

# Thirteenth-century Wooden Sculptures of Amitabha Buddha from the Goryeo Dynasty and the Ink Inscriptions on their Relics

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## Introduction

Research on late-Goryeo Buddhist sculpture has mainly focused on the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century wooden and gilt-bronze Buddhist sculptures that are datable through an analysis of the objects inserted inside them. These sculptures have served as invaluable materials for Buddhist art history, buddhology, and bibliology given that they are exquisitely sculpted, bear inscriptions on their production and regilding, and contain sacred objects such as writings and dharani invocations. Accordingly, a wide range of investigations, including analyses on the stylistic lineages of Buddhist sculpture, their commissioners, and their production techniques, have been conducted since the 1980s, considerably broadening the study of Goryeo dynasty Buddhist sculpture. Moreover, sacred objects that had been inserted inside early-fourteenth-century sculptures of Amitabha Buddha and Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva that no longer exist have provided key data for studies on Buddhist art history, buddhology, bibliology, and costume history during the Goryeo dynasty. This article examines the characteristics and production

backgrounds of the thirteenth-century Amitabha Buddha sculptures of the late-Goryeo period by focusing on the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple (開心寺) in Seosan, of which the wooden plug for inserting sacred objects has been recently investigated; the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Suguksa Temple (守國寺) in Seoul, the excavated relics from which have been newly researched; the ink inscriptions on sacred objects of the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Gaeunsa Temple (開運寺) in Seoul; and the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha from Bongnimsa Temple (鳳林寺) in Gyeonggi-do Province.

## Wooden Seated Sculptures of Amitabha Buddha and the Ink Inscriptions on their Excavated Relics

### Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple and the Ink Inscription on the Wooden Plug for Sealing in the Objects

The Daeungbojeon Hall in the precincts of Gaesimsa Temple,



Fig. 1. Wooden Amitabha Buddha Triad of Gaesimsa Temple. Goryeo and Joseon. Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage



Fig. 2-1. Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaesimsa Temple. Goryeo, regilt in 1280. Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage



Fig. 2-2. Detail of the Large Outer Monastic Robe over the Left Shoulder of Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaesimsa Temple. Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage





Fig. 2-3. Right View of *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaesimsa Temple*. Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage

located in Seosan-si in Chungcheongnam-do Province, was repaired in 1484 in the early Joseon period. It enshrines a triad made up of a Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha, Standing Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and Standing Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva (Fig. 1). The two attending Bodhisattva sculptures are presumed to have been added after the sculpting of the main Buddha figure since they are larger and differ from it in formal terms. Moreover, considering that a Daeungbojeon Hall commonly enshrines Sakyamuni Buddha as its principal figure, it appears that the Amitabha triad currently enshrined in Gaesimsa Temple's Daeungbojeon Hall were moved when the temple was repaired.

The main image, the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha, is sitting with his body leaning forward (Fig. 2-1). He has narrow and roundly drooping shoulders and pinches his thumb and middle finger together to make a preaching mudra (說法印). He also has a precious stone in his ushnisha (頂上髻珠) and another at the base of a hemispherical protuberance (中髻珠), which blurs the boundary between the head and the protuberance. The dignified and merciful visage of this Amitabha Buddha is marked by a broad forehead, half-open



Fig. 3. Ink Inscription on the Wooden Plug for Sealing Objects inside *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaesimsa Temple*. Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage

eyes, a sharp nose, a clear philtrum, soft lips, and plump cheeks. Notably, the eyes made of crystals are inserted into the front wooden block of the head from the back side. This technique of setting crystal eyes into perforated eye-sockets from within is found among wooden and dry-lacquered Buddhist sculptures from the late Goryeo and early Joseon periods.

The remarkable modeling of this Seated Amitabha Buddha is most clearly demonstrated in the drapery folds. The hems of the large outer monastic robe, which are folded several times over his left shoulder, the zig-zag ends of the robe over the hems, and the small omega-shaped folds of the drapery finely cascading from the shoulder are all elegantly carved (Fig. 2-2). Below its broad chest, a knot resembling the Chinese character for eight binds the inner garment. The skirt of the large outer monastic robe covering the crossed legs is folded four times and set over the ankle. More than half of the right leg is covered with the skirt of the large outer monastic robe, which is neatly and spaciouly carved. From its details to the facial expression, this Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple demonstrates the greatest sculptural maturity among the surviving wooden Buddhist sculptures from the late Goryeo period.

The specific background of the production of the Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple remain unknown since the repositories hidden inside the sculpture have not yet been examined. However, an ink inscription on repairs made to the sculpture in 1280 (Fig. 3) was found in the inner portion of the wooden plug used to close the hole in the bottom of the



044 Fig. 4. Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaeunsa Temple. Goryeo, 1274. Gaeunsa Temple. Cultural Heritage Administration

sculpture through which sacred objects were inserted, providing details of this repair. Although some characters have vanished or are illegible, the inscription can be read as follows:

“至元十七年庚辰十一月 十四日別立僧齋色  
修補開心社堂主 量壽如來  
法回 金白  
內侍試興威衛長史宋 內侍別雜朴.”

(On the fourteenth day of the eleventh month of the Gyeongin year, a temporarily established Seungjaesaek repaired the principal [deity], Amitabha Buddha, of the [Geum]dang Hall at Gaesimsa Temple. [Participants in this project include] Beophoe, Kim [illegible]baek, [illegible], Mr. Song, who serves as Naesi and Jangsa at Heungwiwi, [illegible], and [illegible] Mr. Bak [illegible], who serves as [illegible] and Naesi.)

