



Editorial Note

Buddhist Art and Monk Artisans of the Late Joseon Dynasty

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Research Directions and Results

Research on monk artisans and Buddhist art of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) made great strides between the publication of *Korean Buddhist Paintings* (40 volumes) (1996–2007) and the publication of the *Report of Korean Buddhist Heritage* (2002–2014). During this period, almost all relevant Buddhist sculptures, paintings, and ritual implements in the possession of temples across Korea were surveyed. Moreover, with the additional publication of related documentary materials such as the *balwonmun* (發願文, votive texts), the records of completion of statues (造成記, K. *joseonggi*), and the records of paintings (畫記, K. *hwagi*), active research was also conducted on the works of monk artisans and their activities. Notably, the study of votive texts secretly enshrined deep inside the statues led to much progress in research on Buddhist sculptures based on individual monk artisans.

The special exhibition *Monk Artisans of the Joseon Dynasty: Buddhist Sculptures and Paintings*, held at the National Museum of Korea (December 7, 2001 – March 6, 2022), was planned based on research results accumulated since the beginning of the 2000s. A symposium on the most important monk artisans who produced sculptures and paintings was held on December

18, 2021. On the occasion, the need to introduce these research outcomes to the international audience was discussed, and hence this edition of the *Journal of Korean Art & Archaeology* features the special topic of monk artisans of the Joseon Dynasty.

Basis for Research on Buddhist Art during the Late Joseon Dynasty: Documentary Materials

A wealth of documentary materials exists on the circumstances regarding the production of Buddhist art during the late Joseon Dynasty. They give researchers detailed information on the artworks, including not only the date of production and place of enshrinement, but also the names of the painters and sculptors, the patrons, and all the other people involved in their creation, as well as knowledge on the division of roles among artisans. These records have enabled researchers to gain an understanding of the changes in the works of the artisans concerned and the schools (流派, K. *yupa*) of Buddhist art. Additionally, the lists of donors (施主者, K. *sijuja*) have yielded diverse information on the patrons' social position and region of origin, as well as on donations by family groups. In other words, with so many documentary materials for reference, it is now possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of all the artistic and religious activities regarding the creation, enshrinement, and worship of

Buddhist works of art, including the people who donated for them or commissioned them, the painters and sculptors, and the original settings of paintings and sculptures.

Basis for Research on Joseon Buddhist Art: Maintaining Religious Context among Artworks

Research on the Buddhist art of the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392) and earlier periods involved applying various methods, including those focused on the viewpoint of art history looking at the history of style and iconography, as well as the political and economic history perspective, the social history perspective, and the perspective of ideological history. However, because most Buddhist artworks have been found removed from their original place of enshrinement, it has been difficult to even think of studying them in the context of their connection to works inside a temple hall. In the case of Buddhist artworks dating to the late Joseon period, however, many of them remain in their original settings, making it possible to grasp the relationship between works inside the same space.

Owing to the documentary materials available, we can study the rituals conducted inside the temple hall, and the way the works used in the rituals relate to each other using much more diverse approaches than those used for Buddhist art of the

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Research on the Schools of Monk Artisans

Due to a great increase in temple reconstruction during the seventeenth century, different schools of monk painters and monk sculptors in charge of producing Buddhist art began to emerge. Typically, a number of monk artisans worked together to create a single painting or sculpture, and each monk in the group performed a different task under a division-of-labor system. It is thought that the monks naturally formed master-disciple relationships and evolved into “schools,” or groups called *yupa*, as they worked and trained together.

The schools of monk sculptors, founded during the first half of the seventeenth century and active through the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were each based in a particular region, and the monks belonging to each school worked together to produce Buddhist images. Research so far has identified around ten large monk-sculptor schools and twenty to thirty smaller schools that were active around the same time. Though it was very rare for several schools to work together, collaborative projects were carried out in exceptional cases. Some examples include Buddhist projects at large representative temples led by an elderly monk, such as Byeogam Gakseong (碧

巖覺性), or work at temples closely connected to the royal court, such as Jasusa Temple and Insusa Temple in Seoul, and Yongjusa Temple in Hwaseong.

