



Portrait of Yi Chae, 1807; ink and color on paper, 98.2x58cm; National Museum of Korea



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A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

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First published in the catalog of the exhibition entitled *Picturing Spirit:*
Portraiture in East Asia co-organized by the Seoul Museum of Art,
Chun Asian Fine Arts, and The JungAng Daily in 2003

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to ascertain when in Korean history the first portraits were created. Based on the available historical records and a few extant examples of figure paintings, the earliest portraits date from the Three Kingdoms period. Apparently, the figures found on the murals in Sasinchong Tomb and Ssangyongchong Tomb in Maesan-ri and a tomb in Deokheung-ri from the Goguryeo Kingdom (37 B.C.~668) were drawn to indicate the buried in the tombs (Plate 1). However, it is unlikely that these figures were faithfully portrayed because they look too typical to represent specific people. Meanwhile, a book of the Goryeo period (918~1392) describes about people paying their respects before the portraits of Buddhist monks of the Three Kingdoms period. It is very possible that these portraits were created during the Three Kingdoms period but this cannot be confirmed.

Nevertheless, various records on the epitaphs and documents show that, by the Unified Silla period, not only portraits of kings were drawn on the walls of temples as murals but also numerous images of monks were produced. As for portraits of aristocrats, a portrait of Choe Chi-won (857~?), a great poet, scholar, and statesman of the 9th century Unified Silla Kingdom, exists as documented today. Although it is a double-copied version, the *Portrait of Choe Chi-won* featured at



108

109

吠

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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吠

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this exhibition has drawn great deal of interest by many viewers and scholars alike.

In the Goryeo Dynasty, portraits of the king and queen were frequently produced and enshrined. Various types of portraits of loyal subjects were often made under titles such as 'Byeoksang Gongsin' or 'Dohyeong Gongsin,' which were given in reward for and to praise their various contributions to the dynasty. In addition, a number of private records account for the inscriptions and the eulogies in regard to portraits of the literati. A considerable number of portraits of women (queens' in particular) and of Buddhist monks were also created in this period. Regrettably, however, only a few pieces of these portraits remain today (copied versions included) and they are not sufficient enough to map the stylistic changes and characteristics of the portrait paintings of this era.

In contrast, the Joseon Dynasty left a tremendous amount of portraiture. Because the dynasty promoted filial piety and loyalty to the state as the two most important virtues, numerous shrines variously called *sadang*, *yeongdang*, and *seowon* including the halls for kings were built to practice the virtues. Portraits of the illustrious, the wise, and the deceased were accordingly in great demand to be enshrined for tribute there. Even the kings occasionally ordered portraits of meritorious subjects to promote and to honor them for their remarkable services to the nation. A great number of portraits to respect elderly officials and Buddhist monks were also produced.

To most portrait painters of Joseon, 'rendering a portrait' especially of a high figure was a good opportunity to become famous as a professional artist and to rise to a higher position. The painters naturally made every effort to depict the subject as realistically as possible faithfully adhering to such old principles as: "The slightest mistake, like one strand of hair not exactly resembling that of the subject, would fail the portrait."¹ According to various inscriptions and accompanying titles of portraits, the stringent evaluation criteria were to be applied to viewers and critics as well. They must have the eyes to see not only 'the physical veracity' but also 'the spiritual veracity' to determine whether it is a fine piece or not. Seven-tenths perfection was considered satisfactory even in the production of portraits of the king (a state affair so important that only the greatest painters of the times were employed) suggesting that the expectations for the artistic achievement in the genre of portrait painting were very high in Joseon. It may be due to this lofty desire to 'learn about the spirit through figure'² Koreans today have many excellent Joseon portrait paintings in the museums as well as in the various shrines in care of the descendants or the Confucians throughout the country. The portraits of Joseon mark a brilliant aspect of Korean painting.

(Plate 1)

Husband and wife of Ssangyongchong Tomb,
Murals from Goguryeo Kingdom,
Yonggang-gun, Pyeongannam-do Province,
5th-6th century

This paper classifies traditional portrait paintings into six categories based on the social status of the subjects and will trace the historical development of each category: portraits of kings, portraits of meritorious subjects, portraits of elderly officials, portraits of literati, portraits of women, and portraits of Buddhist monks. The portraits presented at this exhibition were selected to illustrate the unique characteristics of each category and to demonstrate how traditional Korean painting differs from those of its counterparts under the same Chinese cultural influence, such as China and Japan. The ultimate goal of this paper is to delineate the unique characteristics of Korean portrait painting through this exhibition that collectively presents the portrait painting of Korea, China, and Japan.

II TYPES OF KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTINGS

01 PORTRAITS OF KINGS, *EOJIN*

Eojin or portraits of kings have been called by various names: *eoyong*, *suyong*, *jinyong*, *seonyong*, and *wangyeong*.³ It is not clear when the first *eojin* was created. However, there is a record in the Treatise on Ritual and Music: Goryeo Music section of *History of the Later Tang Dynasty* (compiled in 1060 during the Northern Song period) about a portrait of a king that was painted on the ivory decoration of a musical instrument to perform Goryeo music to Emperor Gaozu (the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty who established nine musical divisions to perform diverse court music). Although this particular *eojin* was made for decoration of the instrument, we cannot exclude the possibility that *eojin* as portraits were already being produced in earnest around this time.⁴ The *History of the Three Kingdoms* (written by Goryeo scholar Kim Bu-sik in 1145) describes the royal portraits on the wall of Buseoksa Temple verifying that portraits of kings were certainly being produced by the Unified Silla period. *Changamjip*, an

anthology by the eighteenth century poet Kim Sang-chaе (pen named Changam), also tells about a portrait of King Gyeongsun (?~978) of the Unified Silla drawn on a wall of a temple in Wonju.

During the Goryeo period (918~1392), portraits of kings were being produced for various types of shrines that had been built in accordance with the development of custom to respect the deceased. Gyeongryeonjeon Shrine was founded in the capital to house the portrait of King Taejo (the founder of the dynasty) and those of numerous deceased kings that were alternately hung in a group of five in the shrine. Buddhist temples were built all over the country (usually near Gaeseong, the capital) and individually assigned for the portraits of deceased royal couple.

Sadly, only two royal portraits from the Goryeo period remain today. A sketchy portrait of King Taejo Wanggeon (918~943) remains at Sunguijeon Shrine historic site but it is hardly recognizable. A portrait of King Gongmin (1351~1374), the 31st monarch of Goryeo, and his Mongolian wife Princess Noguk remains in the National Palace Museum of Korea (Plate 2). In this color portrait of single canvas, King Gongmin and Princess Noguk appear side by side. Their costumes are noticeably of the style of the closing years of Goryeo through the early years of Joseon, but neither the king nor the princess seems drawn true to life.

