

The World of Circulation: The Universality of Literary Value in the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy*

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Abstract

This essay aims to measure the universal literary value of the *Gunmong* by Kim Man-jung. To properly measure the universality of the *Gunmong*, we need to shed new light on its universal dimension, which, however, leads to the inevitable question of what universality is. The literary values in the *Gunmong* can be communicated to diverse readers, texts, and contexts. This is linked to the work of comparing the classics of center and periphery, and showing the differences and commonalities between them, so as to rethink the significance of universality of literary value.

The *Divine Comedy* is adopted for this work, which concentrates on how the *Gunmong*, as a classic work from the periphery, can maintain universal literary value through its textual power to abolish the division of center and periphery itself. I explain this by analyzing such literary effects in the *Gunmong* as “folding,” “harmony,” “ambivalence,” “appropriation,” “inclusion,” and “relativity,” concepts that all constitute the structure and concept of circulation.

Although I intend this work to be a radical reconsideration of universality in literature, I do not necessarily aim to pull down the “center” in favor of the “periphery” or vice versa, but rather to clarify that plural universalities exist, and the resultant new horizontal, democratic, and mutually productive relationships among them need to be highlighted in the work of examining literary value. This is what the *Gunmong*, with its structure and philosophy of circularity, accomplishes so well and what qualifies it as a classic.

Keywords: universality, literary value, circulation, folding, harmony, ambivalence, appropriation, inclusion, relativity

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Literary Value

The nature and significance of the universality of literary value is related to the two questions of what literature is and what it can do. One might answer those questions in a variety of ways: for instance, by describing the characteristic features that literature has in comparison with other kinds of creative works; by investigating the specific interrelationships between the literary text and its readers; by examining the historical, institutional, or social life of the text. In this essay, I focus on the relationship between literary value and effect, discussing how a classic might achieve literary universality and have a universal effect. I do so through a comparative reading of Kim Man-jung’s the *Gunmong* and Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*.¹ My examination of the *Gunmong* is based on the premise that the universality of literary value is variable, bound to sociohistorical contexts that affect how readers of these classics interpret their value and what intellectual, emotional, and cultural effect the texts have on them.

It is commonly said that these texts have achieved classical status the *Gunmong* has long been honored as a classic work in Korean literature. Likewise, the *Divine Comedy* has seen countless editions and scholarly studies throughout the West, and Dante scholars widely agree that it has had a profound influence on the Western literary tradition. On the other hand, I would like to emphasize that the two have hitherto maintained the firm positions of classic “merely” in their respective historical and cultural contexts. Broad interest in the *Divine Comedy* in Korea derives only from the historical situation of modern Korean literature that has in reality been governed by the hegemony of Western literature; indeed, we can hardly find a study or evaluation of the *Divine Comedy* based on a critical or academic Korean approach.² By the same token, the *Gunmong*, like most classic Korean works of literature, has not attracted much attention from Western scholars, despite having been translated into nine

1. Kim Man-jung (2007); Alighieri (1982).

2. See Park (2007, 309-346).

languages.³ Far from reflecting the literary values of the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy*, these scant attentions reflect the asymmetrical intellectual map of modernization, with Western influences moving to the East much more rapidly than vice versa.⁴

In all, these two works, representative classics of Korea and the West, respectively, remain mutually unfamiliar, and scholarly studies of each text have been pursued only within their original cultural contexts. As a result, although relevant scholarship has accumulated, I cannot help but assert that, in the absence of a comparative perspective, we have not shed proper light on these two works, nor fully considered the reason why they have been called “classics.” As how they can be interpreted and evaluated within each text’s respective contexts has not been properly examined, in a similar way, how these two “classics” can be read as universal texts and what kind of universality they exhibit have never been demonstrated.⁵

In order to reconstruct the universality of these texts as classics,

3. The English version of the *Gunmong* was published in 1922. See Kim Man-jung (1922). Kwon Young-Min (1995, 459) held that, with this version, Korean literature became known to the West for the first time. Other translations of the *Gunmong* were published in 1961 (Russian), 1975 (English), 1986 (Chinese), 1990 (Japanese), 1992 (Czech), 2001 (Italian), 2004 (French), 2006 (Spanish), and 2007 (Polish). Now the *Gunmong* is being translated into German, Vietnamese, and Romanian by the Korea Literature Translation Institute (www.ltkorea.net).

4. To the best of my knowledge, there are only a few works on the *Gunmong* written by Western scholars. Bantly (1996); Richard Rutt concluded that the *Gunmong* is a “literary work” while *Chunhyangjeon* belongs to the field of folklore. Rutt (1970); Soberg (1963, 213-230).

5. One might say that the term “value” implies a relation of superiority and inferiority, and thus we need to discuss “difference” rather than value. In short, what I mean by “value” includes the discussion of difference because the concept of value prescribes evaluation. I argue that value does not depend on any absolute criteria so as to decide its peculiar locus but rather on the ability to change meaning in the process of infinitely postponing such decision. In contrast, difference is merely the concept required to begin and advance that process. Further, difference can easily be confined to explaining the existing phenomena and end up by focusing on itself. But the process of evaluation allows the power of resistance to the negative effect of differentiation or omission that the discussion of difference may cause.

we should imagine new spheres for them, by looking at each text from a comparative position and by examining their reciprocal relationships based on a pluralism of literary value and alterity. For despite all the possible differences in conventions of valuation among various contexts, I argue for the important distinction that a “classic” has the power to exist in all of these contexts, providing new meanings and understandings that are renewed from generation to generation, from place to place, and from context to context.

The aim of this essay is to examine what allows the *Gunmong* to maintain its universal literary value.⁶ The universality of a text results from its capacity for self-negation.⁷ In the process of self-negation, absolute and final meanings are radically rejected. In discussing the universal value that a literary text maintains, we should therefore focus on the relationships of difference and communication of the literary values that the text forms in association with other texts. This is because no absolute universality exists or is recognized *per se*; true universality indicates something that continues to survive in traversing the contexts of the “Other.” Therefore, the authenticity of a universal text can be measured by investigating the relationship and procedure of difference and communication of universalities on the premise that there exist plural ways of being universal.

In this respect, to measure the universality of the *Gunmong*, we need to inquire how its literary value can be communicated to diverse readers, texts, and contexts. The authenticity of the universal value of the *Gunmong* will arise at as many points as we can show in relation to its differences formed by the readers and texts of other

6. In this essay, I strive to refer mainly to the discourses on the *Gunmong* that Korean literature scholars have produced, so as to reexamine both the text and its studies on a more universal level.

7. In one of my articles, I maintained that “the capacity and attitude of self-negation is one of the essential conditions of universality. In other words, we should define and control universality in that way. If universality does not include its own negation, it allows its borderline and further outside; at that moment, universality disappears. Therefore, the process itself in which universality includes its negations that occur inside and outside of it is the essential content and condition for building the concept of universality” (Park 2006a, 77).

contexts and to their consensus and communication with them. This means that the *Gunmong* has the possibility of not excluding other contexts and at the same time not being excluded from them, which is the basic principle of the *Gunmong*: circularity.