Research on monk-sculptor schools has so far identified the major schools and leading sculptors in each school as follows: the Wono School (Wono and Gakmin), the Hyeonjin-Cheongheon School (Hyeonjin, Cheongheon, Seungil, Eunghye, and Huijang), the Suyeon School (Suyeon, Yeongcheol, Unhye, and Gyeongrim), the Eungwon-Ingyun School (Eungwon, Ingyun and Samin), the Beopryeong School (Beopryeong, Hyehui, and Joneung), the Muyeom School (Muyeom and Haesim), the Daneung School (Daneung and Takmil), the Seungho School (Seungho and Sujong), the Saeknan School (Saeknan, Chungok, Chobyeon and Hacheon), and the Jinyeol School (Jinyeol, Sangjeong, Gyecho and Bonghyeon). Along with the study of the works shown by extant records left by these schools, attempts have been made to restore works for which no records remain, based on an estimation of the monks who took part in creating them.

The study of the schools of monk painters has taken the form of research to identify the lineages of the monk painters based in different regions. Examples of such painters active during the seventeenth century are Singyeom, Myeongok, and Eungyeol, who were active in Chungcheong-do Province; and Cheonsin, who was active in Jeolla-do Province. During the eighteenth century—when the schools grew very active—the Uigyeom School (Geungcheok, Saekmin, Chaerin, Pyeongsam, Seungyun, Hwayeon, Kwaeyun, Doil, Cheonyeo, and Naewon), based in Jeolla-do Province, created a new style of Buddhist painting. In the Gyeongsang-do region, famous schools were the Uigyun School (Chejun, Seokmin, and Kwaemin) based at Donghwas Temple in Daegu; the Segwan School at Jikjisa Temple in Gimcheon; and the Imhan School (Pogwan, Yuseong, and Jiyeon) at Tongdosa Temple in Yangsan. During the nineteenth century, monk painters worked primarily in the provinces of Gyeongsang-do and Gyeonggi-do. The monk Eungsang, originally from Gimyongsa Temple in Mungyeong, formed an artists’ lineage and became the head of the Sabulsan School, which produced artists such as Sewon, Jincheol, and Gijeon. The Sanggyeom, Mingwan, and Yeonhong schools were active in the Gyeonggi-do region, and in 1790 took charge of the paintings for Yongjusa Temple, the vow temple of King Jeongjo (正祖, r. 1776–1800). These schools produced artists such as Yeonghwan, Changhwa, and Eungseok in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They were followed by Cheollyu, Chugyeon, and Yakhyo between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Munseong and Ilseop in the early twentieth century.

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Research on the Buddhist Iconography

Buddhist temples built during the late Joseon Dynasty comprised not just the central hall but a cluster of several halls, and various sculptures and paintings were enshrined in each. That is, different Buddhist statues and Buddhist paintings were enshrined as separate objects of worship in the Daeungeon (大雄殿, Main Hall), the Geungnakjeon (極樂殿, Hall of Paradise), the Eungjinjeon (應眞殿, Hall of Arhats), and the Myeongbujjeon (冥府殿, Hall of Judgement), depending on the principal icon in each. The iconography of Joseon Buddhist paintings has always been a popular topic for research. Based on the sutras and ritual texts, in-depth iconographic research has been conducted on Buddhist paintings for worship, including paintings of the Buddhas Sakyamuni, Amitabha, Bhaisayaguru, and the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha, corresponding to the principal icon in the temple hall. However, Joseon Buddhist sculptures are not as diverse as paintings and show almost no change in iconography over time. Hence, there has been comparatively little interest in the iconography of Buddhist sculptures compared to Buddhist paintings. The Buddhas of the Three Directions (Sakyamuni in the center) in Daeungeon, the Amitabha Triad in Geungnakjeon, the Ksitigarbha, and the Ten Kings of Hell in Myeongbujjeon are common compositions of Buddhist images that are used almost without exception. However, the Buddhas of the Three Generations (Dipamkara, Sakyamuni, and Maitreya) enshrined with the Sixteen Arhats in Eungjinjeon is a special example that reflects the individuality that sets Joseon temples apart from Chinese temples.