This inscription informs that the Seated Amitabha Buddha sculpture, the main image in the Geumdang (Main Hall) at Gaesimsa Temple, was repaired in 1280 (the sixth year of the reign of King Chungryeol). In this inscription, Gaesimsa Temple is recorded as “開心社” (Gaesimsa Association)

instead of “開心寺” (Gaesimsa Temple), which indicates that at least some Buddhist temples of the Goryeo dynasty were thought to bear a nature more similar to associations (社, *sa*). The inscription further reveals that the Amitabha Buddha was produced as the principal deity for the main hall at Gaesimsa Temple. The names of the figures who participated in the repair project are also noted. Most of these names are illegible, but at least “Beophoe” (法回), the name of a monk, can be identified. Moreover, the inscription states that the chief agent for the repairing project was a temporarily established office named Seungjaesaek (僧齋色). Seungjaesaek was mentioned in the *Sutra of Daehwasu* (大華手經, Skt. *Kushala-mūla-wsamgraha sūtra*; K. *Daehwasugyeong*), revised and republished by this Seungjaesaek in 1287 (the 13th year of the reign of King Chungryeol) and found among the excavated relics inside the Gilt-bronze Seated Amitabha Buddha at Munsusa Temple (文殊寺) in Seosan; the colophon, including “engraved by Seungjaesaek” (僧齋色刻板) in Volume 7 of the Lotus Sutra (妙法蓮華經, Skt. *Saddharma-pundarika sūtra*; K. *Myobeop yeonhwagyeong*) printed in 1288 (the 14th year of the reign of King Chungryeol); and *Dharani of the Seal on the Casket of the Secret Whole-Body Relic of the Essence of All Tathagatas* (一切如來心秘密全身舍利寶篋印陀羅尼, Skt. *Sarvatathāgatadhīsthānahrdayagubhyadhātu karandamudrā dhāraṇī*; K. *Ilche yeorae sim bimil jeonsin sari nohyeopin darani*) published by Seungjaesaek in 1292 (the 18th year of the reign of King Chungryeol) and found among the excavated relics inside an Amitabha Buddha created in 1302 (currently in the collection of Onyang Folk Museum). Thus, this Seungjaesaek is presumed to have been a government office established during the reign of King Chungryeol (忠烈王) that was responsible for publishing Buddhist scriptures, repairing Buddhist temples, regilding and repairing Buddhist sculptures, and performing Buddhist rituals. The inscription regarding its repair project on the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple provides the earliest mention of the activities of the Seungjaesaek.

According to the ink inscription on the Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple, the individuals in charge of its repair project are thought to have been a person from the Song family who held positions as a palace attendant (內侍, Naesi) and Jangsa (長史) in the central army Heungwiwi (興威衛) as well as military officers under the command of this Song. During the Goryeo dynasty, one of the many duties of Naesi included the supervision of construction laborers. It seems reasonable to surmise that a palace attendant would assume responsibility for supervising a project for repairing a Buddhist sculpture. Outside of military drilling and mobilization for the prevention

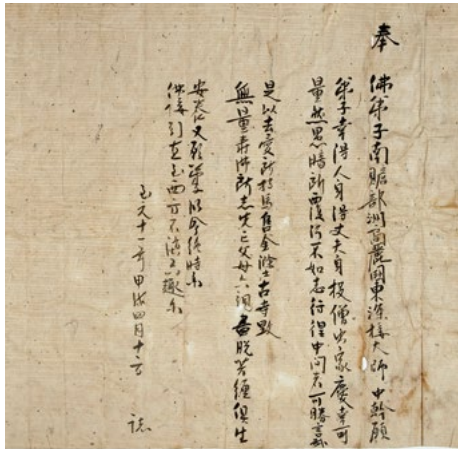


Fig. 5. Monk Junggan's Prayer Text on the Repair of Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaeunsa Temple. Goryeo, 1274. Gaeunsa Temple. Cultural Heritage Administration

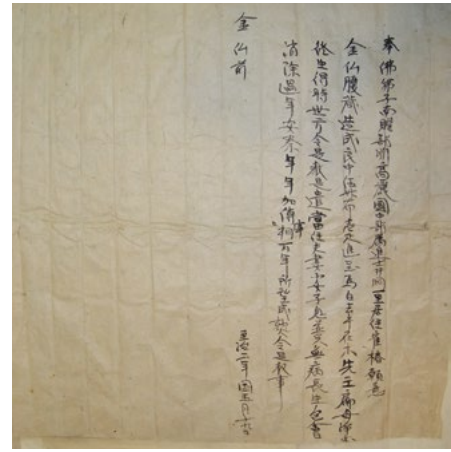


Fig. 6. Choe Chun's Writing on Producing the Repositories inside Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaeunsa Temple. Goryeo, 1322. Gaeunsa Temple (Photograph by the author)

of flooding, since the Heungwiwi was tasked mainly with construction projects during peacetime, it is presumed to have been responsible for repairing the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple.

Given that the project of repairing the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple was supervised by the Seungjaesaek and managed by a figure who served as Naesi and as Jangsa of the central army, this project might have been connected to the royal court of the Goryeo dynasty. In 1279, a year before the implementation of this project, King Chungryeol sent his eldest son Wang Ja (王滋), whose mother was Jeongsinbuju Lady Wang (眞信府主 王氏), to Dongsimsa Temple (東深寺) in Aju (present-day Asan) in Chungcheongnam-do Province. Four years later, the king summoned him to Gaegyeong. Wang Ja, also known as Lord Gangyang (江陽公), was the eldest among the three princes sired by King Chungryeol. However, he was not a son of the Mongolian Princess Jeguk (齊國公主), the official wife of King Chungryeol, so he was ineligible to ascend the throne. King Chungryeol, therefore, dispatched him to Asan for his safety. The repair project is believed to have been conducted while Wang Ja was residing there. Thus, at the time, Aju and Seoju (present-day Seosan) must have been considered important. The temples in these regions, including Gaesimsa Temple, must have been related to the Goryeo royal court in Gaegyeong.

### Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Gaeunsa Temple and the Prayer Texts on its Creation and Regilding

The Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha (Fig. 4), enshrined at Gaeunsa Temple in Anam-dong, Seoul is almost 115.5 centimeters in height, relatively large compared to other wooden sculptures from the era. A great volume of sacred objects was inserted inside, including a Goryeo-period handwritten copy of *Flower Garland Sutra* (華嚴經, Skt. *Avatamsaka sūtra*; K. *Hwaeomgyeong*) and various writings and dharanis from the Goryeo and Joseon periods. Other objects include a prayer text written by Monk Junggan (中幹) about the repairs to the Amitabha Buddha in 1274 (Fig. 5); the document on producing repositories inside the sculpture, which was written by Choe Chun (崔椿) in 1322 (Fig. 6); and a repair prayer text written by Cheonjeong (天正) and Hyeheung (惠興), monks at Chukbongsa Temple (鶯峰寺), in 1322 (Fig. 7). According to these documents, Monk Junggan funded the regilding of the damaged Amitabha Buddha in 1274 by selling a horse that he had cherished. They further state that Cheonjeong and Hyeheung of Chukbongsa Temple repaired it again in 1322. This indicates that about fifty years after Monk Junggan's regilding, Amitabha Buddha of Gaeunsa Temple was regilt and repaired once again.

The Amitabha Buddha at Gaeunsa Temple is seated with the body leaning forward, has narrow, drooping, rounded shoulders, and offers the preaching mudra with his hands. The hemispherical protuberance on his head is wide, obscuring the boundary between the two. His plump cheeks, long and slender



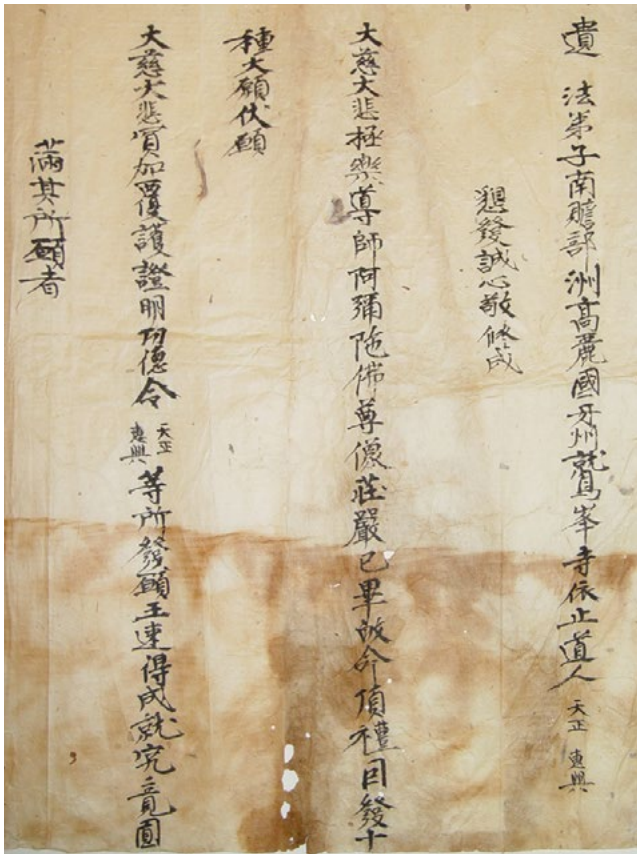


Fig. 7. Prayer Text Written by Cheonjeong and Hyeheung, Monks at Chukbongsa Temple, on the Repair of Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Gaeunsa Temple. Goryeo, 1322. Gaeunsa Temple (Photograph by the author)

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half-open eyes, long, high nose with a bent ridge, and small lips are all realistically sculpted. The drapery folds of the large outer monastic robe covering the left shoulder are similar to those of the Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple.

An X-ray scan of the Amitabha Buddha at Gaeunsa Temple revealed that the sculpture was made of wood from a coniferous tree with a vertical wood grain. Moreover, it found that crystal eyes had been set into the perforated eye-sockets from within, as seen in the sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple. It was also discovered that the spiraled curls of hair were not made from wood, but of soil mixed with sawdust and glue, perhaps for its plasticity. The Buddha's body was produced by joining multiple blocks of wood.

The opening of the repair prayer text written in the fourth month of 1274 (Fig. 6) provides information on Gaeunsa Temple enshrining the Amitabha Buddha as follows: Monk Juggan in Dongsimjeop in the Goryeo dynasty in Jambudvipa offers a prayer to the disciples of the Buddha (奉佛弟子南瞻部洲高麗國東深接大師中幹願). Here, the location of "Dongsimjeop" is not specified. However, the repair prayer

text from 1322 mentions the region of Aju (牙州) in the following sentence: Cheonjeong and Hyeheung, monks from Chukbongsa Temple in Aju (present-day Asan) in the Goryeo dynasty in Jambudvipa, repair [this sculpture] with utmost sincerity and respect to the disciples of the Buddha (遺佛弟子南瞻部洲高麗國牙州鷲峰寺依止道人天正惠興懇發誠心敬修成). Hence, Dongsimjeop is presumed to have referred to the region around Dongsimsan Mountain in Asan that was marked in the Mountain and River Section of Volume 20 "Asan" of *Newly Augmented Geographical Survey of Korea* (新增東國輿地勝覽, Sinjeung Dongguk yeoji seungnam).