I perform this study by comparing classics from the center and periphery while showing the differences and commonalities between them, so as to rethink the significance of universality. Here, the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy* represent the classic of the periphery and the classic of the center respectively. This comparative study concentrates on how the *Gunmong* as a peripheral classic obtains and maintains universal literary value through its power to abolish the relationship between the center and periphery itself by blurring the boundaries that divide them.

Through the process of circularity, by which readers constantly construct new meanings from classic texts, the relationship between center and periphery is transformed into a relationship in which there is neither center nor periphery. As mentioned above, I focus on the *Gunmong* rather than on the *Divine Comedy* because I believe that it more readily demonstrates the challenge that may be found in and from the periphery. We can imagine the idea of a “classic of periphery,” an idea that does not seek to question the “classic of the center” itself but rather seeks to alter altogether the concept, position, meaning and role of the “center” and ultimately the very relationship between the center and periphery.

The *Divine Comedy* is arguably appropriate for highlighting the so-called “peripheral universality” of the *Gunmong* insofar as the *Divine Comedy* itself obtained universality from its peripheral location vis à vis Latin civilization through such literary virtues as self-negation, openness, and ambivalence, all of which are concepts that can be used to discuss the universality of the *Gunmong*. Although I intend this work to be a radical reconsideration of universality, my aim is not to depreciate the “center” in favor of the “periphery” or vice versa, but to show that a plurality of universalities exist, along with a recognition that makes new horizontal, democratic, and mutually productive relationships possible.

The Structure of Circulation

The *Gunmong*

In Korea, the *Gunmong* is well-established among both academic and popular readers. Since its first publication in the seventeenth century, it has enjoyed a wide readership: though the historical record is spotty before the twentieth century, we can assume that the *Gunmong* gained general popularity from the fact that it was printed on wooden plates and circulated over the province of Naju during the reign of King Yeongjo.⁸ In addition, along with *Chunhyangjeon* and *Hong Gil-dong jeon*, it has firmly established itself as an exemplary text that represents the Korean classics.⁹

The novel the *Gunmong* was written during the writer’s exile in Seoncheon.¹⁰ Forced into the maelstrom of political strife, Kim Man-jung has been evaluated from diverse perspectives, but his literary talent and filial affection for his mother were commonly recognized. His filial devotion was the direct motive behind the creation of the *Gunmong*; *Seopo yeonbo*, the chronological record of Kim Man-jung, reports that Kim Man-jung wrote the novel with the intention of consoling his mother who was anxious over his exile.¹¹ The story of the *Gunmong* is set in China around AD 840, during the Tang dynasty.

8. Sul (1999, 302). In 1725, the Chinese edition was printed and distributed; this is regarded as the first Chinese publication of a Korean novel for commercial purposes (Jung 2004, 115).

9. For an historical overview of studies of the *Gunmong*, see Kim B. (1995, 351-370).

10. In his thorough analysis of diverse materials and debates on the place and time of the writer’s exile and on the time of his creation of the text, Kim B. (1995, 284-305) concludes that the *Gunmong* was written during Kim Man-jung’s exile to Seoncheon between 1687 and 1688.

11. “When he thought of his mother who would weep, missing him sorely, he realized that separation can take place both in death and life. He wrote a novel and sent it to her so that she could while away the time with it. The major point of the novel is that human life in splendor is all a dream. This was also so that he could examine and console himself” (*Seopo yeonbo* 1992; my translation); quoted from Song (2003, 239). It is commonly accepted that Kim Man-jung wrote the text to console his mother’s anxiety over his exile and to fulfill her wishes (Kim B. 1995, 276).

The young Buddhist Seongjin is sent by his master to greet the Dragon King, who hosts him for dinner and deceives him with wine. On his return he is seduced by eight fairy maidens and thinks of worldly splendor. His master punishes him by seeing to it that he is reincarnated as Yang Soyu. Thereafter follows the story of Yang's earthly life and his eight-fold love story. Yang, who is a man of much beauty and wisdom, reigns in peace. In addition, his love for each of the eight fairies—who are all peerless in beauty, virtue, talent, goodness and charm—is equally warm and unabated. By this, Yang Soyu achieves all Seongjin's worldly desires. Finally, Yang changes back into Seongjin. Seongjin realizes that Yang Soyu's life is merely a short dream and thus awakens to the truths of religion and becomes a follower of the Buddha, and at last reaches the blissful heights of the Paradise to come.

The Effects of Folding

The effects of folding allow both the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy* to embody the circularity according to which textual meaning is interpreted in association with the reality of the reader. The two texts exhibit a similar narrative structure based on a dream, though with a number of important differences. In the *Divine Comedy*, dreaming takes place along a relatively linear trajectory, moving steadily towards the happy ending that the title itself (“comedy”) suggests; indeed, Dante's dream state is expressly noted in the textual narration, in which plural folds of dreaming are suggested indirectly or retrospectively through the literary process rather than explication.¹² In contrast, the plural folds of dreaming in the *Gunmong* are built into

12. John Scott clarified that “the term ‘comedy’ appears twice in the poem and once in the *Epistle to Cangrande* (13.10.28).” He quotes the statement in the latter that “comedy is a poetic narrative genre different from all others. It differs from tragedy in its subject matter, because tragedy at the beginning is admirable and peaceful, but at the end is foul and horrible. . . . Instead, comedy begins with a difficult situation but its plot has a happy ending. . . .” See Scott (2004, 171-173). In the ongoing debate about the authenticity of the *Epistle to Cangrande*, weighty evidence has been put forward by Lino Pertile (1991, 105-123).

the text itself, and they include phases of the pre-dream, the dream, and the post-dream, all of which are continually interrupted by other dream narratives.¹³ It is worth noting that while both texts contain dream sequences, their textual structures are markedly different. The entire *Divine Comedy* is a travelogue of a dream:

I cannot clearly say how I had entered
the wood; I was so full of sleep just at
the point where I abandoned the true path.¹⁴

In the introduction, the pilgrim Dante describes how he finds himself lost in a “dark wood” after waking from “sleep.” Here, there are two “folds” of reality: first, the world into whose woods he walks before falling asleep; and second, the woods into which he wakes, whose world forms the context for the subsequent narration. The narrator, ultimately, ends his pilgrimage without ever awakening from his dream. The entire world of the *Divine Comedy* is filled with the pilgrim Dante's dream. Therefore we can think that it is the stages of the writer and the readers that the text is extended toward, both in the pre-dream and the post-dream. The procedure ranging from the writer's address to the readers' reception and their subsequent relationship is repeatedly continued, and is what I call the literary process.¹⁵

13. These stages are not so clearly divided in the text. Seongjin enters the stage of dreaming as he descends from the real world to the underworld and returns to the real world in his reincarnation as Yang Soyu (Kim Man-jung 2007, 19-22). Then he comes out of the stage of dreaming in a sudden awakening from a “one night dream” (Kim Man-jung, 2007, 230-231) and finally his travels end in his ascent to the world of perfect bliss (Kim Man-jung, 2007, 233). Over the course of his transformations, he crosses the borders between the real and transcendental worlds over and over again.

14. Dante, *Inferno*, canto 1. 10-12. I follow Allen Mandelbaum's translation, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (1984).