Throughout the Joseon period (1392~1910), a huge number of portraits were produced for the



(Plate 2)
Portrait of King Gongmin and his wife Princess Noguk; Ink and color on silk; National Palace Museum of Korea



(Plate 3)
Portrait of King Taejo, Jo Jung-muk and others, 1872; Ink and color on silk; 218x150cm; Gyeonggijeon Shrine, Jeonju



(Plate 4)
Various sides of a face



(Plate 5)
Portrait of Emperor Gojong, Attributed to Chae Yong-shin, Early 20th century; Ink and color on silk; 130x70cm; Wonkwang University Museum

kings ranging from Taejo, the founder of the Joseon Dynasty to the last monarch, King Sunjong. From the beginning the dynasty built as many as six shrines at six locations throughout the nation to enshrine the portrait of King Taejo: Munsojeon in Seoul, Junwonjeon in Yeongheung, Yeongseungjeon in Pyongyang, Mokcheongjeon in Gaeseong, Jipgyeongjeon in Gyeongju, and Gyeonggijeon in Jeonju. Portraits of preceding kings and queens were enshrined in Seonwonjeon Shrine on the premises of Gyeongbokgung, the main palace. The dynasty continued to build shrines systematically for royal portraits until the Japanese invasion of 1592. During the war, nearly all of the shrines were burnt down and almost all of the royal portraits inside them were lost. Although the shrines were never rebuilt after the war, they were still considered very important. Before the end of the Joseon Dynasty, Junwonjeon and Gyeonggijeon were additionally constructed to enshrine the portraits of King Taejo; Yeonghuijeon and Seonwonjeon were built inside Changdeokgung for the portraits of other kings; and various small places and pavilions were assigned within the palaces for other royal portraits.⁵

According to a historical document, as many as 26 scrolls of the portraits of King Taejo were produced. One of them allegedly described the king riding on horseback and many others portrayed the kings in various costumes such as a military outfit, crown and royal robe, hood, or traditional Korean hat. Regrettably, only a few *eojin* remain today. An *eojin* of King Taejo is kept at Gyeonggijeon Shrine, Jeonju and one at the Royal Museum of Deoksugung Palace is King Yeongjo's. Only parts of portraits of Prince Yeoning (later King Yeongjo), King Cheoljong, and King Ikjong remain today after a fire broke out at the storage house where they were kept during the Korean War. In addition, a few portraits of King Gojong and the draft of a portrait painting of King Sunjong still exist.

Although the full-length portrait of King Taejo (Plate 3) is a copy produced in 1872, it faithfully reproduced the original painting in terms of both formality of facial expression and painting technique (Plate 4). This portrait shows King Taejo seated facing front and wearing a king's hat and royal robe and closely resembles the portrait of Taizu of Ming at the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The portrait of King Yeongjo is half-length down to the abdomen. It clearly shows the portraiture style of the latter half of Joseon even though it is a copy. The swollen and sunken parts of the face are expressed by dyeing the silk canvas in light brown. Many of the portraits of King Gojong (Plate 5) in existence are frontal, full-length portraits with the king portrayed seated on a chair, wearing a king's hat and royal robe, with a folding screen with the sun and the moon pictured in the background. This style is typical of Chae Yong-sin (1850~1941), the most renowned portrait painter at the time.⁶

Seungjeongwon Ilgi, the diary of a government agency called 'Seungjeongwon,' the Royal Secretariat, elaborates on the production process of a portrait of a king. The account enables us to understand the significance of a royal portrait in the era of Joseon. The making of a king's portrait was a very complex process: First, a temporary office was established to supervise the work of the painters selected from all the court painters at Dohwaseo, Royal Bureau of Painting. The selected painters were usually those who had been recognized as the most outstanding in portrait painting at the Bureau, but when there was no painter qualified enough for the job, outside painters were brought in through recommendations by the ministers. In some cases, an open competition was held to test painters, where each candidate was required to draw meritorious subjects of the court. Once selected, the painters were divided into three teams. The first (*jjpilwhasa*) was the lead team responsible for rendering the king's face. The second team (*dongchamwhasa*) was the team of associate(s) in charge of other parts of the king's body, and the third team (*sujungwhasa*) was to assist the first and the second teams with coloring. Six painters were usually involved but there could be as many as 13. In addition, there were many other workers such as artisans, mounting technicians, and sewers assigned for mounting the painting on a scroll.

As for the process of rendering a royal portrait, rough drafts were made on paper first (*chobonwansung*) and then the actual portrait was painted in ink on a silk canvas (*sangchomukwha*) followed by coloring (*seolsaek*), mounting (*whubae*), entitlement (*pyoje*),⁷ designating place (*jinjeon*), placing (*bongan*), and finally evaluation of the painting by the artists and ministers in charge (*nonsang*). Furthermore, divination was practiced to determine auspicious days for each of these processes and the king and his ministers often oversaw the paintings in progress. The complexity of these processes indicates that the production of a royal portrait was tantamount to any major state event. While the production of a king's portrait was for

royal descendants to cherish his memory (as was the case with ordinary families) the enshrinement of the portraits was performed as a symbol of the royal wish to perpetuate the dynasty.

02 PORTRAITS OF MERITORIOUS SUBJECTS, GONGSINSANG

Production of *gongsinsang* or portraits of meritorious subjects was ordered by the king in appreciation of those who rendered distinguished services for the nation. These portraits were developed to enhance the power and the prestige of the monarchy and to warn citizens against disobeying their monarch. While *eojin* were enshrined as symbols for tribute because the royal portraits were for the royal ancestors, *gongsinsang* were done for more practical purposes. Bestowing the title "*gongsin* (meritorious subjects)" on a person for his distinguished services for the nation and building a pavilion for enshrinement of the portrait of the meritorious subject were regarded as a great honor not only for the *gongsin* but also for the future generations of his family. It also set a strong example for other subjects and Joseon promoted *gongsinsang* as an essential form of portrait painting in this regard.

Portraits of meritorious subjects date back to ancient times. According to historical records in China, a portrait of a subject was produced in the third year of Emperor Gaozong (5 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty and enshrined in Qiling Pavilion. A portrait of Zhao Chongquo under Emperor Chengzong was enshrined in Ganguangong Temple and another example was enshrined in a tower in Yunnan Province during the reign of Emperor Mingzong.

There are records about monetary rewards to be given to officials for distinguished services during the Unified Silla. However, it is not clear if a status like *gongsin* existed at the time.⁸ The earliest record of this practice dates to 940, the 23rd year of King Taejo's reign. According to *Goryeosa* (*the History of Goryeo*), King



(Plate 6)
Portrait of Yi Jung-no, Anonymous, Early 17th century, Ink and color on silk, 171.5x94cm
Gyeonggi Provincial Museum



(Plate 7)
Portrait of Yi Man-yu, Anonymous, Early 18th century, Ink and color on silk, 42x30cm,
Private collection



(Plate 8)
Portrait of Yi Man-yu, Anonymous, Early 18th century, Ink and color on silk, 70x104.5cm,
Private collection

Taejo ordered the construction of a shrine called Gongsindang (Hall of Meritorious Subjects) at Sinheung Temple to honor the subjects who contributed to the founding of the new dynasty. A couple of *gongsinsang* were painted on the east and west walls of the shrine. From that year onwards, *gongsinsang* were continually produced to praise various achievements in defense of the nation, expansion of national boundaries, suppression of internal revolts, and etc.

In Joseon, numerous *gongsinsang* had been created from the beginning of the dynasty. No fewer than 28 different titles were used to commend the so-called *gongsin* throughout the 500-year history of the dynasty. Nearly every time *gongsin* status was conferred, the king ordered the construction of a shrine to house the portrait of the *gongsin* and the establishment of a stone monument to praise the subject for his distinguished service.⁹ A government agency called Chunghunbu (division of loyalty and merits) was responsible for the administrative affairs on this *gongsin* practice and a pavilion called Gigonggak was established to house *gongsinsang*, the portraits. Two copies were made for each *gongsin*: one was enshrined in Gigonggak,¹⁰ also called Gigak and Ingak, and the other was to reside in the home of the eldest grandson of the *gongsin* family.