The document on the production of sacred objects inserted in the Gaeunsa Temple sculpture was written by Choe Chun, who made an offering of a roll of fine hemp cloth in 1322 when the sculpture was repaired. According to this document, "Choe Chun living in 1-ri of Jinsajeong-dong in Jung-bu in the Goryeo dynasty in Jambudvipa offers [the sculpture] to disciples of the Buddha" (奉佛弟子南瞻部洲高麗國中部屬進士井洞一里居住崔椿). "1-ri of Jinsajeong-dong" is thought to mean one of the 75 Ri (里) villages of the eight Bang (坊) quarters of the Jung-bu District, one of the five districts of Gaegyong. This suggests that Choe Chun participated in the project of repairing the sculpture in Asan as a visitor from the capital Gaegyong. However, it is also possible that Choe Chun was originally from Asan but was living in Gaegyong at the time.

The beginning of the repair prayer text (Fig. 7) written by Cheonjeong and Hyeheung, the monks of Chukbongsa Temple, states that it was not monks from Dongsimjeop but from Chukbongsa Temple who were responsible for repairing the sculpture, calling for an examination of how Dongsimjeop is related to Chukbongsa Temple. The *Newly Augmented Geographical Survey of Korea* records that Dongsimsan Mountain is situated 1.95 kilometers east of Aju-hyeon. Moreover, according to the Buddhist Hall Section of *Newly Augmented Geographical Survey of Korea*, Dongsimsa Temple was situated on Yeonamsan Mountain, 11.31 kilometers east of Aju-hyeon (present-day Sodong-ri and Dongam-ri in Eumbong-myeon). Another Chukbongsa Temple, whose name uses the different Chinese characters "縮鳳寺" is located on Dongnimsan Mountain, which is positioned 2.73 kilometers south of Aju-hyeon (present-day Seowon-ri and Gangcheong-ri in Yeomchi-eup). These records make it clear that Dongsimsa Temple and Chukbongsa Temple are set in different locations. Moreover, according to the Temple Section in the *Aju Gazetteer* (牙州邑誌, *Aju eupji*) published in the nineteenth century, "Dongsimsa Temple on Dongsimsan Mountain was ruined," which shows

that Dongsimsa Temple was located in the Dongsimsan Mountain area. A map included in the *Aju Gazetteer* and a provincial map produced in 1872 during the late Joseon period all mark Dongnimsan Mountain as close to Aju-hyeon on the east and place Dongsimsan Mountain to the south at the same distance as noted in the *Newly Augmented Geographical Survey of Korea*. This adds evidence that Dongsimsan and Dongnimsan Mountains are in fact different sites. Based on all these records, it can be inferred that either a Buddhist sculpture enshrined at Dongsimsa Temple on Dongsimsan Mountain at the foot of Yeonamsan Mountain was moved to Chukbongsa Temple and repaired around 1322 or that monks from Chukbongsa Temple participated in the repair project of a Buddhist sculpture in Dongsimjeop.

In the Asan region where Dongsimsan Mountain was located, Hayangchang (河陽倉), one of the thirteen *jochang* (漕倉, grain-transport warehouses) of the Goryeo dynasty, was established. A *jochang* was a granary in which grains collected as tax were stored prior to their transport by water to the main granary in the capital. They provided an appealing target during the Mongol invasions of the Goryeo dynasty, and the Mongols indeed threatened the grain transportation route serving the national government in Ganghwa-hyeon by conquering the northern coastal area of Chungcheongnam-do Province and the western coastal area of Jeolla-do Province. Since Hayangchang in Asan was the closest warehouse to Ganghwa-hyeon, the national administration heavily defended the coastal areas of Asan. Monk Junggan's prayer text found inside the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Gaeunsa Temple records that "the damaged Amitabha Buddha of the old temple has been regilt" (塗古寺毀無量壽佛). This may denote that the Buddhist sculpture at the temple was damaged between 1256 (the 43rd year of the reign of King Gojong) and 1257 (the 44th year of the reign of King Gojong) during the fierce fighting between Goryeo and Mongol forces in the coastal areas of Asan.

As noted above, the Aju region was significant for its economic linkage to Gaegyeong. King Chungryeol also sent his eldest son Wang Ja to Aju five years after the Amitabha Buddha sculpture of Dongsimjeop was repaired. His stay there lasted four years. These findings reveal that powerful people related to the Goryeo royal court were already present in the Aju region, providing a suitable living environment for Wang Ja. In any case, a close relation between the Aju region and the Goryeo royal court can be assumed. Moreover, the Dongsimjeop sculpture is one of extant images embodying the Buddhist culture of the Aju region in the late thirteenth century.

## Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Bongnimsa Temple and its Excavated Documents

The Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Bongnimsa Temple (鳳林寺) (Fig. 8) resembles the one at Gaeunsa Temple in terms of style, but is slightly smaller. Bongnimsa Temple is located in Hwaseong-si in Gyeonggi-do Province. The section on Buddhist halls in Namyang in Volume 9 of the *Newly Augmented Geographical Survey of Korea* records that "Bongnimsa Temple is sited on Bibongsan Mountain" (鳳林寺在飛鳳山). The same expression can be found in *Beomugo* (梵宇攷), a book recording a national survey on Buddhist temples published in the late Joseon period. As a result, Bongnimsa Temple is believed to have existed since the late-Goryeo period. When this Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha was regilt in 1978, several sacred objects, including prayer texts regarding past regildings, a sarira bottle, books, documents, dharanis, beads, and scraps of cloth, were found inside the sculpture. A stupa was newly built to enshrine the sarira, but all the other items except the documents were reinserted into the regilded sculpture.