15. I use the term “literary process” here for the procedure in which the writer produces a text on the basis of his experience of the world, after which the text is interpreted by the reader, who may then contribute to the production of other texts. The literary process maintains itself by allowing itself to form a circle in which meanings flow repeatedly between writer and reader.

Thusly does the *Divine Comedy* realize the structure of plural strata in the literary process while the *Gunmong* does so in the text itself.

The different worldviews within which the two texts are based constitute the difference: the *Gunmong* demonstrates more clearly the structure of plural strata by virtue of the aesthetics of transmigration and emptiness (*gong*)¹⁶ whereas the *Divine Comedy* does so through the teleological aesthetics of unilateral progress and ultimate hope. The narratives of both texts tend to move toward the transcendental, but the movement of the *Gunmong* is lateral and less teleological than that of the *Divine Comedy*, which moves consistently toward God as a fixed point.

Despite such differences, both texts exhibit this so-called process of “folding.” Sul summarizes the effect of folding in the *Gunmong* as the “foreshadowing of the meaning and function of the structure of fantasy through continuous self dual-negations.”¹⁷ Although this summary is limited to the dream of one character (Yang Soyu) among many, it is enough to show the more general phenomenon of dreaming in the *Gunmong*. Sul holds that “the dreams in the text adopt the plural strata of synthesis as well as their diverse sub-strata, among which we can locate their inter-relatedness.”¹⁸ This inter-relatedness of dreams leads us to consider the entire structure of the *Gunmong* as “the relationship of inside and outside of dream and reality.”¹⁹ I would like to emphasize that such a relationship highlights circularity by virtue of its unstoppable communication with reality and allows us to blur the border between the textual and real worlds.

Although they differ in their manner of folding, the literary values in both texts sustain the ability to appear in diverse contexts. This ability is the most important prerequisite for a literary text that is to survive across time and space so as to obtain and maintain uni-

16. On this point, see the subsection “Inclusion and relativity” below.

17. Sul (1981, I-13-4).

18. Sul (1981, I-22).

19. Sul (1981, I-22).

versalities. Moving among the various “folds” of time and space, the two texts blur the binary between text and reality, mirroring the process by which a classic text maintains its universal meanings. How then is the interpretation of the reader able to enter into the text via the folding effect?

The Transcendental and Non-Transcendental Worlds

Seongjin in the *Gunmong* and Dante in the *Divine Comedy* are both travelers to the immortal and transcendental worlds, yet still display remarkable differences—while Dante journeys to the world of an absolute being who defines the place of salvation for him, Seongjin travels in the “real” China, which indicates the presence of a broader historical world. While Dante’s journey has a fixed endpoint, Seongjin moves back and forth between the transcendental—divine—world and the non-transcendental—real or earthly—world. Dante declares himself a mortal being and endows that fact with special meaning. The movement from the mortal to immortal realm is grounded in the medieval Catholicism contemporary to the *Divine Comedy*, and more generally, in a Western philosophical tradition that emphasizes the movement from “lower” forms of material being to “higher” spiritual or intellectual states. Making the journey to the immortal world as a mortal pilgrim, Dante tries to reach the “Absolute”, for souls can be saved only through the grace of God. This narrative journey structures the *Divine Comedy*.²⁰

On the other hand, in the *Gunmong*, the distinction between transcendence and non-transcendence is far less obvious. Instead, the entire world of the *Gunmong* is filled with human desire and love, and in the same sphere, the gods are humanized and described in material terms. In the travel and life of Seongjin, as described in the *Gunmong*, body and soul and even the divine are not separated from

20. The *Paradiso* in particular is filled with Dante’s theological and philosophical affirmation of the synthesis of body and soul, and his mortal status is deconstructed in the final stage of salvation (see Dante, *Paradiso*, canto 33).

one another—and in any case, the text is not primarily focused on that separation. the *Gunmong* sustains the world where binary oppositions such as body and soul, life and death, human and god do not cause any confrontational contradiction. For instance, Seongjin, drunk with liquor offered by the Dragon King, returns safely to the human world,²¹ and the eight fairies descend to the real world; these two events motivate Seongjin's journey to the transcendental world. In this respect, it is largely recognized that the *Gunmong* is based on Seongjin's journey, in which he, transformed into Yang Soyu, travels to the transcendental world in his dream and, upon awakening from it, returns to the real world.²²

Here I would like to focus on how the *Gunmong* is related to the real world of the reader, rather than attempt a determination of whether Seongjin is a transcendental being, for the world of the *Gunmong* goes beyond such binary opposition in that it relates the text to the real world.²³ In the text, the "real world" indicates both

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21. "The King in response bowed low and ordered a feast of welcome to be prepared. . . . Seongjin, moved by this kindness, could no longer refuse, and drank three glasses. He then spoke his greeting and, riding on the wind, sailed directly for Lotus Peak. When he reached the base of the hill, the influence of the wine reached his face and his cheeks burned" (Kim Man-jung 2007, 8-9; my translation).
22. Seongjin was seduced by the eight fairies and scolded and sent to the other world by his master (Kim Man-jung, 14-22). In fact, the disambiguation between the transcendental and non-transcendental worlds is not manifested clearly in the text, so that the question has remained among Kim Man-jung scholars of whether the world of the *Gunmong* is already transcendental or not. This we can see in Lee Sang-Taik (1981, III-44-53). Personally, I think that disambiguation is possible, although the borderline between the two worlds is unclear. See note 13.
23. Since Jeong Gyu-bok's (1965) interpretation, many scholars have discussed the dream-fantasy structure. Kim Byung-Kuk (1995, 361-363) argued that the universal literality of the *Gunmong* could be extracted from its structure of fantasy. This, I think, can be confirmed by conceptualizing circularity. The structure of fantasy is generally discussed from the perspectives of psychoanalysis or mythology, but I would like to discuss fantasy here as establishing its own meaning by maintaining a circulative relationship with reality. The concept of fantasy and fantastic structure in the *Gunmong* has been discussed extensively among Kim Man-jung scholars. See particularly An (1973, 70-75; 1977, 390-421); Jeong (1972, 453-465); Kim B. (1968a, 107-114; 1968b, 70-83); Sul (1995, 73-93). They all discuss the way in which fantasy and reality communicate.

the pre-dream and post-dream worlds. In contrast, Lee Sang-Taik observes that it is meaningless to distinguish between the three stages of pre-dream, dream, and post-dream because Seongjin always exists as a transcendental being beyond such distinctions; Lee defines the *Gunmong* as "a literature of eternal transmigration based on a transcendental ontology and worldview."²⁴ However, his definition is acceptable only if focused on the dream part of the narrative. In fact, the stages of pre- and post-dream are not absorbed into the stage of dreaming. Quantitatively, the dream stage may occupy most of the *Gunmong*, but the stages of pre- and post-dreaming play the decisive roles of connecting the dream stage itself to the real world. Thus, Seongjin does not remain an unrealistic being, although he transcends the distinctions between the pre-dream, dream and post-dream states.

After all, although the stages of pre- and post-dreaming, like the stage of dreaming itself, might belong to the transcendental world in the text, the structure of plural strata that they form allows the readers to read themselves into the *Gunmong*. That is to say, the reader identifies with the stages of pre- and post-dream rather than with the stage of the dream. Through these folding effects, the stages of pre- and post-dream are not isolated in themselves, but cause the dream stage to communicate with the real world either on the level of the text or the reader's own socio-historical situation. This kind of discourse helps us understand the structure of the *Gunmong* beyond that of mere transcendentalism.