The *gongsinsang* of Joseon are important in two respects. First, the quality of the portraits is excellent because they were produced by the top portraitists at the king's direct call. Second, they are valuable in Joseon studies because they bear the exact production dates. Although the clothes and hats depicted on *gongsinsang* vary with the passage of time, in almost all cases, the subject was seated in a chair with his hands folded on his lap and dressed in his official robe (including a black silk hat) that bear his official emblem on the chest. These chest patches are important for historical research as they reveal the subject's rank in the government at the time the painting was created. The *Portrait of Yi Jung-no* (1577~1624) is typical of *gongsinsang* in the mid Joseon period (Plate 6). It is a full-length portrait depicting the *gongsin* seated in a chair with his hands folded in front and dressed in official robes and a black silk hat with his face slightly turned to the right. The floor is covered by a colorful, patterned carpet, which is typical of *gongsinsang* in the mid Joseon. The official emblem on his chest with *haetae* (a mythical and imaginary animal) and golden belt with crane tells us that Yi Jung-no served as a class 2 military official when he was bestowed the *gongsin* title.

With albums of paintings becoming widely popular in the latter half of the Joseon period, *gongsinsang* were produced not only on large canvases but also in albums. By this time, in particular, Chunghunbu produced *gongsinsang* in albums for cost-cutting and convenience. Portraits in the form of an album were also issued in two copies: one was kept in Chunghunbu and the other was given

to the family of the subject. As seen in the example of the album of Yi Man-yu, a portrait album consists of two leaves (Plate 7). One leaf bears the name, official government post, and brief biography of the subject and on the other is the portrait of the subject. In the latter half of the Joseon period, larger *gongsinsang* were often produced separately by the family of the subject in commemoration of being granted *gongsin* title (Plate 8).

Production of *gongsinsang* ended with the bestowal of *gongsin* titles to military officials who helped suppress the revolt of Yi In-jwa in 1728, the fourth year of King Yeongjo's reign. However, this style of *gongsinsang*: seated in a chair with his hands folded in front in a dignified manner became popular among the Joseon elite and many aristocrats had their portraits painted in similar poses.

03 PORTRAITS OF ELDERLY OFFICIALS, GIRODOSANG

While fewer in number, *girodosang* or portraits of elderly officials are considered as important as those of meritorious subjects because they were a means to memorialize the subjects. The word *gi-ro* refers to elderly men with *gi* meaning sixty and *ro* seventy. However, for one to be qualified for one of these portraits, one should be much more than merely old. One had to hold a respectable social position and be known for one's virtuous character and other excellent personalities.

The Tang and Song of China first introduced an association of lofty and virtuous elderly men. Bai Juyi, a Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty and Wen Yanbo, who formed the Poetry Society of the Venerated Seniors, organized a society of elderly men and had famous painters produce their portraits. This practice was introduced to Korea and first realized during the Goryeo period under the name, Haedong Girohoe. Choe Dang (1125~1211) and seven other elderly gentlemen founded the organization after Choe had resigned from his government post.¹¹ It was a fraternal society to foster friendship of the member¹² and subsequently triggered the formation of such societies of aristocrats and men of letters. Records show that Yu Ja-ryang (1150~1229) and Yi Geo-yi (1348~1412) formed private societies of elderly officials in Goryeo era.¹³

In Joseon, a court agency known as Giroso was established in 1394, the third year of King Taejo. It replaced private gatherings of Goryeo and even the king himself joined the agency when he turned 60. Civil officials aged over seventy of minor second rank (*jong-lpum*) or above were selectively given membership in the agency. The practice existed until the end of Joseon but never became more than symbolic authority having little actual power.

No *girodosang* produced before King Sukjong's reign (1674~1720) is available today and only the documents about such portraits remain. According to Girohoedoseo (Preface to Social Gathering of the Elderly) by Kim Sang-heon (1570~1652), the members of the so-

called Girohoe or Society of Elderly Officials gathered together in Cheongpung-dong in August, 1635, the 13th year of King Injo's reign, and had painters produce a painting of their social gathering. It is, however, not a portrait in a strict sense because the human figures in the painting are treated as part of the scene.

Most of the *girodosang* extant today are album leaves produced in the latter half of the Joseon period. A few examples on folding screens and hanging scrolls exist including a folding screen depicting a gathering scene of the Girohoe Society to celebrate the introduction of Gwon Dae-un (1612~1699) as a new member. Gwon Dae-un is shown on this screen with seven other new members of the Giroso in 1689, the 15th year of King Sukjong's reign (Plate 9). The officials are illustrated in front of a Chinese-style mansion and garden—the same style of Xiyuanyajitu (Social Gathering at West Garden) from Song.¹⁴ The officials are dressed in official robes and black silk hats but without official emblem patches on their chests. Each of the eight officials is depicted full-length, seated in a chair, and dressed in official robes and black hat. Some are talking to others and some others are sitting in dignified poses.

These portrait albums are much like modern school albums and Korea has two albums of the 18th century. One is *Gisagyecheop* of 1719, the 45th year of King Sukjong's reign and the other is *Gisagyeonghoecheop* of 1744, the 20th year of King Yeongjo's reign. *Gisagyecheop* is presented at this exhibition (Plate 10) and was painted by Kim Jin-yeo, Bak Dong-bo, Jang Deuk-man, and Heo Suk, all of whom were leading portrait painters of the time (some were even engaged in the production of royal portraits). The album clearly shows the characteristics of the painting style during the latter half of Joseon. Nonetheless, the small, half-length portraits of figures in stereotypical postures and stylized facial expressions do not show any specific features of the individuals. There are also some examples of *girodosang* that were privately produced for personal celebration.

As mentioned earlier, although only a few *girodosang* remain today, the practice of producing this type of portrait continued until the end of Joseon. According to *Jeungbomunheonbigyo*, an encyclopedia published during the late Joseon, production of portraits was standardized in 1809, the 8th year of King Sunjo's reign.

When a chair and a walking stick were bestowed by the king as a symbol of royal appreciation to elderly subjects¹⁵, portraits were painted to commemorate the honor together, like the cases of the portraits of Ha Yeon (1376-1453) and of Gwon Dae-un (Plate 11). These portraits were similar to those of elderly officials in terms of purpose: commemoration. Also, there is an album known as *Myeongsin*



(Plate 9)
Folding Screen: Social Gathering of the Elderly; Ink and color on silk; Private collection, Deposited at Seoul National University Museum

114

115

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie



(Plate 10)
Album of the Gathering of Aged Statesmen, Kim Jin-yeo and others, 1720; Ink and color on silk; 43.7x32.5cm each; Private Collection, Treasure No 639



(Plate 11)
Portrait of Gwon Dae-un, Anonymous, 1689; Ink and color on silk; 178x98 cm; Seoul National University Museum

Hwacheop (*Album of Portraits of Distinguished Subjects*) that collectively contains portraits of distinguished subjects of the dynasty. Meanwhile, *Myeongsin Chosang Chobonjip* compiled drafts of the portraits of *Myeongsin Hwacheop* enabling us to understand various tastes of the portrait-loving Joseon people.