The Amitabha Buddha of Bongnimsa Temple is 88.5 centimeters high, which is a common height for wooden Buddhist sculptures from this period. Its merciful facial expression, including the lowered and half-opened eyes indicating meditative concentration, the sharp nose, delicate lip line, and plump cheeks, recall the appearance of an eminent monk of the Goryeo dynasty. The forms of the head and hemispherical protuberance, posture, mudra, dress, and drapery folds are not notably distinct from those of similar sculptures at Gaeunsa and Gaeunsa Temples. Only slight differences can be found in their visages, the shapes of the ears, the positions of the hands creating the mudra of turning the Wheel of Dharma (說法印, *seolbeopin*), and the drapery folds in the outer monastic robe.

The two prayer texts concerning regilding found among the excavated relics tell that the sculpture was regilt in 1362, the 11th year of the reign of King Gongmin (恭愍王, r. 1351–1374) of Goryeo dynasty, and again in 1583, the 16th year of the reign of King Seonjo (宣祖, r. 1567–1608) of the Joseon dynasty. The document from the Goryeo dynasty does not mention the name of Bongnimsa Temple, simply recording it as "堂主無量壽如來" (Amitabha Buddha, the main deity of the hall). However, the sixteenth-century document states "Amitabha, the main deity of the hall at Bongnimsa Temple" (鳳林寺堂主無量壽). Hence, it remains unclear whether the Amitabha Buddha sculpture was





Fig. 8. Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Bongnimsa Temple. Goryeo, 13th century (Photograph by the author)



Fig. 9. Small-letter Version of *Diamond Sutra*. Goryeo, revised and republished in 1228. Yongjusa Temple Museum



Fig. 10. *Scripture on the Great Dharani of the One-Syllable Crown Wheel King*. Goryeo, the first-half of Goryeo. Yongjusa Temple Museum

originally enshrined at Bongnimsa Temple or transferred there from a neighboring temple.

Other Goryeo- and Joseon-period books and writings found inside the sculpture of Bongnimsa Temple include a *Diamond Sutra* (金剛經, Skt. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*; K. *Geumganggyeong*) revised and republished using small letters in 1228 (the 15th year of the reign of King Gojong) through a commission by National Preceptor Jingak (眞覺國師) Hyesim (慧諶, 1178–1234), the second abbot of Suseonsa Temple (修禪社); *Beom chongji jip* (梵摠持集, Collection of Sanskrit dharanis) published using small letters; *Scripture on the Great Dharani of One-Syllable Crown Wheel-King* (一字頂輪王大陀羅尼經, Skt. *Ekākṣa-uṣṇīṣa-cakravartin nāma-dhāraṇī*; K. *Ilja jeongryunwang daedarani gyeong*); the small-letter version of *Diamond Sutra* commissioned by Gang Geumgang (姜金剛) (Fig. 9); and *Scripture on the Great Dharani of the Buddha's Usnisa Heart of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva* (佛頂心觀世音菩薩大陀羅尼經, K. *Buljeongsim Gwanseeum bosal daedarani gyeong*) (Fig. 10).

Notably, *Scripture on the Great Dharani of the One-Syllable Crown Wheel-King* bears a prayer text specifying that it was published with a wish for a long life and happiness for someone named Cheonghasangguk (清河相國). An annotation on the translated version of the scripture suggests that Cheonghasangguk refers to Choe U (崔瑀, ?–1249), the Lord of Jinyang (晉陽公), who served as the central figure of the Goryeo military regime. As the most influential military leader of the time, Choe sponsored Monk Hyesim of Suseonsa Temple, honored him as a lay disciple, and encouraged his two sons Manjong (萬宗) and Manjeon (萬全) (Choe Hang, ?–1257) to enter the Buddhist priesthood as disciples of Hyesim. Hyesim was able to expand the influence of Suseonsa Temple through his close relationship with the Choe family regime by holding a Buddhist ritual called a *chuksu doryang* (祝壽道場) for blessing Choe U on his birthday and wishing for his longevity. He also endeavored to develop the Seon (禪, Ch. Chan) Buddhist ideology of his teacher National Preceptor Bojo (普照國師) Jinul (知訥, 1158–1210). The Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Bongnimsa Temple is presumed to have been produced around the early thirteenth century based on its stylistic qualities. The *Scripture on the Great Dharani of the One-Syllable Crown Wheel-King* connected to Choe U and the small-letter version of the *Diamond Sutra* commissioned by Hyesim appear to have been inserted in the sculpture of Bongnimsa Temple at the time of its creation. Moreover, the small-letter version of the *Diamond Sutra* commissioned by Gang Geumgang, a palace attendant who aided King Chunghye (忠惠王, r. 1330–1332 and 1339–



1344) during his stay in Yuan dynasty China, is thought to have been placed inside the sculpture of Bongnimsa Temple at the time of its repair in the fourteenth century. This small-letter *Diamond Sutra* serves as a significant material for the study of the bibliography of the late Goryeo period.



Fig. 11-1. *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Suguksa Temple*. Goryeo, 13th century. Suguksa Temple (Photograph by the author)

### Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha at Suguksa Temple, the Dharani in the Gihae Year, and the Prayer Text on its Regilding

The *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha* (Fig. 11-1) enshrined in the dharma hall of Suguksa Temple in Galhyeon-dong, Seoul is known to have been transferred there from Simwonsa Temple (深原寺) on Bogaesan Mountain in Cheolwon in Gangwon-do Province around the time of the Korean War. A recent investigation into the repository within this Amitabha Buddha has revealed that the sculpture was produced around the thirteenth century during the late Goryeo period. The Amitabha Buddha of Suguksa Temple has been repaired and regilded several times, making it hard to precisely identify its original form. Nevertheless, in contrast to the inverted triangle shape of the faces of the Amitabha Buddha sculptures at Gaesimsa and Gaeunsa Temples, the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Suguksa Temple has a nearly square face, small chin, and plump cheeks. It also has a short neck and slightly narrow shoulders. The ears are sculpted in a particularly fascinating manner (Fig. 11-2). The cartilage formed into the shape of a “Y” inside the auricle is identical to that of the Amitabha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple, which indicates that both sculptures might have been produced at the same workshop, although not at the same time.