Openness of the Text

At this point, it is important to note that, however complex its world is, the *Divine Comedy's* structure of a folded dream, in comparison with the plural folding structure of the *Gunmong*, can be realized only when it goes beyond itself; that is, it is only when Dante's tale enters the literary process that the tale gains the ability to communi-

24. Lee Sang-Taik (1981, III-53).

cate with the real world. Dante's journey and its representation belong to the transcendental world alone. Due to this fact, we cannot find in the pilgrim Dante's journey the experience of returning to the place of pre-dream or post-dream (as we see in the case of Seongjin). The connection between pre- and post-dream in the *Divine Comedy* is realized only outside the text. It is through Dante's memory that the connection is realized inside the text; he remembers the real world throughout his journey into the world of the soul, and further does not conceal the authorial intention that he writes only from memory after the completion of his journey.²⁵

The premise that Dante as writer and protagonist represents his journey through memory implies that the journey is already located outside the text of the *Divine Comedy*. Strictly speaking, the term "text" encompasses the process in which the *Divine Comedy* is written and read. To repeat, I use the term "literary process"; i.e. the procedure through which the author produces a text on the basis of his experience of the world, as well as through which the text is distributed to the reader, who reflects his experience of reading to his life and communicates it to the world whereby contributing (in)directly to the production of other texts. Therefore, it is in such repeatedly associated literary processes that the journey of the pilgrim Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, which is limited to the transcendental world, enlarges its literary effect on the real world.²⁶

In short, it is through memory that Dante constantly refers to the real world during his journey to the transcendental one, whereby he incessantly returns to the real world. The end of his journey is not linked to the transcendental being itself but is deconstructed both in the *Divine Comedy* by the writer Dante, who recalls and represents the procedure of arrival, as well as in the innumerable possible worlds produced by the readers; the journey is never completed by

25. For instance: "O Muses, o high genius, help me now; / O memory that set down what I saw, / Here shall your excellence reveal itself!" (Dante, *Inferno*, canto 2. 7-9).

The term "memory," or terms of similar meaning, is incessantly repeated in the text.

26. See Park (2006b, 63-110).

arriving at the end, but revives continuously in diverse aspects. This shows that Dante's return not only goes beyond "arrival," but is performed in a way that cannot be achieved by the mere return alone.

In this way, could Seongjin have ever safely returned to his point of origin? The answer is no. The beginning and end of the *Gunmong* are postulated as pre- and post-dream stages that are not arrival points, but rather stopovers. At the end of the *Gunmong*,²⁷ Seongjin comes out of a dream, perceives the false splendor of human life, and then more eagerly applies himself to reaching paradise. At once, he returns to the locus of the pre-dream and leaves for another world (paradise). Thus, like Dante, Seongjin's return is a temporary stay rather than an absolute arrival. The difference is that while Dante's travel without arrival is directly linked to the relationship between writer and reader, the structure of "pre-dream—dream—postdream" in the *Gunmong* represents the non-return of Seongjin's travel entirely within the text itself. In any case, it is precisely through this "open structure of signification" that the return to nowhere represented in the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy* share common ground. Both texts bear narrative structures that lead the readers to the real world instead of the closed transcendental one, thereby allowing the texts to generate their immanent meanings according to the context of the real world.

Now let us closely examine the difference between the two texts. The pilgrim Dante remains alienated from the world through which he travels: he keeps locating himself as an observer in the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, and the reader also looks through Dante's eyes.²⁸ Seongjin does not observe but merely behaves; the reader

27. "From this time, Seongjin became chief of the disciples on the heights of Yonwha and taught the Doctrine, so that fairies, dragons, demons and men all revered him as they did the late Great Teacher. The eight priestesses also served him as their master, achieved the complete degree of the Doctrine, and at last they all reached the blissful heights of the Paradise to come" (Kim Man-jung 2007, 245; my translation).

28. For instance, in hell, Dante describes himself thus: "When I had set my eyes upon the faces / of some on whom that painful fire falls, / I recognized no one" (Dante 1984, 52-54). "In that hollow upon which / just now, I kept my eyes intent"

shares his experience and is united with him. This reminds us that the *Divine Comedy* meets the reader in the extension of the text, while the *Guunmong* meets him in the connotation of the text; that is to say, the *Divine Comedy* can be transformed into an open space only through the memory of Dante (as the writer and the speaker) while the *Guunmong* is open from the beginning. Therefore, Dante tries to recall while Seongjin just dreams; Dante takes a retrospective view, while Seongjin sees in real-time; the readers, through Dante's memory, are repeatedly reminded of their own consciousness²⁹ while in the world of the *Guunmong*, they already reside within it, see it with Seongjin, and come out of the dream altogether when Seongjin discloses his falsehood by saying that life is a mere dream.³⁰ In the *Guunmong*, all events proceed in real time so that, after finishing the text, the readers feel that they have spent a lifetime with Seongjin.

Dante, as an outsider, experiences the world designed and controlled by God whether it is mortal or immortal. However, in this world where God is the center, Dante as writer creates God and thus replaces Him; that is, even God becomes one of his literary devices. The problem is that the center itself remains unchanged; the center of God disappears as the writer—Dante—reappears. Even in a new possible interpretation that Dante's salvation does not imply a Christian mode of salvation, but rather a type of literary salvation achieved through a literary process, he still stands at the center of such a liter-

(Dante, *Inferno*, canto 17. 52-54). The reader is also asked to perform an act of observation when Dante exhorts him to grasp the truth: "Here, reader, let your eyes look sharp at truth, / for now the veil has grown so very thin — / it is not difficult to pass within" (Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 8. 19-21).

29. Sometimes the writer Dante invites the reader to memorize. For instance, "Remember, Reader, if you've ever been . . ." (Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 17. 1).

30. "The Master said: 'You have gone with delight and returned with exhausted delight, so how can I intervene in this? You say that you have dreamed of transmigration into the mortal world and that you have started to think the two worlds to be different, the real world and the dream; this shows that you have not yet awakened from your dream. Zhuangzi, in his dream, became a butterfly, and the butterfly became Zhuangzi; he never distinguished who was real and who was a dream. Who is a dream and who is not among Seongjin and Soyou?'" (Kim Man-jung 2008, 242-243; my translation).

ary enterprise.

On the other hand, the world represented in the *Guunmong* is already open. Even without new attempts to interpret and thus open the text as in the case of the *Divine Comedy*, the process whereby the writer becomes vague and invisible is itself an open one, with the center as object of negation and escape not having been set at all, but with diverse worlds allowed to unfold as they are. The reader is therefore able to experience the world as both affirmation and inclusion. In this respect, we can understand that the path of Dante's journey is markedly unilateral, while that of Seongjin's travels requires an endless going and returning or eventual stopping at some point; Dante's path converges on one point alone, while Seongjin's path reaches everywhere and extends to everywhere. Both are open, yet the characteristics and very principle of openness differs for each.