Study of Rituals and Buddhist Art

In the study of Buddhist art of the late Joseon Dynasty—particularly Buddhist painting—the most outstanding results have been seen in research on the relationship between rituals and art. It is understood that during the late Joseon Dynasty, rituals had a great influence on Buddhist painting in particular, as exemplified by the three-altar ritual (三壇儀禮, K. *samdanuir-ye*) and the distinction made between the paintings used on the upper, middle, and lower altars. The *gwaebulhwa* (掛佛畫, giant hanging scroll paintings) used for outdoor ceremonies, paintings of the Three Bodhisattvas and Nectar Ritual paintings used in Water and Land Rites (水陸齋, K. *suryukjae*) are considered to be highly distinctive paintings with few counterparts in other East Asian countries. In the field of Buddhist sculpture, research has focused on changes in the formative characteristics of statues in relation to rituals. Buddhist sculptures of the late Joseon period have a large face compared to the body and a hunched back and

neck with bowed head, features representing changes that came in connection with the various rituals that were conducted inside the temple halls.

Overview of Articles

Out of the four main articles in this issue of the *Journal of Korean Art & Archaeology*, those written by Jeong Myounghee and Song Unsok cover the general concepts and activities of the monk artisans of the late Joseon Dynasty. The articles by Lee Yongyun and Heo Hyeong Uk present new interpretations of Buddhist art of the same period, based on the activities of certain schools of monk artisans.

Jeong Myounghee’s article “Buddhist Practitioner and Artist: The Dual Identity of Buddhist Monk-Painters during the Joseon Dynasty” defines Joseon’s monk artisans as monks with special skills who renounced the world and were unique individuals, even in the East Asian countries sharing the same Buddhist culture. The article traces changes in the title given to monk painters as well as changes in people’s perceptions of them, and also looks at the organization of groups of artisans, their work system, pay, and other aspects.

During the Joseon Dynasty, Buddhist painting was perceived as a field reserved for monks only, and schools of monk painters with their own distinctive styles were active in different parts of the country. The author emphasizes that every part of the creation process—from planning and production to enshrinement of the painting—was recognized as an area that could not be handled by ordinary artisans. Some temples became famous for training apprentices, passing on techniques, and, subsequently, cultivating new artists. The apprenticeship system (徒弟, K. *doje*), enabled the transmission of skills under the lead of head monk painters (首畫僧, K. *subhaseung*). This paved the way for the emergence of varied schools, each with its own traditions. The head monk painter supervised and directed the whole painting process, starting from the creation of preparatory drawings to painting the decorative designs and coloring them. Within each school, monk painters (畫僧, K. *hwaseung*) who had attained a uniform level of skills worked together.

Since monk painters did not only work at their base temples but also within their respective monastic sub-lineages or factions (門中, K. *munjung*), which constituted their human network, renowned head monk painters worked across a significantly

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wide area. Depending on their economic power and the scope of the area that they covered, some head monk painters were the main force behind Buddhist projects, taking on roles such as fundraising and overall supervision. At times, when the state craft production system was not properly functioning, they also took part in public projects to fulfill the demand for paintings in regional society. The author concludes that Buddhist temples were sacred places and, at the same time, spaces where both sacred and worldly artworks were produced and consumed, with monk painters playing the central role in the creation process.