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Fig. 11-2. Left View of the Head of *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Suguksa Temple*

Among the objects placed inside the sculpture of Suguksa Temple are the record on its regilding from 1389 (Fig. 12), the prayer text concerning a regilding from 1562, a large quantity of books, documents, dharanis, reliquaries, textiles, and clothes. Notably, the record on the regilding from 1389 details the regilding of the Amitabha Buddha, an Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and a Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva through an offering from Lady Sin of Yeongseonggun (寧城郡夫人 辛氏) in Gaeseong, including the amount of gold used. This confirms that the sculpture of Suguksa Temple depicts Amitabha Buddha and that it may originally have been flanked by Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva.

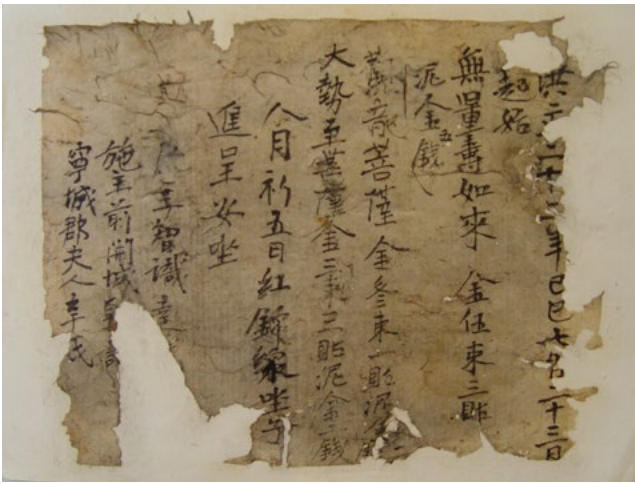


Fig. 12. Document on the Regilding of Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Suguksa Temple. Joseon Dynasty, 1389. Suguksa Temple



Fig. 13-1. Four Treasure Casket Mantras engraved by the hyangdo Buddhist lay group that produced sacred objects to be inserted into sculptures. Goryeo. Suguksa Temple

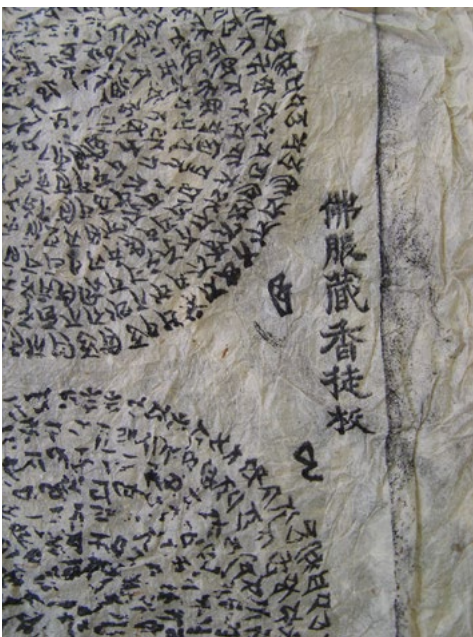


Fig. 13-2. Detail of Four Treasure Casket Mantras engraved by the hyangdo Buddhist lay group that produced sacred objects to be inserted into sculptures



Fig. 14. Treasure Casket Mantra with Inscription of "the Gihae Year." Goryeo, 1239. Suguksa Temple

Other documents found inside the sculpture of Suguksa Temple include fifteenth-century Buddhist scriptures commissioned by the Joseon royal court: a metal-type printed version of *Commentaries of Five Masters on the Diamond Sutra* (金剛般若波羅密經五家解, K. *Geumgang banya baramilgyeong ogahae*) published in 1457 by the order of King Sejo (世祖, 1455–1468), a *Lotus Sutra* printed in 1422 with sponsorship from Grand Prince Hyoryeong (孝寧大君), and *Scripture on the Original Vows of the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva* (地藏菩薩本願經, K. *Jijang bosal bonwongyeong*) commissioned by Grand Prince Hyoryeong and Grand Prince Anpyeong (安平大君). King Sejo had ordered

Grand Prince Yeongeung (永膺大君), Kim Suon (金守溫), Monk Sinmi (信眉), and others to publish *Commentaries of Five Masters on the Diamond Sutra* and transfer merit to the deceased Crown Prince Uigyeong (懿敬世子). Postscripts by Sin Sukju (申叔舟), Han Myeonghoe (韓明澮), and Kim Suon were added at the end. Various Joseon documents inserted in the Amitabha Buddha at Suguksa Temple were revised and republished at Simwonsa Temple in Cheolwon, which indicates that the Suguksa Temple sculpture was originally enshrined at Simwonsa.

Several dharanis were also discovered inside the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Suguksa Temple. As a case in point, “Dharani of the Treasure Casket Mantra” (寶篋真言陀羅尼), which is stamped with all four seals of the mantras (Fig. 13-1), has an inscription indicating that this dharani was engraved when a Buddhist lay group called a *hyangdo* (香徒) produced sacred objects to be inserted into the sculpture (佛腹藏香徒板) (Fig. 13-2). The date of the engraving



is not provided, however. As another case in point, there is the *Treasure Casket Mantra of the Whole-body Relic of the Essence of All Tathagatas* (一切如來全身舍利寶篋真言, Skt. *Sarvatathāgata dhiṣṭhāna karaṇḍa mantra*, K. *Ilche yeorae jeonsin sari bohyeop jineon*) (Fig. 14). This mantra was commissioned by Prime Minister (侍中, Sijung) Choe Jongjun (崔宗峻, ?–1246) in the Gihae (己亥) year. Choe Jongjun, a grandson of Choe Yucheong (崔惟清, 1095–1174) who was a leading civil official during the Goryeo military regime, placed first in the national examination in 1201 (the fourth year of the reign of King Sinjong), held a post as Sangseo (尙書, Minister) at the Ibu (吏部, Board of Personnel), and served as Sijung for fifteen years during the reign of King Gojong (高宗) while the Goryeo dynasty was struggling against the Mongols. Thus, the Gihae year in which the dharani was engraved is presumed to correspond to 1239 when Choe Jongjun was serving as Sijung.