In conclusion, the structure of circulation in the *Guunmong* is open so as to invite readers to generate new diverse meanings according to their sociohistorical contexts. The *Divine Comedy* has a structure in which, in order to generate such meanings, the reader needs to extend himself outside the text, while the *Guunmong* is possessed of that structure in the text itself and is thus open in itself. The structures of circulation in the *Comedy* can be realized only by the readers' active interventions while in the *Guunmong* it is already realized in itself. But the fact that the openness of the *Guunmong* is a given in itself does not guarantee the effect of openness; it requires the intervention of interpretation just as the *Divine Comedy* does. The role of readers who activate the open structure of the *Guunmong* is "still" required; therefore it can be said that the structure of circulation resides in the *Guunmong*, yet only insofar as the other structure of circulation—the readers' cooperation—enables an open structure of circulation to operate.

I call this sort of structure "circulation" because it literally maintains itself only by forming a circle in which the meanings flow repeatedly between the writer and the reader. It should be emphasized that the reader's active reading allows the meaning of Seongjin's salvation to be reflected in the real world, which is

derived from the structure of circulation inherent in the *Gunmong*. Conversely, this circulation allows the *Gunmong* to survive among its readers. If it is recognized that survival is the precondition and basis of universality, the structure, or more precisely, the procedure of circulation in the *Gunmong* contributes to its universal literary value. In short, it is through its circulation that the *Gunmong* carries and mirrors the openness and operation of the entire literary process. Let us consider now how circularity in the *Gunmong* is facilitated by its text and textual strategies.

The Life of Circulation

Historical and Social Similarities

Both Kim Man-jung and Dante were experts in diverse fields of knowledge: Kim Man-jung in Confucian classics, history, mathematics, music, astronomy, geography, Buddhism, Taoism, and even popular literature.³¹ Dante was versed in Christian theology, literature, philosophy, history, geography, as well as classical and medieval astronomy. Both synthesized their knowledge in the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy*, respectively, while maintaining distance from the dominant centers of their societies, Song Confucianism and the Catholic Church.

Both texts are based on the Ptolemaic system.³² In the Joseon dynasty, which had been exposed to Western scholarship through China, some progressive intellectuals had begun to believe that China was no longer the geographical and cultural center of the world.

31. Jeong (1981, 5-6).

32. Kim Man-jung says in his book *Seopo manpil*: "The Western theory of the earth divided the areas into 360 degrees on the basis of the sky. Longitude is used to measure the height of the south-north poles, and latitude verifies it with solar and lunar eclipses so that their principle is clear and their description is precise. We cannot but believe it. Our scholars doubt how the ground can maintain itself on a round ring if the earth is really round, but this is a view that a frog in the pot or a summer insect might hold," (Kim Man-jung 1987, 285; my translation).

Among those was Kim Man-jung, who wrote several books related to *Silhak* (Practical Learning), such as *Uisang jirui* (Inquiry on System) and *Jigu gojeung* (Research on the Earth). Although he used China as the setting for the *Gunmong*, this was not a political claim for China's superiority but a symbolic window into a broader world.

Both the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy* are literary texts written in unorthodox styles; that is, as literature, they were alienated from the recognized institutions for production-exchange-consumption of knowledge in their respective societies. It is well known that the *Divine Comedy* was written in vernacular Italian in order to allow all classes of people to read it. This "vulgarity" is also evident in the use of the word "comedy" in the title, as it was considered a low and insignificant genre compared to "tragedy," a superior and more sublime genre.³³ Likewise, the *Gunmong*, which scholars believe was first written in Korean and not Chinese,³⁴ challenged the neglected status of Korean literature as it existed on the periphery of Chinese literature.³⁵ Both Dante's and Kim Man-jung's texts were cornerstones in their respective national literatures and confirmed their existential consciousness while challenging their specific sociohistorical situations.

33. The *Divine Comedy* established the direction of Humanism, which was arising along with the bourgeois class, by emphasizing the intellectuals' practice of reflecting the human way of life, which is particularly seen in *Purgatorio*. Dante thought that the attainment of "purgatorium" was possible even for pagans who live without sin or achieve morality, which was unacceptable to the doctrine of "original sin" of Christianity. At this point, we can say that Dante's ethics were worldly, unreligious, and political, particularly as caused by the social requirements that the new class of capitalists and merchants presented. See Le Goff (1986).

34. Most Korean Kim Man-jung scholars assume that the original version of the *Gunmong* was published in Korean, but Jeong Gyu-bok has persistently maintained that the original version was published in Chinese. See Jeong (2004, 101-116).

35. Sul (1999, 12). The writer Kim Man-jung was one of the most renowned elites who formed the contemporary mainstream of Confucianism and was promoted to leading national positions, including president of the Confucian academy. However, his progressive thoughts and practice led him to challenge the Confucian order and thereby led to his exile. The fact that he has been hitherto known as a novelist rather than a scholar or bureaucrat also demonstrates that he was a pioneer in his time when the genre of the novel was neglected.

The *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy* were both written during the writers' political falls from grace and experiences of exile. It should be emphasized that the *Gunmong* was read by a variety of readers ranging from the gentry to the lower classes. This fact suggests that the worldview of the text was generally accepted, which may mean that the world of the *Gunmong* is, in fact, "not a world defined by confusion created from conflicts between frustration and victory, between disillusion and happiness, but a world where all human passion and intentionality toward life are always harmoniously and stably maintained."³⁶

In this respect, the *Gunmong* leads readers to experience the affirmation and inclusion of the world. This affirmation and inclusion toward the world were formed from the writer's sincere reflection on and search for political, intellectual, religious, and moral certainties, thereby forming the basis of the circularity of the *Gunmong*.

Harmony

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante achieves salvation by successfully demonstrating a thorough knowledge of theology (particularly in the *Paradiso*); in the *Gunmong*, Seongjin achieves salvation by pursuing a variety of high-level official services, that is, through worldly participation in social institutions and systems with the goal of building a perfectly stable and tranquil society. The "reign of peace" (*taebyeong seongdae*) frequently mentioned in the *Gunmong* is equivalent to the paradise which the pilgrim Dante strives for in the *Divine Comedy*. However, while the pilgrim Dante's journey is mostly concerned with his individual salvation,³⁷ Seongjin's joyful life with the eight fairies symbolizes the salvation of the entire world. We can confirm this point by estimating, in every corner of the text, the aspects of the "reign of peace" that Seongjin establishes without any trouble. For him, as well as for the readers of the text, the "reign of

36. Kim B. (1995, 268).

37. On the differing meanings of Dante's "salvation," see Park (2006b).

peace" stands for a world in which everyone has accepted the world as it is and aims to live within it.

In short, Seongjin's salvation exists on the single level of the "reign of peace," whereas Dante's salvation proceeds by constantly moving forward towards a fixed point. Dante's salvation is thus based on the binary opposition between the world from which he begins his quest for salvation and the world in which he will be saved. Only through the literary process, in which he meets his readers as well as himself (as a reader of his own text), does he achieve salvation here in his own world. Although one may say that the *Divine Comedy* shows us the process through which Dante fulfills salvation, that process is able to unfold merely by aiming at completion or a cure for disharmony. Consequently, Dante's journey for salvation cannot but be perpetually unstable, and requires him to undergo hardship and test, and further needs a progress.