Song Unsok's article titled "Buddhist sculpture Production Methods and the Issue of 'Ghost-sculpting' during the Late Joseon Dynasty" examines the issue of "ghost-sculpting" (代作, K. *daejak*) in the monk sculptor schools (流派, K. *yupa*) through the relationship between the head sculptor and assistant sculptors. During that period, it was common in the *yupa* to have one head sculptor and several assistant sculptors divide the work among themselves, each one responsible for a specific task. These schools generally had a vertical hierarchy from the head down to the lowest monk sculptor, and it is thought they had two functions—training of sculptors and the creation of Buddhist statues. The author studies the issue of "ghost-sculpting" in two forms or situations. The first case involved a deputy monk sculptor who was "ghost-sculpting" for the head sculptor monk, including situations when an imminent changeover in the head of a school caused the next head monk to take charge of the work in place of the current head. In records, the current head was still nominally in charge of the school but the style of the next head sculptor was the most apparent on the finished statue. The other case occurred when a monk sculptor—who left his school to work independently—took on assistants belonging to another school to complete a sculpture project. In this instance, the characteristics of the head sculptor's style were almost non-apparent and the finished work instead exhibited the style of the school to which the assistants belonged. A sculpture made in this way was attributed to the school of the assistant sculptors rather than the head sculptor. In regard to these two methods of working that could be identified as "ghost-sculpting," cases of each were traced through stylistic analysis. The author reached the conclusion, however, that neither of the two methods could be deemed ethically problematic since the works thus produced could not be considered as counterfeits, forgeries or fakes in the modern sense.

Heo Hyeong Uk's article titled "A Study on the Late Joseon Dynasty Monk Sculptor Daneung (端應) and the Wooden Amitabha Buddha Altarpiece at Yongmunsa Temple in Yecheon,

Gyeongsangbuk-do Province" studies the major wood-carved altarpiece of the late Joseon Dynasty. Wood-carved images of Buddha preaching or wooden altarpieces had the same function as altar paintings hung behind the principal icon inside a temple hall. Unlike a painting, however, they are made of wood and have a raised surface. Such wooden altarpieces, about ten of which are extant, are works of Buddhist art unique to the late Joseon Dynasty with no counterparts in the Buddhist art of China or Japan of the same period. The monk sculptor who played the most important role in making wooden altarpieces was Daneung. He was the sculptor behind the altarpiece at Gyeongguksa Temple in Seoul dated to the fifth month of 1684, and the altarpiece at Yongmunsa Temple in Yecheon dated to the ninth month of the same year. The style of the sculpture at Daeseungsa Temple in Mungyeong—dated to 1675 and therefore the earliest wooden altarpiece—suggests that it was the work of Daneung as well.

While the article discusses the area in which Daneung and his school were active, the author's main interest seems to be the Buddhist and Confucian semantic system applied to the Yongmunsa Temple altarpiece. The Buddhist symbolic elements are studied by dividing them into those from the Pure Land faith and those from Seon Buddhism. The Pure Land elements are the nine grades of rebirth in the Pure Land depicted at the bottom of the altarpiece and the text engraved in the form of a gatha on either side of the outer frame. The author points out that the nine grades of rebirth is a motif found in other works produced by Daneung, such as the 1684 wooden altarpiece at Gyeongguksa Temple and the 1689 aureola around the Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha of Seonseoksa Temple in Seongju. The Seon elements are explained in connection with the word "*myeongsim*" (明心), meaning illuminating the mind which is engraved in the center of the bottom part of the outer frame. *Myeongsim* expresses the core of Seon Buddhism, that is, the idea that enlightenment means finding one's innate Buddha nature in one's mind. Engraved on the pedestals of the 1681 Wooden Seven Seated Buddhas of Magoksa Temple in Gongju are the words meaning "sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation" (頓悟漸修, K. *donojeomsu*) and "simultaneous cultivation of meditation and wisdom" (定慧雙修, K. *jeonghyessangsu*). These are two tenets of Seon Buddhism established by the monk Jinul (知訥), and the word *myeongsim* on the Yongmunsa Temple altarpiece can be understood in a similar light. Hence, the author suggests that the religious background for expression of elements of both Pure Land faith and Seon Buddhism on the Yongmunsa Temple altarpiece is the theory of the "unity of Seon and Pure Land

faith" (禪淨一致論), which underlies the practice of *yeombul-seon* (念佛禪), or invoking the Buddha as meditative practice.

