

## **Abstract**

The aim of the dissertation is to present the complex system of Buddhist rituals of death. Being the first lengthy study on the topic written outside Korea, this work introduces these rituals in the context of the rich Korean religious scene and indicates its connection to other religious and philosophical ideas present in the Sinitic cultural area.

The dissertation is structured into five sections, each of which approaches the rituals from a different perspective. The “Introduction,” presents the methodology, including the theoretical framework; textual research of ritual texts and fieldwork are the two key methodological approaches used to study the topic at hand.

Chapter 2, “The Ritual Constituents,” is an attempt to define an apparatus for analysis of the rituals. The two-axis scheme is an attempt to provide a tool, which will help us grasp not only the relative “richness” of the ritual but also its variability.

Chapter 3, “The Structure and Typology of the Rituals,” presents an overall analysis of the ritual process from the deathbed, to rebirth, and beyond. Its structure is based on contemporary rituals. I also use examples from Korean historical sources to demonstrate that certain types of rituals have been standard ritual activities throughout the history of Korean Buddhism.

Chapter 4, “The Key Sequences of *ch’ondo chae* Ceremonies,” takes the reader deeper into the structure of the rituals and presents a translation of selected ritual texts with a twofold commentary—a commentary on doctrine and a commentary on performance. The former relates the meaning of the sections to Buddhist teachings, the latter draws from my field observations.

The “Conclusions,” summarizes some of the findings and hypotheses based on previous chapters, i.e., the meaning and functioning of the rituals within the religious milieu of Korea; soteriological goals expressed through the rituals, the plausibility of the notion of *t’ong pulgyo*, or holistic Buddhism.

Keywords: Korean Buddhism, death, ritual, *musok*, *ch’ondo chae*