In the *Gunmong*, however, salvation is always being achieved and does not begin with a disharmonious world. While in the world of the *Divine Comedy*, particularly in the *Purgatorio*, the salvation of souls involves their transformation in anticipation of divine judgment,³⁸ the world represented in the *Gunmong* is one where both confusion and peace exist and continue to exist without any amendment.³⁹

The path to salvation represented in the *Gunmong* operates differently than that in *Divine Comedy*: it is based on the desire to overcome a binary opposition and seek harmony in our world, rather than being necessarily bound to progress and arrival. Even in the

38. The souls' transformation towards divine salvation fills *Purgatory* in which Dante also changes in order to prepare himself to ascend to Heaven. For instance, "In watching her [Beatrice], within me I was changed / as Glaucus changed, tasting the herb that made / him a companion of the other sea gods. / Passing beyond the human cannot be worded" (Dante, *Paradiso*, canto 1. 67-70).

39. "Beginning as a normal scholar, the minister met the king who recognized him and overcame the national crisis by his military power and achieved the reign of peace by his scholarship . . . there is no such everlasting perfection of prosperity" (Kim Man-jung 2007, 231; my translation).

Gunmong, we can detect a structure of progress (namely Seongjin's achievement of progressively higher social status), but the text emphasizes that progress is based on the recognition and circularity of human life. This allows us to imagine a sequence in which the desire to rise in the world and gain fame sustained by Confucianism is offset and undermined by the Buddhist moderation represented in the "dream of the butterfly" (*hojeopmong*) found at the end of the text.⁴⁰

Ambivalence

The ambivalent cosmology or worldview peculiar to the *Gunmong* is particularly evident in two aspects: the pattern of never-ending return and the theme of bisexuality. The former is above all linked to Seongjin, whose transformation among the pre-dream, dream, and post-dream stages is, as stated above, circular. His travel to the transcendental world is preceded by his master's affirmation that he will return safely to the non-transcendental world.

If your mind remains unpurified, you can hardly fulfill your wisdom although you stay here in the mountains; but if you never forget the root, then you will return safely even though you stay in the mundane life. If you ever desire to come back here, I will go and bring you. So depart now without doubt.⁴¹

The destination of the safe return is not clear here. Even though Seongjin's travel is obviously designed for his salvation and his return point should be the place where he achieves it, it is not clearly suggested whether that be "the mountains" or "the mundane life." We need to focus on the pattern of return itself rather than on its specific destination, which is evidently safe, as we see in the Master's admonition to "depart now without doubt." Seongjin's return is

40. Kim Man-jung (2007, 231). See also note 29-30.

41. Seongjin's Master says this when Seongjin enters the dream stage or ascends to the transcendental world (*Gunmong*, 13; my translation).

always guaranteed, although its destination is not prescribed. This example differs from the situation of Lucifer in the *Divine Comedy*, who can never return to his original place in Heaven, being held forcefully in Hell after committing the sin of pride.⁴² While Lucifer's descent signifies the absence of God's grace, Seongjin's descent includes all the values of heaven and earth. Seongjin surpasses the teleological origin whereby he embraces the innumerable folds of reality (including dreams) that he faces.

If there is no origin, there is no end. In Christianity, on which the *Divine Comedy* is based, the whole flow of our world and time ranges from the origin characterized by "original sin" to the end represented by the Last Judgment. Human salvation is to be achieved along the line between these poles, and it necessarily requires obtaining the grace of God, who prearranged them. However, we should not forget that the *Divine Comedy* itself is not theological doctrine relying on a predetermined line of salvation, but a literary text, conveying possible worlds where the reader can imagine how salvation is represented in the text. This reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy* suggests that human salvation can be achieved by human practice without Grace.⁴³

This interpretation, which shows an optimistic view of salvation that the writer Dante is believed to maintain, can also be seen in the example of Seongjin who accepts both the values of heaven and earth. To judge from the observation that Seongjin's descent does not conclude in itself but opens the possibility of ascent and further, of re-descent and re-ascent, the *Gunmong* bears an optimist worldview. For example, Cho Dong-Il understood that Kim Man-jung, by writing a novel that shows truthfully the relationship of surface and interior in his society, leads us to see that the substance of things always has a two-faced aspect.⁴⁴ It is certain that the *Gunmong*

42. He is described thus: "If he was once as handsome as he now / is ugly and, despite that, raised his brows / against his Maker, one can understand / how every sorrow has its source in him!" (Dante, *Inferno*, canto 34. 34-37).

43. See Martinez and Durling (2003, 3-16).

44. Cho (2001, 15-48).

exposed the contradictory relationship between Confucianism—the dominant ideology in his society—and Buddhism and Taoism—both relatively “descended,” and furthermore, postulated the ground for affirming and including all of them in a circular way that annihilates the difference between heaven and earth, thereby constructing a perfect world where the two are no longer opposed but harmonized. Similarly, the journey of the pilgrim Dante maintains ascent but the position of the writer Dante is bound to the earth that is already descended. In other words, the writer Dante makes his alter ego ascend continuously from his fixed goal. This shows that Seongjin’s descent of exile can be applied to Dante; the writer Dante can be understood to include the two worlds by his standing on the borderline. We can engage in the *Divine Comedy* in this way only insofar as we make them enter the literary process.

In order to discuss the theme of bisexuality in the *Gunmong*, it is necessary to make a brief detour and start with some remarks about the relevant discourses. Some read Kim Man-jung’s desire to enlighten the lower classes as an aspect of the popularization of the seventeenth century Korean novel. However, it is also possible to say that enlightenment was merely “one” part of the *Gunmong* and, more crucially, that it does not seriously affect its literary effects. Some might maintain that to reveal and spread Kim Man-jung’s optimistic view of human salvation is also related to enlightenment. However, the definition of “enlightenment” on which such arguments are based is limited to the dissemination of a specific ideology, namely that of patriarchy.⁴⁵

Some have striven to relate the theme of patriarchy to feminist concerns. Kang Sang-Sun, for instance, holds that patriarchy and the desire for escape are paradoxically matched in the *Gunmong*, so as to maintain male privilege.⁴⁶ Song Sung-Wook similarly observes that

45. See Song (2002, 249); Jo (2001, 220). On the other hand, there are papers that tend to perceive in the *Gunmong* a world where worldly desire is most realized: see Lee Sang-Ku (2004, 187-213); Yun (2004, 347-388).