Another distinctive feature of the Yongmunsa Temple altarpiece are the engraved hexagrams of the *Zhouyi* (周易, or *I Ching*, the Book of Changes), the Chinese classic that is the main scripture of Confucianism, an ancient Chinese belief system. Along the inner edge of the aureola around the principal icon, the eight directions are expressed using the eight trigrams of the Later Heaven, a concept established in Neo-Confucianism. Here the *taegeuk* mark (太極, the supreme ultimate) was added to express the idea that the Buddha and the dharma are at the center of the order and principles of the universe. On the outer wooden frame, twelve out of the sixty-four hexagrams are engraved to reveal the Buddhist outlook on time. That is, the twelve declining and growing hexagrams symbolizing the flow and circulation of time were used to express the waxing and waning of yin and yang (陰陽, K. *eum-yang*).

The author stresses the importance of this kind of application of hexagrams in the Buddhist art of the Joseon Dynasty. The monks of Joseon, a nation that had adopted Confucianism as its ruling ideology, sought the harmony of Confucianism and Buddhism and explored channels for communication with the outside world while familiarizing themselves with Neo-Confucian knowledge, including the *I Ching*. While depiction of hexagrams on the wooden altarpiece is a direct expression of Buddhist and Confucianism harmony within Buddhism, or Buddhist art, the author notes that non-Buddhist elements were not accepted unconditionally, as seen in the changes made to the twelve declining and growing hexagrams. Finally, in regard to the agents assimilating Confucian elements in Buddhist art, the article emphasizes the role of artisans such as the monk sculptor Daneung, but remains open to other possibilities, and closes with the anticipation of further research on this topic.

Lee Yongyun's "The Buddhist Projects of the Pyeongyang Monastic Sub-lineage and the Artistic Activities of Monk Artisans during the Late Joseon Dynasty" calls attention to the importance of the temples and sub-lineages that commissioned works, the parties that determined the theme, iconography, materials, and other matters in the process of creating Buddhist sculptures and paintings. The article raises the possibility that monk artisans of the late Joseon Dynasty worked based on the artisan sub-lineages that they belonged to. The most prominent example is the Pyeongyang Eongi (鞭羊彦機, 1581-1665) sub-lineage based in Gyeongsang-do Province, and the monk sculptors Daneung and Takmil (卓密), as well as the monk

painter Singyeom (信謙), who formed relations with the sub-lineage. Soyeong Singyeong (昭影神鏡, 1683-1711), a second-generation apprentice of Pyeongyang Eongi, referred to Daneung and Takmil as *munin* (門人, disciple of a great scholar/artist) and it is thought that the two sculptors actually belonged to the Pyeongyang monastic sub-lineage. Active in the northern part of Gyeongsang-do Province, the two monk sculptors pioneered the distinctive genre of wooden altarpieces. The author suggests that underlying the creation of such new iconography was the faith and thinking of Uicheon (義天), Singyeong's teacher and the first-generation apprentice of Eongi, and that, indeed, the altarpieces would have been made under the active guidance of Soyeong Singyeong. The author also argues that Toeun Singyeom (退雲慎謙, active 1788-1830), the head monk painter of the Sabulsan School, had formed close connections with the apprentices of Hwanseong Jian (喚醒志安, 1664-1729), another second-generation apprentice of Pyeongyang Eongi, and would have been influenced by monks of the Pyeongyang monastic sub-lineage when devising new iconography such as Ucchusma (穢跡金剛, the Vajra-being of Impure Traces) and the Eight Vajra-beings (八金剛). Aside from the groups of artisans, such as monk painters and monk sculptors, the research sheds light on the role of the temples and sub-lineages that commissioned works of Buddhist art during the late Joseon Dynasty, and is important for broadening the horizons of research on Buddhist art of that time.

Further Research Directions

Over the past twenty years, research on the Buddhist sculpture and painting of the late Joseon Dynasty has focused on the separate component fields such as monk sculptors, monk painters, schools of artisans, rites, and iconography, and significant results have been achieved. In the history of Korean art, Buddhist art of that time is almost the only field and only period characterized by a wealth of documentary materials and continued (religious) context among works of art. Future research will hence be able to move toward more comprehensive interpretation, encompassing all genres, including Buddhist sculpture, Buddhist painting, ritual implements, and sutras, to draw even closer to grasping the real picture of Buddhist art of that era.