04 PORTRAITS OF THE LITERATI, SADEABUSANG

The fourth type is portraits of literati or *sadae-busang*. Historical records and a few extant examples of literati portraits indicate that the *Portrait of Choe Chi-won* is the first literati portrait in Korea (Plate 12). A record states: Choe Chi-won in his last years wandered around the country and secluded himself on Mt. Gayasan where Haeinsa Temple was located. Feeling despondent about the turbulent time, he suddenly disappeared one day. Yearning for his return to the temple, a monk prayed in front of his portrait enshrined in Dokseodang Hall of the temple. Interestingly, a portrait of Choe Chi-won was housed in a shrine called Daicisi Temple in China.¹⁶ A number of the poet's portraits remain today and two of them are presented at this exhibition: one from Museong Seowon—a private academy that also functions as a Confucian shrine—and the other from Cheongseongsa Temple. Both of the portraits depict him in Tang-style costume, but the way in which Choe is seated and fingers are folded is unusual following the Buddhist style. Also noticeable is that, although different coloring was used for these two portraits, both are of the same form and pattern, implying that they are imitations of the same copy.

Various documents such as *Dongmunseon* (*Anthology of Korean Literature*) compiled in the fifteenth century; inscriptions recorded in many other anthologies by private individuals and various records at shrines; and numerous tombstone inscriptions verify that many portraits of the literati were done in Goryeo.¹⁷ These portraits were used for educational, ceremonial, and commemorative purposes and sometimes exchanged to

enhance companionships among literati. For example, portraits of Su Dong Po, one of China's great poets and calligraphers, and Bai Juyi, a Chinese poet of the Tang, were cherished by the literati scholars.¹⁸

Despite many existing documents about *sadaebusang* in the Goryeo period, the quintessential Goryeo style cannot be defined because few portraits from the time remain. Among these are portraits of An Hyang enshrined in Hongju *hyanggyo* (County School); a portrait of Yi Je-hyeon painted by Zhen Jian Ru of Yuan; portraits of Goryeo literati which were copied during the Joseon period such as portraits of Yi Saek, Gil Jae, and Jeong Mong-ju; and portraits of Yi Jang-gyeong, Yi Jo-nyeon, Yi Po, and Yi Seung-in that are enshrined in Seongsansa Shrine in Goheung, Jeollanam-do Province. Yi Gyu-bo's *Donggukisanggukjip* (*Collected Works of Minister Yi of Goryeo*) indicated that the portrait of Bak In-seok depicted the subject wearing a white robe detailed with black trim. In addition, Jeong Hyeong-jin, a well-known painter of the time, left a portrait of Yi Gyu-bo on his seventieth birthday. These stories tell us that portraits were quite popular among the literati in Goryeo. This can be confirmed all the more clearly from various records. In fact, King Gongmin, the 31st monarch of Goryeo, personally painted portraits of his subjects: Yi Po and Yu Won-jeong according to *Goryeosa*; Yun Hae according to *Mogeunjip* (*Collected Works of Mogeun*); Yeom Je-sin, Yun Taek, and Yi Gang according to tombstones; and Son Hong-ryang according to *Dongguk yeoji seungnam* (*Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea*).

In Joseon, *samyo* ancestral shrines were developed under the Confucian teaching, "Be devoted to your parents when they are alive; be devoted to funeral when your parents pass away; and be devoted to ancestral rituals onwards. This is filial piety." *Samyo* ancestral shrines are where ancestral tablets and portraits of the deceased are enshrined and rituals are performed several times a year to comfort the souls of the deceased. These *samyo* ancestral shrines were

developed based on *gamyo* (family ancestral shrines) commonly called *sadang*, which originated from the Confucian doctrine: "As the root of individuals and a family is ancestors, it is the obligation of descendants to pay respect for what they owe to their ancestors." While ancestral tablets are placed in *gamyo*, *samyo* (also called *yeongdang*) houses portraits of the deceased and holds ancestral rituals according to the customs of the time.¹⁹ Along with the development of *gamyo* family ancestral shrines, Joseon witnessed *yeongdang* shrines increasingly established and many of them exist today (Plate 13).

Apart from the aforementioned *gamyo* and *yeongdang* shrines, *sawoo* or common shrine was also built to worship great men and ancient sages regardless of blood relationship. According to *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (*Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea*), compiled in 1481, the shrine to worship Kim Yu-shin, a general in 7th-century Silla, had been built during the Silla period for ordinary people to worship him. During the Goryeo, a number of *sawoo* were built for worship including the ones for Three *Gongsin* of Goryeo in Andong, Gyeongsang-do Province; General Yun Gwan in Jeongbuksa Shrine; and General Gang Min-cheom in Eunyeolsa Shrine.

Great men and ancient sages were widely worshiped in Joseon and shrines to worship royal subjects and ancient sages rapidly proliferated. In many cases, those who came from the same village or who had special relationships with royal subjects or ancient sages took leadership in building such shrines. In addition, a *sawoo* was built within a *seowon*. Not all of these *sawoo* housed portraits to be worshipped but, because there are so many *sawoo*, the demands for portraits were great in the dynasty. At first, there were some differences between the figures to be worshipped at *sawoo* and those at *seowon* shrines. In general, *sawoo* were for those who had been distinguished in their righteousness, loyalty, and filial piety while *seowon* were for more qualified persons. To be enshrined in a *seowon*, moral philosophy, scholarship, and achievement in services to the state must be satisfied and the figures must have been born in the village (where the *seowon* is located), lived there (even only for a short time), been assigned there as a government official, or lived in exile there.²⁰ Most figures enshrined at *seowon* were literati-bureaucrats and scholars. At *sawoo*, most were military officials who must have been stationed in the area or died in defense of their loyalty. Toward late Joseon, however, the distinction became blurred and selection of figures to be enshrined was often made based on blood relations or other connections rather than set standards and as a result the qualifications and the quality of figures to be enshrined degraded.

Joseon had as many as 417 *seowon* and as many as 492 *sawoo*. With an increasing number of *seowon* being established throughout the country,

116

117

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie



(Plate 12)
Portrait of Choe Chi-won, Anonymous, copied,
20th century; Ink and color on silk; 113x79cm;
Cheongseongsa Shrine (Choe Jong-gyu
Collection)



(Plate 13)
Tajindang Shrine in Chungwon-geun where
Portrait of Ha Yeon's Wife is housed

seowon came to exert greater influence accompanied by abuse of power. During the reign of King Sukjong (1674~1720), every province had eight to ten *seowon*. Worried over the increasing malfeasance by the *seowon*, Kim Man-jung and others presented a memorandum to bring the abuses of the *seowon* to attention of the king. The abuses by *sawoo*, collectively called *hyanghyeonsa*, were extremely serious in the reign of King Yeongjo (1724~1776). Although some 300 such shrines were abolished by the order of the king, there were still as many as 650 nationwide and the number continued to increase until the end of King Cheoljong's reign (1849~63). According to *Jeungbo munheon bigo* (*Reference to the Old Books, Enlarged with Supplements*), there were as many as 670 such shrines in Joseon then.

In 1864, when King Gojong succeeded Cheoljong at age of twelve, the king's father, Daewongun (1820~1898), who held power at the time, had most *seowon* closed. By the order of Daewongun, only one *seowon* for one figure with distinguished scholarship and fidelity was preserved. With the hundreds of *seowon* having been abolished, only 47 shrines (including *seowon* and *sawoo*) remained. In the wake of Daewongun's abolishment of the *seowon* followed by the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, most portraits housed in *seowon* were scattered and lost.