46. Kang (1993).

gentry-class male readers believe that the *Gunmong* supports the patriarchal ideology of Confucianism, while female readers, who were oppressed by patriarchal ideology, read it with an ironic familiarity because they were haunted by the narrative interest that the text itself offered.⁴⁷ Consequently, they maintain that the intention to accept patriarchal ideology unconditionally permeates the world of the *Gunmong*. The critical problem thus seems to be whether the text reproduces a social ideology of patriarchy or provides consolation for women oppressed by that ideology. I argue that the text and its themes are too dynamic to confine their meaning to that simple dichotomy.⁴⁸

In order to appreciate the complexity of the *Gunmong*, it is helpful to study the theme of bisexuality in the text. I define bisexuality as representing the process of circularity and the practice of standing on borderlines. It is unstable because it negates binary oppositions and moves between them. It is thus a process that blurs the distinction by which homosexuality and heterosexuality postulate themselves as the center while casting the other as “Other.” In this process of transgression, the negative effects of difference are post-

47. Song (2003, 259-261). According to him, the translation of the *Gunmong* into Chinese also corresponded to its consumption by male readers. The following observation is noteworthy in the same vein. “The heterogeneous voices in the basis of the *Gunmong* are verified as figuration of ambivalent characters, homosexual intimacy of female characters, caricature of male authority, and the dual attitudes of male character concerning love affairs. We can find through such observation a movement of escaping from the reinforced consciousness of the patriarchal system. Thus, the *Gunmong* becomes a text based on multi-layered discourse by strengthening apparently the dominant ideology of the society of Joseon dynasty but reversely displaying women’s desire and critical eyes on the illusion of the patriarchal system” Kim Moon-Hee (2005, 262; my translation). On the other hand, Jung Byung-Sul grasped that the fantastic and romantic love in the *Gunmong* was derived from the appearance of commercial culture in the 17th-century’s East Asia.

48. For instance, Kim Byung-Kuk emphasizes this point by quoting Mun Sang-Deuk: “the *Gunmong* is the only novel from the Joseon dynasty that discontinues the old-fashioned romantic or unofficial historical tale style because it clearly maintains a consistent subject” (Kim B. 1995, 358; my translation). I think that the “consistent subject” can be best explained by the appropriation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, whose principal aspect is ambivalence.

poned indefinitely. This is the process of openness in which the flow of circulation itself is maintained and at the same time disappears repeatedly and incessantly—that is, the process in which circulation is maintained by abandoning itself.

The subject of love, insofar as it indicates bisexual love, should be a foundation for constructing the “universal value” of the *Guunmong*. While *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (The Life of an Amorous Man) in Japan or *Yujiaoli* (The Two Fair Cousins) in China are clearly love stories told against the historical backdrop of an emerging commercial culture, the *Guunmong* is a fantastic and romantic love story with fairies rather than “real women.”⁴⁹ Such “unrealistic” love is a narrative through which all sorts of binary oppositions melt away, especially because so many of the love stories in the text are characterized by bisexuality. In the *Guunmong*, each of the eight fairies has her own body and her own emotional and social relationships; yet, though divided into eight entities, the fairies symbolize oneness in a single entity.⁵⁰ This indeed shows their bisexual reconciliation; they are connected with each other to provide a unified complex result of Seongjin’s relationship with them and his pursuit of maternity.⁵¹ Not

49. Jung (2004, 120).

50. Kim B. (1995, 267). See a sentence in the *Guunmong*: “We the eight people were born and grown up in diverse places but became one by serving one person thereby uniting ourselves” (Kim Man-jung 2007, 229; my translation).

51. Kim B. (2001, 23-45). Seongjin’s desire, which is fulfilled through Soyu’s life, is focused on love. His desire of love fills the plot of the *Guunmong*. In general, medieval Joseon novels were based on polygamous system; they start with the crisis of lack of posterity and end with the richness of fecundity. They emphasize the importance of family in the Confucian society. However, the polygamy in the *Guunmong* is unique: the eight were blessed with children. The two princesses, Cloudlet, Moonlight, Swallow and Wildgoose had each a son, while Phoenix and White-cap had each a daughter. Not once did any of them see a little child die in the home, which is an experience that differs from the common world of mortals” (Kim Man-jung 2007, 229-230; my translation). Here we find that the novel does not respect mainstream Confucianism; the characters in the *Guunmong* do not grant any meaning to children above that of being evidence of love. Therefore, for Yang Soyu, the eight women are no more than the objects through which he is able to achieve his desire for love in diverse ways. Even worldly splendor is a product of his love affairs (Song 2003, 243-246). Seongjin’s desire for love reflects

only the eight fairies but Seongjin, all work together toward a complex mode of existence that is linked to Beatrice’s mode of existence of melting binary oppositions between divinity and humanity, transcendence and non-transcendence, immortality and mortality.⁵² It is crucial to stress that insofar as the bisexuality of the eight fairies overcomes binary oppositions, it operates as a basis for the world of circularity of the “reign of peace” that Seongjin incessantly fulfills in the text.⁵³ By presenting an ambivalent symbol to which Seongjin strives, the eight fairies blur the sharp distinctions between masculinity and femininity as embodied in individuals.

Inclusion and Relativity

I have argued that the narrative of the *Guunmong* as a product of confronting reality pursues a world of harmony. I would now like to discuss the philosophical foundations of the *Guunmong*, and specifically its appropriation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Many scholars have written about how these three elements are synthesized within the text,⁵⁴ but I argue the importance of observing how the text “appropriates” those philosophies. To be more precise, the structure and procedure of appropriation, rather than the result of

the writer’s desire, which converges on his mother. The eight women have diverse backgrounds and personalities yet suggest, together, one ideal woman: the mother (Kim B. 1995, 267). This can be interpreted using a psychoanalytical approach. For instance, Kim Byung-Kuk, on the basis of C.G. Jung’s theory, argued that the writer’s unconscious stratum is in search of maternity; the eight fairies are a unified symbol of his mother. See Kim B. (1968b, 79).

52. See Ferrante (1992); Lund-Mead (1997, 195-213).

53. Lee Sang-Ku argued that the *Guunmong* shows that the moral justification of Confucianism was not an absolute system of order granted from the laws of nature. It does this by successfully representing the process in which the eight fairies, who had been equal in the original world, were born by chance into different social statuses. See Lee Sang-Ku (2004, 209). In this respect we can consider that bisexuality functions as an affirmation of our world as well as a resistance to any absolute value system.

54. On this, see the recent discussion: Shin (2006, 123-154).

it, allows the text to have a universal literary value. They are pre-established worldviews or philosophies as the universals; or even if one re-examines their universalities, they are powerful candidates for obtaining universality again. However, true universality can only be established by appropriating their universal worldviews in a way in which they are not confined to themselves. In this way, the *Gunmong* maintains its universality. By appropriating such universal philosophies as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism and fashioning a unique narrative identity from them, the *Gunmong* models the process of interpretation and reformulation that would allow diverse readers to engage with the “circularity” of the text. It has the capacity to provide us with new meanings whenever we read it in a new context.

It is widely recognized that the *Gunmong* is best explained through the principle of Emptiness discussed in the *Diamond Sutra* (*Geumganggyeong*),⁵⁵ but there have been many discussions concerning the philosophical background of the *Gunmong*.⁵⁶ During his period of career success, Kim Man-jung was faithful to the socially and philosophically dominant orthodox Song Confucianism; but when he was exiled, he began studying Buddhism, which was then suppressed by Confucian laws and institutions, and concentrated on writing novels rather than on continuing his academic activities. Kim Man-jung found a link between those two philosophies through the principle of Emptiness, particularly as explained in the *Diamond Sutra*, which was consistent with the “moral nature theory” of Confucianism.⁵⁷

As Cho Dong-Il has acutely observed, the *Gunmong* is not specifically a Buddhist novel, nor does it reflect the philosophy of Buddhism appropriately in the theory of Emptiness of the *Diamond Sutra*.⁵⁸ Instead, argues Cho, it is important to understand that Kim

55. Cho (2005, 124-125); Yun (2004, 347-388); Kim Il-Ryul (2000, 319-345); Jeong (1993, 214-247).

56. On the precise history of the study of its philosophical background, see Kim B. (1995, 358-360).

57. Sul (1999, 341).

58. Cho (1981, III-9-21).

Man-jung, who had experienced both success and failure in Confucian society, used Buddhism as a site of inclusion⁵⁹ in order to point out the limits of Sino-centric Confucianism and simultaneously embrace them.⁶⁰ If we agree with Cho, then, we must consider how to understand the ways in which Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism blend together in the text.

