' was transmitted from Puyō to Koguryō and Paekche. The comparison might also perhaps be stretched to include the 干 EMC *kan < LH *kan < OC *k'ar in various Silla titles recorded in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*, like 麻立干 EMC *mæ-lip-kan or 角干 EMC *kæk-kan (Song 2004: 224–27).²³

The above *kɛj 'king, lord' is also reminiscent of the etymon 'ruler, lord' in Yenisseian: Ket ^lqij 'prince' (Werner 2002: 153), Yugh ^lkij 'prince, power' (Werner 2002: 153), Kott *hiji* (Castrén 1858: 210) ~ *hii* (Werner 2005: 110) 'lord, prince', Assan *hii* ~ *hu* ~ *huj* 'lord' (Werner 2005: 136), Arin *kej* 'chief, power' (Werner 2005: 159). The proto-Yenisseian (pY) form of this etymon is hard to reconstruct due to irregularities in the correspondences (Werner 2002: 154). It is nevertheless possible to tentatively reconstruct pY *qij or *χij.²⁴ The initial back consonant, the central vowel, and the final yod are a rather good match for our *kɛj, especially if we consider the fact that pY did not originally have mid vowels (Werner 2005: 194).

If, as suggested by various authors,²⁵ speakers of a language ancestral to the Yenisseian languages were a major component of the Xiōngnú 匈奴 confederation, the above etymological link does not seem to be beyond the stretch of imagination, even if the modern Yenisseian languages were spoken much farther west from the Korean peninsula. The word 'king, lord', a prestigious word potentially prone to borrowing, would have been diffused in North-east Asia during the period of Xiōngnú domination between the third century B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E. If the above etymon is indeed a prestige word diffused by the Xiōngnú, we would expect it to be found not only on the Korean peninsula but widely distributed in Central Asia too. This is precisely the hypothesis of Pulleyblank (1962: 260–62) and Vovin (2007b), who proposed that pY *[q|χ]ij was the word transcribed by 于 LH *wa < OC *g^w(r)a in the Xiōngnú titles 護于 LH *γwas-wa 'crown prince' and 單于 LH ? *dan-wa 'supreme ruler',²⁶ and that this was also the ultimate source of Turkic and Mongolic *qan* 'ruler' and *qayan* 'supreme ruler'. The identification of a direct connexion between 于 OC *g^w(r)a > LH *wa and pY *[q|χ]ij is however not straightforward, and the alternative reconstruction of the pY form as *[q|χ]ij by Vovin (2007b) would require a more detailed discussion.

7. FINAL WORDS

Given the paucity of the data and the problems inherent in phonetic reconstructions based on foreign transcriptions, etymologies are hard to establish, even more in the case of non-alphabetic scripts like Chinese. There is nevertheless in the present case sufficiently ample

23. See Beckwith 2004: 46–47, 122–24 for other speculative comparisons. The opaque character of the method of reconstruction adopted by Beckwith severely hinders his work and makes his hypotheses difficult to evaluate (Pellard 2005).

24. Or perhaps *χiji (Starostin 1995: 301).

25. Ligeti 1950, Pulleyblank 1962, Janhunen 1996: 185–87, Vovin 2000a, 2003. Werner (2008) specifically associates the Dinglíng 丁零 ethnic group, who were part of the Xiōngnú confederation, with the proto-Yenisseian people.

26. *Hàn shū* 漢書 (Book of Han, 111), vol. XCIV.

evidence for the existence of an etymon ‘king, lord’ widely distributed in East Asia and going back at least to the Puyō and Koguryō people, if not the Xiōngnú.

Whatever the ultimate origin of this word, it enables us to finally reconnect the pieces of the puzzle of the etymology of ‘Buddha’ in both Japanese and Korean. The result is without surprise. In both languages, ‘Buddha’ can be traced back to Sanskrit via Chinese, and it follows the general tendency to adjoin a title ‘king, lord’ to the name of deities. This scenario also remarkably fits the history of the transmission of Buddhism in East Asia, i.e., from India to China, from China to Korea, and from Korea to Japan, which only adds to its plausibility.

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