As has been discussed thus far, shrines for portraits developed greatly in Joseon. Those shrines not based on blood relations such as *sawoo* and *seowon*, or shrines called *saengsa*²¹ housed portraits rather

than spirit tablets. The reason for this seems to be that portraits were more accessible means for people to remember the deceased than hard spirit tablets. The most commonly enshrined figure at *sawoo* and shrines annexed to *seowon* is Song Si-yeol (1607~1689). As many as 16 shrines including the ones in Maegok, Suwon, and Hyoam, Jeongeup were built to worship the scholar-official. On all these portraits, Song Si-yeol is depicted in a plain robe and headgear called *bokgeon* or *sabangmo*. The *Portrait of Song Si-yeol* in the collection of the Seoul Museum of History is a half-length portrait of him dressed in a white robe detailed with black trim (Plate 14). The furrows of a wrinkled face well express Song Si-yeol's austere features and his belief in righteousness.

In general, *yeongdang* and *sawoo* housed a portrait of one person. However, some shrines housed a number of portraits of different people, such as the portraits of Heo Mok and Che Jae-gong enshrined together at Dogang *yeongdang*.

In most cases, portraits of the literati depict a man in a Confucian scholar's robe and hat. However, towards the end of Joseon, an increasing number of *saedaebusang* came to resemble *gonsinsang*, dressed in formal official costumes and hats. Many such portraits of figures in formal outfits were housed in shrines. Of all such portraits, the *Portrait of Choe Ik-hyeon* (1833~1906) housed at Chaesansa Shrine is the most outstanding example (Plate 15). The portrait is one of the patriot portraits created by Chae Yong-sin, and the patriot who



(Plate 14)
Portrait of Song Si-yeol, Anonymous, copied, late Joseon; Ink and color on silk; 81.7x57.6cm; Seoul Museum of History



(Plate 15)
Portrait of Choe Ik-hyeon, Chae Yong-shin, copied, early 20th century; Ink and color on silk; 97x53cm; Chaesansa Shrine (Choe Jong-gyu Collection)

118

119

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie



(Plate 16)
Self-portrait, Yun Du-seo, 18th century Joseon; Ink and color on paper; 38.5x20.5cm; Private Collection, National Treasure No. 240



(Plate 17)
Im Su-ryun from the album of paintings by Im Hui-su, Im Hui-su, 1749; 23.8x11.5cm; National Museum of Korea

fought against the Japanese is portrayed full-length in the portrait wearing a deep blue official robe and a black hat for his spirit of independence. An official emblem with a crane design decorates him seated facing front in a chair placed on a tiger skin on the floor. The costume is so realistically depicted that it deceptively invites a touch. The portrait looks as if Choe is right before us in person.

Most literati portraits were produced to be enshrined or worshipped but there was also a genre of literati portraits produced by a literati-painter himself as a piece of art. Self-portraits and various albums with full-length portraits belong to this genre. Records on self-portraits appeared as early as the Han period of China. The earliest record of a Korean self-portrait is that of King Gongmin in the 14th century Goryeo. It was allegedly painted based on a reflection in a mirror. Regrettably, the self-portrait does not exist today. There were two self-portraits of Kim Si-seup (1435~1493) in Joseon according to *Maewoldangjip* (*The Collected Works of Maewoldang*). No further records exist on self-portraits until the eighteenth century when self-portraits of Yun Du-seo (1668~1715), Yi Gwang-jwa, and Gang Se-hwang appeared. It seems that self-portraits were rarely painted in Joseon because the painter must first think himself valuable enough to be portrayed and have strong social recognition to support the self-respect before making a portrait in addition to an excellent skill set for realistic representation while professional court painters did not have adequate self-esteem as their social status was very low and most literati painters were not technically capable of drawing themselves. Of all these rare self-portraits, the *Self-portrait of Yun Du-seo* (Plate 16) is a true masterpiece. It is comparable to any other masterpiece self-portrait in the world. Only the face in ink fills the paper canvas and the artist looks so bold and firm as if he is confronting himself for some reason. This self-portrait is particularly impressive in its shrewdness in expressing the artist's penetrating gaze. It truly shows the attitude of Yun Du-seo as the most talented realistic painter. The painting style is typical of the time in a way that numerous brushstrokes were made to express shadowed parts in his face. The pupils of his eyes are shown to be as clear and as distinctive as those of an immortal. When his friend Sim Deuk-gyeong died, Yun Du-seo painted his portrait in memory of him. The portrait the artist made was so true to life that the surviving family of Sim Deuk-gyeong burst into tears. This episode tells us how talented Yun Du-seo was in realistic expression as a literati painter.

Joseon also has excellent examples of portraits filled with the spirits of modern day artist. The most representative example is *Im Hui-su jeonsin hwacheop*, a book of portrait paintings by Im Hui-su. Im Hui-su was a prodigy artist who died at the age of only seventeen. He created a series of sketches of guests to his house in light ink or charcoal (Plate 17). Although these sketches are not completely finished, they caught the essence of subjects so spontaneously as well

as objectively being free from any restraints or pressures that the professional portraitists of the time might have been subject to. Being lightly sketched, his portraits allow us to see the process of his creation as well.

There are also a few *sadaebusang* portrayed in very unique composition and form. *Jeongsiksang* is one of them and it was produced based on an anecdote: When a subject was accompanying King Sejo (1417~1468) on his way to Onyang, a fire broke out and the subject rescued the king by carrying him out of the danger on his back. Another is the *Portrait of Ju Do-bok*. It depicts him when King Yeongjo passed away in 1776 (Plate 18). The other is *Three Brothers of the Jo Family*, a group portrait of three brothers depicted side by side on one canvas (Plate 19).

05 PORTRAITS OF WOMEN

Portraits of women are the least conspicuous category of Korean portrait painting. The earliest evidence of such portraits was found in the murals of Goguryeo tombs, including Tomb No. 3 in Anak, Sasin-chong Tomb (Tomb of the Four Deities) in Maesan-ri, and Ssangyongchong (Tomb of the Twin Pillars). The faces of the women are all accompanied by men who appear to be their husbands. As was pointed out earlier in the introduction, these portraits of women on murals cannot be paintings of real people and they are rather stylized figures that were repeatedly drawn in a certain pattern. There are no records of women's portraits from the Unified Silla period. During the Goryeo period, however, a



(Plate 18)
Portrait of Ju Do-bok, Anonymous,
Joseon circa 1776; Ink and color on
silk; 113x57cm; Private Collection

(Plate 19)
Three Brothers of the Jo Family, end
of the 18th century; Ink and color
on silk; 42x66.5cm; National Folk
Museum of Korea



number of queens' portraits are said to have been done. In particular, the portrait of Princess Noguk, wife of King Gongmin, is said to have been painted by King Gongmin himself. Also, in 990, the sixth year of King Seongjong, a man named Son Sun-heung is said to have painted a portrait of his deceased mother and performed an ancestral ritual in front of it. He was commended by the king for the conduct but the quality was not so great.

During the early Joseon period, portraits of queens were painted together with those of the kings and housed in Seonwonjeon Shrine within a palace. However, there is no record of the production of portraits of queens after the Japanese invasions of 1592~1598. The *Annals of King Sukjong* mentions an incident relating to a portrait of the queen. In August 1964, King Sukjong ordered Kim Jin-gyu, a literati painter, to paint a portrait of his wife, Queen Min, but the ministers and the artist himself all strongly objected.²² The Confucian ethical code forbade the company of males and females over the age of seven and it was unthinkable for a queen to sit for a male painter, a mere subject of her husband, the king. King Sukjong eventually withdrew his instruction and no portraits of queens were produced thereafter.