Yu Byung-Hwan’s argument is noteworthy in showing that Kim Man-jung synthesized the three philosophies centering on Buddhism and successfully represented them in the *Gunmong*.⁶¹ Yu’s interpretation allows us to understand the *Gunmong* as a primarily Buddhist novel that also includes Taoism and even Confucianism. My judgment here is that by incorporating different and at times conflicting worldviews into the same text, the *Gunmong* relativizes those worldviews and thus opens itself to plural literary and philosophical interpretations. This process is especially important given the absoluteness—both practical and philosophical—of Confucianism at the time. By challenging Confucian dominance through such Buddhist or Taoist concepts as emptiness, moderation (*jungyong*) or dependent-arising (*yeonggi*), the *Gunmong* makes Confucianism only one system among several. It is true that the *Gunmong* is certainly characterized by such Buddhist or Taoist concepts, but only insofar as we focus on what they do for the effect of relativity rather than what they are, can we establish the universal value of the text. In other words, the world of universality of the *Gunmong* can best be explained by virtue of asking how the “process” in which relativity unfolds and operates, rather than clarifying the “substance” of relativity. Even though Buddhism and Taoism are the substances of rela-

59. As I pointed out above, China was also quoted as a “broader world.” China should be thought of as a stage toward the world of Buddhism. However we should not forget that Buddhism itself tends to overcome Buddhism-centeredness and to move incessantly toward another “broader world.” In this endless chain, all kinds of centrism and dualism will be abolished, which again brings us back to the concept of circularity.

60. Cho (1978, 201-215).

61. Yu (2001, 45-75).

tivity, they can be meaningful only insofar as they maintain their own positions of relativity to an absoluteness so as to allow their principle of relativity to unfold.

Like ambivalence, relativity is also the philosophy of alterity and the process of openness to the Other. The world of literature of Kim Man-jung is located above the ground of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. This is not to say that it is superior to or dominates them; rather, it means that the text represents the contingency and openness of human life itself instead of any systems provided by them. Yu Byung-Hwan argues that the *Gunmong* should be understood as a Buddhist novel because such Buddhist concepts as emptiness, moderation and dependent-arising build up the world of the text. I agree with him only insofar as he may recognize that the text as a Buddhist novel locates itself in the process of appropriating Confucianism and Taoism including Buddhism itself.⁶²

Such is the nature of circularity. It is filled with the affirmative thought and optimistic inclusion of man and world. We should also not forget that in the *Gunmong*, human salvation is not realized only by means of the will of God or an absolute being, but is also pursued and completed by human practice.⁶³ In this respect, we need to accept that the *Divine Comedy* is a literary text in which Dante understood salvation not simply as a question of accepting Christianity, but also as a question of exploring ancient and medieval philosophy, theology, history and natural science as well as his own existential understanding of the contemporary world. He believed that human-kind could achieve salvation without relying solely on Christianity or any kind of specific belief systems and institutions. In this respect, Dante needs to be recognized as a “writer” who pursued literary and ethical practice in our world. Kim Man-jung also refused to be bound to any absolute or normative system of thought, crossing the borders between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. By practicing literature, Dante and Kim Man-jung clearly show their will and

62. See Hwang (1981, II-13).

63. See Martinez and Durling (2003).

power to include the world and humankind in their texts beyond doctrines or ideologies or philosophies. In addition to their literary practices, then, Kim Man-jung and Dante also suggest the universal value of literature through their own beliefs.

After all, inclusion is the element by virtue of which we are able to imagine the universal literary value of the *Gunmong*. Circularity is the active process of inclusion, by which the *Gunmong* includes all the locations and contexts of the writer, the text and the reader and, in addition, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The structure of circularity includes the contents of circularity and makes them flow.⁶⁴ Circularity is the openness of the world and communication with the world. Circularity opens communication among diverse literary values. It is from this communication, I conclude, that universal literary value stems. When one examines how universality or universal value is realized in a literary text, we realize that it is no more than the relationship between diverse differences formed by diverse values, their way of communication and tension, and their ability of self-negation.

Literary Salvation

As we have seen, Kim Man-jung created a world characterized by circularity, a world where neither origin nor arrival is final. Circularity exists through inclusion, through recognition of the world, and through communication with it. Salvation is already and always realized in the *Gunmong*. Indeed, salvation exists in life itself and is represented through the non-contradiction created by the blurring of

64. This has led some scholars to describe the *Gunmong* as “an exemplary text of the style of completeness”; see Kim Yun-Sik and Kim Hyun (1973, 91). Completeness is highlighted in the *Divine Comedy* as well. This might be one of the characteristics of the texts that possess universal literary value, though not necessarily. The idea does not seem irreconcilable with my position, provided that “completeness” is not understood in a structuralist way centered on textual strategy as complete openness. Note that the term “complete openness” is not self-contradictory; the completeness is the start of communication in openness.

binary oppositions. The world where salvation is already achieved is our real world. It is also in our real world that the form and content of circularity realizes the writer Kim Man-jung's literary salvation: a kind of survival that goes beyond the limits of space-time yet is bound to our real world. To survive is to continue life and yet to change it constantly: its contextualized process of endless continuity and change prepares a ground for a text to produce diverse meanings, which is what I call literary salvation. This is the condition and contents of the truth that a literary text carries.

If the *Gunmong* contains a truth, it does so by achieving literary salvation. the *Gunmong* does so by succeeding in communication and thus sharing the truth or possibility of salvation across time and space. It is on these grounds that we can postulate the universality of a classic. The definition of a "classic" inheres in its own aesthetic form that allows for new truths so as to bring that classic into being and maintain it, which is made possible in turn by the individual readers' interpretive practices. I would not inquire into superiority and inferiority between the positions of reader and writer, but say instead that the role of effecting literary salvation might be more firmly applied to the reader. But there may be no objection if one maintains that the writer invents an apparatus for such interpretive acts. What matters is to note that such subjects who show a willingness to realize literary salvation are necessarily bound to diverse sociohistorical contexts, and thus that a literary text should always be newly revived as grounds for communication of diverse literary values.

We can measure the universal value of a literary text by the diversity of literary values it generates and the diversity of contexts it is able to confront. the *Gunmong* and the *Divine Comedy*, as widely-recognized classics, have universal literary value, but the contexts in which they were produced and have survived differ. If universal literary value changes from context to context, it may not appear "universal" in the narrow sense of the word; yet at the same time, literary value can be universal only if it can be received and altered according to diverse contexts. The classic, in other words, both sur-

passes and is simultaneously bound to context, negotiating its ambivalent position through the process of endless self-negation. This is what the *Gunmong* accomplishes so well and what qualifies it for status as a classic.

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