The Dongju (東州, present-day Cheolwon) Choe family (崔氏) to which Choe Yucheong (崔惟清), Choe Seon (崔詵), and Choe Jongjun (崔宗峻) belonged was one of the definitive aristocratic families of the Goryeo dynasty. Simwonsa Temple located in Dongju is thought to have been closely associated with the Dongju Choe family. *Treasure Casket Mantra of the Whole-body Relic of the Essence of All Tathagatas* (Fig. 14), found inside the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Suguksa Temple, is presumed to have been engraved through a commission by Choe Jongjun as a wish for peace for the country that had been devastated by warfare. Since no prayer text for the construction of the Amitabha Buddha of Suguksa Temple can be found, its exact production date is unknown. However, the presence of Choe Jongjun's *Treasure Casket Mantra of the Whole-body Relic of the Essence of All Tathagatas* inside the sculpture suggests that the sculpture was enshrined at Simwonsa Temple by the family of Choe Jongjun during the era of struggle against the Mongols.

## Style Analysis of Amitabha Buddha Sculptures

The late Goryeo Amitabha Buddha sculptures scrutinized above are all modeled in wood using almost identical visual styles. Similarities in the posture slightly leaning forward, round, drooping shoulders, drapery folds in the large outer monastic robe covering both shoulders, the skirt of the robe partially covering the right of the completely crossed legs, and the depth of the sculpted drapery folds indicate that Goryeo sculptors based these images on a highly similar model and used the same



Fig. 15. Stone Seated Buddha from the North Zhongshan Grottoes. Northern Song, 1067–1126

tools. Despite a few minor variations in facial expressions, the positions of the hands, and the drapery folds, these sculptures clearly belong to the same type.

The objects placed inside the Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple have not been researched, so its exact production date is unknown. Nonetheless, given that it was repaired in 1280, the production date would have to be 50–100 years prior. It could certainly extend into the twelfth century. If so, the sculpture of Gaesimsa Temple would be the earliest example among the surviving wooden sculptures of Amitabha Buddha from the Goryeo dynasty and may have served as a prototype in terms of iconography and style.

Among the Chinese Buddhist sculpture of the Northern and Southern Song dynasties, which may have influenced Goryeo Buddhist sculpture, dated examples are rare. Wooden sculptures are even rarer. Among the surviving Song-period Buddhist sculptures, stone sculptures (Fig. 15) from the North Zhongshan Grottoes in Zichang County in Shaanxi Province (1067–1126) and sculptures from the Cave of Shuanglong Qingfodong in Huangling County in Shaanxi Province (1095–1115) show an exotic face with a prominent nose. Such exotic faces are believed to have been popular during the Northern Song dynasty, and they are often found in wooden Buddhist sculptures from the late Goryeo period, including the



Fig. 16. Detail of the Painting of *Sakyamuni Buddha Preaching* on the West Wall of Kaihuasi Temple. Northern Song, 1096



Fig. 17. Detail of *Stone Bodhisattva* at Huayandong Cave. Southern Song

Amitabha Buddha at Gaesimsa Temple. A close examination was conducted of the heads, faces, and bodies of Chinese Buddhist images produced from the end of the eleventh century during the late Northern Song dynasty till the twelfth century in the early Southern Song dynasty. This investigation revealed that the mural painting of *Sakyamuni Buddha Preaching* (Fig. 16) created in 1096 during the Shaosheng reign on the west wall of Kaihuasi Temple (開化寺) in Gaoping County in Shaanxi Province depicts the Buddha with an obscured boundary between the head and hemispherical protuberance, which recalls the Amitabha Buddha sculpture of Gaesimsa Temple.

The sculpture of Gaesimsa Temple with its exotic face, somewhat oval chin, and plump cheeks appears similar to the static and exquisite Bodhisattva sculptures (Fig. 17) at Huayandong Cave in Anyue County in Sichuan Province that are characterized by a fleshy face, half-opened eyes, tall nose, and softly outlined full lips. The exact production date of these Bodhisattva sculptures is unknown, but they are presumed to have been created around the late twelfth century during the Southern Song dynasty.

In the city of Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song dynasty and a center for the exchange of cultural elements with

Goryeo during the Yuan dynasty, and in the Ningbo region, a hub of trade between China and Goryeo, there are almost no sculptures directly comparable to late Goryeo Buddhist examples. However, several surviving Buddhist paintings produced in Hangzhou and Ningbo during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties can be compared to late Goryeo Buddhist sculptures in terms of style and iconography. For example, the main deity Amitabha Buddha depicted in the painting of the *Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha* (Fig. 18) created in 1183 and currently housed at Chion-in Temple (知恩院) in Japan is considered the epitome of Southern Song Buddhist images. This Amitabha Buddha bears similarities with the Amitabha Buddha sculpture at Gaesimsa Temple in the proportion of the head to the body, the costume, and the overall atmosphere. There is a strong likelihood that the model for a given sculpture at the time was generally another sculpture. However, the possible relation of a sculpture to a painting cannot be overlooked since sculptors may have produced works based on more easily transportable paintings.