In early Joseon, it was popular among the literati to commission portraits of husbands and wives together as was the case with portraits of the king and queen. This was a custom handed down from Goryeo. Among the extant examples of this genre are paintings of King Gongmin and his wife, Princess Noguk; Jo Ban and his wife; Bak Yeon, a music scholar in the court of

120

121

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie



(Plate 20)
Portrait of Wife of Ha Yeon, Anonymous;
Ink and color on silk; 146x93cm;
Private collection



(Plate 21)
Portrait of Choe Yeon-hong, Chae Yong-sin,
1914; Ink and color on silk; 120.5x61.7cm;
National Museum of Korea

King Sejong, and his wife; and of Ha Yeon and his wife (Plate 20). Records on the portrait of Jeong Do-jeon, a literati-bureaucrat of early Joseon, and his wife are found in Gwon Geun's *Yangchonjip* (*Anthology of Yangchon*) and Jeong Do-jeon's *Sambongjip* (*Anthology of Sambong*). However, as these portraits are all copies and the colors are seriously faded, we can hardly appreciate the originals. Only the historical point of view on costumes and outline of the painting style can be vaguely discerned through these portraits.

It is noteworthy that a few portraits of women by Chae Yong-sin who was very active from the end of the Joseon period through the Japanese occupation period extant today. The *Portrait of Un Nangja* (also known as *Portrait of Choe Yeon-hong*) (Plate 21) is a portrait to commemorate Choe Yeon-hong who acted very bravely during the revolt of Hong Gyeong-nae in 1811. The woman here is not a real model but an ideal image of a woman seen by the artist.

06 PORTRAITS OF BUDDHIST MONKS

The last group of portraits is portraits of Buddhist monks. One might think portraits of Buddhist monks preceded the development of any group discussed above. However, we cannot find any historical references to the production of portraits of Buddhist monks during the Three Kingdoms period. It is highly likely that monks who had been to China brought back portraits of revered masters, which would certainly have motivated Silla people to produce portraits of their own monks. Documents from the Goryeo period refer to portraits of monks highly revered during the Three Kingdoms period, supporting the assumption mentioned above.²³ Various documents indicate that portraits of Buddhist monks were actively produced in the Unified Silla. The inscription on the tombstone of Jingam Seonsa at Ssanggyesa Temple refers to *Yukjo Yeongdang* (portraits of six masters) while *Dongmunseon* (*Anthology of Korean Literature*), the portrait of Haejo Guksa; *Jodangjip*, the portrait of Beomil Guksa (810~889); the Tombstone of Sinhaeng Guksa at Dansoksa Temple, the portrait of Sinhaeng Seonsa; and the Tombstone of Jingong Daesa (855~937) at Biroam Temple, the portrait of Doui.

During the Goryeo period, portraits of Buddhist monks were a common artistic form thanks to the rising influence of Zen Buddhism. Zen emphasized the guidance of teachers rather than the worship of a specific Buddha or bodhisattvas as a way to attain enlightenment. Zen spread rapidly since the late Unified Silla period and portraits of revered masters were accordingly produced and enshrined in temples across the country.

Complimentary salutations found on these portraits are included in

various literary anthologies.²⁴ In *Ikjejip* (*Anthology of Ikje*) by Yi Je-hyeon (pennamed Ikje), a literati scholar at the end of Goryeo, is an article under the title, *Salutation to the Portrait of Yi Guksa of Songgwangsa Temple*. It paid tribute to the portrait painted by the order of the king. In *Gajeongjip*, an anthology by Yi Cheom, are writings in praise of a portrait of a revered priest of the Cheontaejong Sect. All these records indicate that the literati enjoyed writing salutations to portraits of revered Buddhist monks during the Goryeo period. This may be indicative of friendship between the literati and monks and the stylistic exchange between the portraits of Buddhist monks and the literati portrait paintings.

Among the Goryeo portraits of masters extant today, noticeable are those of Bojo Guksa (1158~1210) and Jingak Guksa, (1178~1254) both enshrined in the Hall of National Preceptors at Songgwangsa Temple (Plate 22). (In January 1995, sixteen portraits of national preceptors, including the one of Cheongjin Guksa housed in this temple, were stolen). The portrait of Daegak Guksa (1055~1101) is enshrined at Seonamsa Temple in Suncheon, Jeolla-do Province and portrait of Gakjin Guksa (1270~1355) is housed at Baeggyangsa Temple in Jeolla-do Province. However, both works have lost much of their original value because of excessive restoration work. Few portraits of Buddhist monks have been preserved in their original state. Repeated restorations and copying have been necessary because of smoke damage from the incense and candles burned in Buddhist shrines and because of constant exposure to

temple visitors. Nonetheless, the stylistic forms common at the time are still readily apparent in these portraits.

Portraits of Buddhist monks continued to be actively produced throughout the Joseon period despite the suppression of Buddhism by the Confucian rulers. There are several types depending on the subject's pose. The typical example of the first style is the *Portrait of Master Muhak* (1327~1405), enshrined at Tongdosa Temple (Plate 23). The subject is portrayed full-length and seated in a chair as was the customary form of the late Goryeo period. The subject is seen from the side in a three-quarter view, holding a staff in one hand and gripping the arm of his chair with the other. His feet are placed on a low stool. The Buddhist robe is depicted in strongly contrasting complimentary colors and the contours of the master's face are seen clearly probably because the subject did not wear a hat. The second type of monk portrait is exemplified by the paintings of the renowned Master Chaewol (Plate 24). The subject is also seen from a three-quarter view at full-length but he is seated on a cushion and holds a staff in his left hand. The right hand either holds Buddhist beads or rests on the subject's knee.

As pointed out before, few portraits of Buddhist monks have been preserved in their original state. Repeated restoration and copying have been necessary because of smoke damage from the incense and candles burned in Buddhist shrines and because of constant exposure to temple visitors. These portraits also suffer stylistically because they were generally



(Plate 22)
Guksadang in Songgwangsa Temple, Suncheon, Jeollanam-do

(Plate 23)
Portrait of Master Muhak, Uiyun, Joseon 1807;
Ink and color on silk; 146.7x76.7cm; Tongdosa Shrine Museum



122
123

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie

painted in mountain temples secluded from the outside world. Thus, the artists were not influenced by the developments in poses, background, brushwork, and coloring techniques of the time. More recently, an increasing number of portraits of Buddhist monks produced in the late Joseon in the style of folk painting have been discovered.

There are also group portraits of Buddhist monks. At Daeheungsa Temple and Jikjisa Temple are portraits that depict a number of Buddhist monks on single canvas (Plate 25). In China, literati scholars of the same society used to produce group portraits during the Ming and Qing periods but a group portrait of Buddhist monks were never produced elsewhere but in Korea. Group portraits of Buddhist monks are worth our attention because they are a genre unique to Korea.

CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTINGS

As discussed, Korean portrait paintings are divided into six categories depending on the social status of the subjects. Each category has important social functions and meanings: *Eojin* as a symbol of everlasting prosperity of the dynasty; *Gonsinsang* to enhance the power of the monarchy and to prevent any disobedience; *Girodosang* to commemorate the respectful; *Sadaebusang* for scholars to be enshrined in *seowon* or *yeongdang*; portraits of women produced until discontinued under the prevailing Confucian ethics; and portraits of monks to be enshrined in Buddhist temples.

This section summarizes the overall characteristics of Korean portraits. Most of Korean portraits (in a narrower sense the Joseon portraits because most of the portraits extant today were from Joseon) were produced to be enshrined and to be respected. The figures were drawn as symbolic objects to which tribute was to be given and almost all of the figures were high status male scholars who had worked for the dynasty. Portraits of women were rarely produced except



(Plate 24)
Portrait of Buddhist Priest Jaewol Daesa, late Joseon;
Ink and color on silk; 103x79cm;
National Museum of Korea

(Plate 25)
Group Portrait of Monks,
Anonymous, late Joseon;
Ink and color on silk;
112.3x227.4cm; Jikji Museum
of Buddhist Arts



in early Joseon because of the Confucianism doctrine that prohibits women from being seen and drawn by portraitists (because they were predominantly men). Not a single portrait of a child has ever been discovered. In China and Japan, most portraits are of grown-up men as was the case in Joseon. However, portraits of young women (Plate 26, 27) as well as old women (Plate 28) were produced in large numbers in both countries. In Japan, portraits of children who died young were often produced after their deaths to cherish them in memory (Plate 29) but no portraits of children were produced for enshrinement or ritual ceremonies in Korea.

The fact that most of Korean portraits were produced to pay respects for the deceased and not to appreciate their artistic beauty or to reflect the figures in the portraits is the most powerful element in shaping Korean portraiture.

Firstly, most Korean portraits were hung on the shrine wall (Plate 30). Only the eldest son of the main family was to make a respectful bow before the portrait in the shrine and the other descendants were to bow outside the shrine. This customary rule was the same in every type of shrine ritual. Only significant scholars could enter the shrine to bow and the others were confined to the courtyard in front of the shrine. For this reason, Korean portraits were large enough for everyone to see them afar off.

Secondly, in Korean portraits, only one person is shown. There are no other elements that could distract viewers' attention. It seems that Joseon portraitists knew how to make a portrait effective when it was to evoke the dignity of the portrayed figure. Most portraits in China are also only of one person. However, there were many cases in the Ming and Qing dynasties in which this rule was not followed. Family portraits that depicted a group of family members from different generations together (Plate 31) and group portraits of a teacher and students or friends (Plate 32) were common. Maids or servants were included in some portraits in addition to



(Plate 26)
Portrait of a Concubine of Emperor Yongzheng, early 18th century China; 184x98cm; Palace Museum, Beijing



(Plate 27)
A Woman Temple Prayer, 1582 Japan; Ink and color on silk; 75.6x31.9cm; Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Japan



(Plate 28)
Tokugawa Ichihime, 1610, Japan; Ink and color on silk; Temple, Kyoto, Japan



(Plate 29)
Portrait of Noble Ladies, Anonymous, late Qing China~early 20th century; Ink and color on silk; 156x98.2cm; Private Collection, Korea.



(Plate 30)
Portrait of Choe Chi-won, Housed in Museong Shrine



(Plate 31)
Four Generations of the Family, China; Ink and color on paper; 164x86.4cm; Nanjing Museum, China



(Plate 32)
Ten Elderly Gentlemen; Ink and color on paper; 37.2x135.4cm; Nanjing Museum, China

the main characters to emphasize the status of the main characters (Plate 33). In *Portrait of Emperor Go-Daigo* (reigned 1318~1333) of Japan, the emperor is portrayed with his subjects (Plate 34).

Joseon portraits depict only one scholar seated in a room alone without any background objects while many Chinese portraits depict a scholar relaxed and strolling with a servant or maid in a beautiful and scenic place (Plate 35). In Chinese portraits, various vessels or pieces of furniture such as a bookshelf and writing desk were added to show the social status, background, or tastes of the portrayed (Plate 36).

Korean portraits are not diverse in terms of style. They follow some patterns or formula without any dramatic pose or expression. In almost all portraits, the subject is seen from the side in a three-quarter view and very static pose (Plate 14). No dynamic pose is used in Korean portraiture. All Korean portraits depict the subject from the same angle and same gaze as seen in *Portrait of Yi Jung-no* (Plate 6), *Song Si-yeol* (Plate 14), and *Choe Ik-hyeon* (Plate 15). Portraits of Japan are different from those of Joseon as demonstrated in the *Portrait of Shinran* (1173~1262) (Plate 37), a monk who lived in Japan in the 13th century and the *Portrait of Ikkyu Sojun* (1304~1481) (Plate 38) in the collection of Tokyo National Museum. Japanese portraits express the spirit of the subject through the eyes. All Joseon literati portraits depict a scholar with his hands hidden in sleeves and folded in front of him, regardless of social status. In contrast, Chinese portraits from the 17th century and onwards increasingly depict subjects in many more stylish poses, such as one hand on the knee and the other hand holding a belt. Portraits in such stylish poses remained very popular until the end of Qing. With an active relationship with China during the reign of King Sukjong and onwards, Korean envoys to China had their portraits painted by Chinese painters and brought them back home to Korea, like the *Portrait of Yi Gwang-jeong* (1552~1627) (Plate 39). Through these paintings brought from China, the typical style of



(Plate 36)
Seven Elderly Gentlemen, Lin Fuchang, Qing China; Ink and color on paper; 40.6x146cm; Nanjing Museum, China



(Plate 33)
Portrait of a Ming Scholar, Anonymous, repainted, Ming and Qing China; Ink and color on silk; 150.5x102cm; Private Collection, Korea.



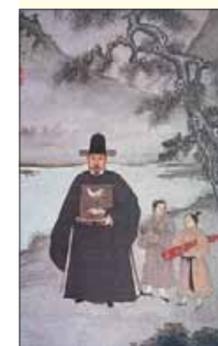
(Plate 37)
Shinran, 14th century, Japan; Ink and color on silk; 120x81.2cm; Nara National Museum, Japan



(Plate 34)
Emperor Go-Daigo, 14th century, Japan; Ink and color on silk; 131.8x77.3cm; Daitokuji Temple, Japan



(Plate 38)
Ikkyu Sozun, latter half of the 15th century, Japan; Ink and color on paper; 43.8x26.6cm; Tokyo National Museum, Japan



(Plate 35)
Jiang Shun Fu, end of the 15th~early 16th centuries, Qing China; Ink and color on paper; 161x67cm; Nanjing Museum, China



(Plate 39)
Portrait of Yi Gwang-jeong, Anonymous, 1602, China; Ink and color on silk, hanging scroll

Chinese portraits was introduced to Korea characterized by a chair with a tiger skin underneath, frontal view, pose with one hand holding a belt and the other on the knee, and leather shoes on the shoe pedestal placed in “八” form. Among these features, a chair with a tiger skin underneath and leather shoes placed in “八” form were commonly used by Korean portraitists until late Joseon. The Chinese-style frontal view was used for a while but the traditional quarter view of Korea soon



(Plate 40)
Self-portrait of Gang Se-hwang, 1782;
Ink and color on silk, hanging scroll;
88.7x 51cm; Private collection



(Plate 43)
Self-portrait, Gitagawa Utamaro,
Portraits of Scholar Painters, Art of
Japan, Sibundo



(Plate 41)
Portrait of Gang Se-hwang, Yi Myeong-
gi, 1783; Ink and color on silk, hanging
scroll; 88.7x51cm; Private collection



(Plate 44)
Portrait of Yi In-yeop, Anonymous,
late Joseon; Ink and color on silk;
150.7x86.5cm; Gyeonggi
Provincial Museum



(Plate 42)
Self-portrait, Okada Beisanzin, Portraits of Scholar Painters, Art of Japan, Sibundo

returned. The Chinese pose of hands was used by only a few painters and soon disappeared.²⁵ These changes in portrait styles are valuable evidence that the preferences of Joseon people were different from the Chinese of the Ming and the Qing. It seems that Joseon literati did not like to look exaggerated or showy in their portraits.