The hems of the outer monastic robes covering the left shoulders of wooden Amitabha Buddha sculptures at Gaesimsa, Bongnimsa, Gaeunsa, and Suguksa Temples are folded to





Fig. 18. Amitabha Buddha in the Painting of *Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha*. Southern Song, 1180. Chion-in Temple, Kyoto, Japan



Fig. 19. Detail of the Painting of *Amitabha Buddha*. Goryeo, 1286. Bank of Japan



Fig. 20. Detail of the Painting of *Amitabha Buddha and Eight Bodhisattvas*. Goryeo, 1320. Matsuodera Temple, Nara, Japan

produce two or three pleats. These pleats, in turn, create several narrow, vertical folds that cascade down in an omega shape. Such depictions can be seen in many Southern Song and Yuan Buddhist paintings, including the aforementioned *Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha* (1183) at Chion-in Temple. They are also present in Goryeo Buddhist paintings, such as *Amitabha Buddha* (1286) (Fig. 19) commissioned by Yeom Seungik (廉承益) and painted by Jahoe (自回) and *Amitabha Buddha and Eight Bodhisattvas* (1320) (Fig. 20) enshrined at Matsuodera Temple in Japan. Clearly, the delineations of the drapery folds of the wooden Amitabha Buddha sculptures at Gaesimsa, Bongnimsa, Gaeunsa, and Suguksa Temples were frequently employed in Buddhist sculptures and paintings during the Goryeo dynasty. Furthermore, the end hems of the inner garments and outer robes of late Goryeo Amitabha Buddha sculptures are sculpted broadly. This rendering of hems can also be found in numerous Song and Goryeo Buddhist paintings, which implies that the hems of the outer monastic robes worn by monks at the time were embroidered.

## Conclusion: Creation Backgrounds and Significance of Amitabha Buddha Sculptures

As discussed above, most existing thirteenth-century wooden Buddhist sculptures from the late Goryeo period depict Amitabha Buddha. One of the major reasons why they were preferred is the damage inflicted on the Goryeo Buddhist world during the Mongol invasions. Over a period of warfare that lasted for more than four decades from 1231 (the 18th year of the reign of King Gojong) till 1273 (the 14th year of the reign of King Wonjong), the Mongols devastated the entire territory of Goryeo, including the coasts, islands, and even the innermost mountain regions. They also destroyed numerous temples across the country. As the temples damaged by war were restored afterwards, various Buddhist sculptures were newly created or repaired.

Faith in Amitabha was already popular among devotees from the early Goryeo period prior to the Mongol invasions. Moreover, religious community movements promoted in the late Goryeo period revolved around the Amitabha faith. Jeonghwataekju (靜和宅主), the wife of Choe Chungheon, was known to have commissioned an Amitabha Buddha sculpture, enshrined it at the main hall of the Baengnyeonsa Society (白蓮社), and transcribed the *Lotus Sutra* in gold letters in an effort to support the Baengnyeonsa Gyeolsa (白蓮社結社, White Lotus Community) formed by Yose (了世), also known as National Preceptor Wonmyo (圓妙國師). This reflects the integration of Amitabha faith into Tiantai and the Lotus School, which provided the philosophical foundation of the White Lotus Community. Furthermore, epitaphs and documents from the late Goryeo period contain a wish for the rebirth in the pure land of Amitabha Buddha while embodying other distinct religious elements. In particular, the production of an apocryphal scripture entitled *Sutra on the Manifestation of the Path to the Western Paradise* (現行西方經, *Hyeonhaeng seobanggyeong*) resonated among devotees with the spread of Amitabha faith. This scripture presumably produced around 1298 (the 24th year of the reign of King Chungryeol) promises that chanting the name of Amitabha and reciting his mantra will lead all sentient beings in the latter days of the Buddhist law to be freed from sin and reborn in the paradise of Amitabha.

This trend in late Goryeo Buddhist faith accounts for the host of Amitabha Buddha sculptures among the surviving late Goryeo Buddhist examples. The commissioners who supported

the production of Amitabha Buddha sculptures were of diverse social standings ranging from aristocrats to servants. The inclusion of their names in the documents on the creation and regilding of sculptures enables us to guess the backgrounds of Amitabha Buddha sculptures from the Goryeo dynasty. The faith in Amitabha during this period led to the popularization of *yeombul hyangdo* (念佛香徒, Buddhist lay associations for recitation), *yeombul hyangsa* (念佛香社, Buddhist lay communities for recitation), and *yeombulsa* (念佛社, recitation societies). The formation of these religious groups can be understood as an extension of the faith in reciting the name of Amitabha during the late Goryeo period.

If these religious groups were sponsoring sculptures or paintings of Amitabha Buddha out of a wish for rebirth in his paradise, demand for Buddhist sculptures would have naturally risen. Such increased demand can be presumed to have impacted the production of Buddhist sculptures. Considering the availability and efficiency of materials applicable for the production of Buddhist sculptures, wood must have been preferred over gilt bronze or stone. Late Goryeo wooden Buddhist sculptures were made using an economical multi-block technique that saved on raw materials. Moreover, since the inner areas of the wooden sculptures were hollowed out, they were relatively light, transportable, and not easily warped by changes in humidity. This would have made it possible for sculptors in the capital to produce Buddhist sculptures and transfer them to regional temples. These thirteenth-century wooden Amitabha Buddha sculptures created in almost identical styles appear to be a product of set types of Amitabha Buddha sculpture preferred by devotees as an object of worship. Furthermore, it would have been much easier for artisans to repeat the production of works in a uniform style compared to creating sculptures in a variety of forms. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the widespread of Amitabha faith among the people of Goryeo, regardless of social position, led to the production of numerous Amitabha Buddha sculptures and the standardization of Buddhist sculptural styles.

### Translated by Kwon Ye Gee and Park Shinhee

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