Such inclination is apparent in album portraiture for aesthetic appreciation. Even in album paintings (a genre in which relatively freer expression was possible), the subject is shown to be austere and dignified. For example, Gang Se-hwang (Plate 40) left a number of self-portraits and all these self-portraits are the same as the *Portrait of Gang Se-hwang* painted by a professional court painter (Plate 41) in terms of facial expression, angle, and posture as well as the tense look. The tense look is always there unchanged in all portraits of Gang Se-hwang. This characteristic is different from those of Japan and China. In his self-portrait, Okada Beisanzin (1744~1820) (Plate 42) captured an image of the relaxed scholar after becoming very drunk and comically expressed the state while Kitagawa Utamaro (1753~1806), a famous ukiyoe artist, expressed his humor by depicting himself in one of his own artworks (Plate 43). Ren Xiong (1823~1857), a Chinese literati painter, showed his boastful attitude toward the world in his self-portrait. All these examples of Japanese and Chinese self-portraits are in strong contrast with Korean's.

Thirdly, the fact that portraits in Joseon were to be used exclusively for ancestral rituals clearly dictated the approaches of the portrait painters in producing portraits. As portraits were meant to be used for ceremonial purpose and models for their descendants, painters should express not only the physical appearance but also the spirit of the subject. Of course, all portrait paintings of the East and the West aim to express the spirit of the subject. Even so, what the spirit implies or the meaning of the spirit differs from one society to another. For Korean portrait painters, the meaning of the spirit never did refer to the individual characteristics or inclination of their subjects.

126

127

咲

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

咲

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

咲

Cho Sunmie

The portraits were designed to evoke in the viewer both positive memories and deep reverence for the subject and painters did their best to present their subjects in the best possible light. Joseon portraits depicted the subjects as the respectable figures that the viewers would want to remember and to worship rather than as they were at a certain moment or certain place. As we have a clear, foggy, rainy, and dark stormy day but the ideal day is a clear day, Joseon portrait painters thought that they should depict their subjects in the most dignified and decent appearance. To attain the ideal aspect, painters studied the social background as well as personality and moral character of their subjects. Is he a scholar or a military official? Is he a scholar living a secluded life? What is his social class? It was only natural, therefore, that the portraits of kings were meant to symbolize the supreme authority of the dynasty and painters did their best to portray the majesty of their ruler in audience with his loyal subjects. To serve the purpose, it is repeatedly stated in *Seungjeongwon Ilgi (Dairy of the Royal Secretariat)* that the frontal view was considered the most desirable. Meritorious subjects were most often portrayed as the embodiment of nobility and dignity and models for their descendants. As such, they were depicted in full-length, seated in a chair, and dressed in official robes. Paintings of literati emphasized the subjects' intellectual character and they were seated, dressed in official robes or Confucian robes.

What should be noted is that the so-called 'desirable nature' and 'idealized traits' are depicted all the same way in all types of portraits produced in Joseon regardless of whether they were portraits of kings, meritorious subjects, literati, or the elderly. As pointed out earlier, there were no differences in expressing the desirable nature of the subjects between literati bureaucrats or military officials, or between the king and subjects. Back in the Joseon period, the viewers wanted to see a tranquil and self-restrained gentleman in a portrait because such traits were regarded as the most virtuous of all. Therefore, both the portraits of Yi Jung-no who rendered distinguished military service (Plate 6) and Yi In-yeop (1656~1710) who was a typical literati-bureaucrat (Plate 44) were the same man in portraits meditating in tense and emotionless postures. In Joseon portraiture, there is no such dynamism and vigor as depicted in the *Portrait of Ashikaga Dakauzi* (1305~1398) (Plate 45).



(Plate 45)
Portrait of Ashikaga Dakauzi, mid-14th century
Japan; Ink and color on silk; Kyoto, Japan

Fourthly, the descriptive style of Joseon portraiture is another important element making it unique. Throughout the Joseon period, portrait paintings evolved with the passage of time. In the early Joseon period, contours were drawn with thin double lines with the eyes, ears, mouth, and nose being defined with lines. Faces and folds of robes were not colored in early painting. In the mid Joseon period, the so-called five distinguished areas of the face were colored in very light red to denote highs and lows on the face (Plate 46) and folds of a robe

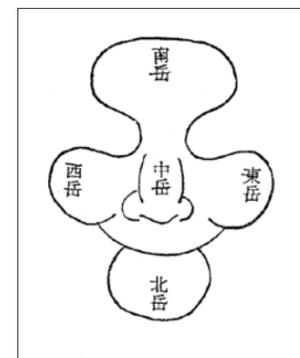
were drawn with lines and minimal coloring around the folds, as can be seen from the details of the *Portrait of Yi Jung-no* (Plate 47). A painting technique to use repeated layers of brush strokes to give a dark feeling to hollow cheeks as well as to apply fewer brush strokes to give feelings of lightness to swollen areas of the face was used (Plate 48) in late Joseon. Painters studied physiognomy to better understand the general features of the human body. After studying the general structure of both the bones under the skin and big wrinkles on the skin (Plate 49), individual bone structures and wrinkles on the face were depicted to express the substantiality of the subject.

Despite the changes discussed above, however, Joseon painters were devoted to depicting their subjects as realistically as possible. Verisimilitude was regarded as the key element in Korean portrait. Portraitists always worked with the conviction that even the most minor details such as pockmarks, freckles, and spots on the face should be depicted as they are. As already pointed out, the gaze of eyes is of the same angle as the face on Joseon portrait. If the face is in frontal view the eyes also look straight ahead. The eyelids carefully drawn in thin lines, the pupils painstakingly depicted to the finest detail, and the wrinkles carefully tinted in light red are the typical characteristics of Joseon portraits. The most representative example of Joseon's realistic expression is the beards (Plate 50). Joseon painters regarded the beard as part of the face and each strand of the beard was rendered in fine lines of black and white applied alternately on skin-toned face. Such exquisite brush

strokes for the beard cannot be found in portraits of any other countries in the world attesting to the fact that Joseon professional painters faithfully followed the principle of portrait painting: 'It does not make a real portrait if only one strand of hair is incorrectly drawn.'

Joseon portrait painters did not attempt to show their subjects to be more than what they truly were. They strictly avoided any distortion or change for that reason. Nor did they pursue exaggeration by emphasizing noticeable features. Joseon painters had only one thing on their minds: how to depict their subjects as realistically as possible. Joseon portraits therefore look rigid without any variation in expression or any awkward element of personal touch. They are, for this reason, all similar in quality without any noticeable differences in depicting skills. The beauty of Korean portrait lies in this extreme realism and the expression exuding from it.

This exhibition, therefore, should focus on revealing how our ancestors perceived portraits. When they appreciate and cherish a portrait, they regard the portrayed as the epiphany of the real person, not as a work of art. This perception of Joseon people on portraits is best understood in how they treated the portraits of the king. One record states that, in times of war or crisis, even the lowest ranking official strived to keep *eojin* safe from a disaster, and the king and the ministers of the dynasty used to cry desperately before the enshrined *eojin* of the deceased kings. When royal portraits were destroyed by fire, all the governing officials including the king himself, the princes, princesses, and the concubines



(Plate 46)
Physiognomy example for painters

(Plate 47)
Portrait of Yi Jung-no (in detail)

(Plate 48)
Portrait of Choe Ik-hyeon (in detail),
copied, Chaesansa Shrine



128

129

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
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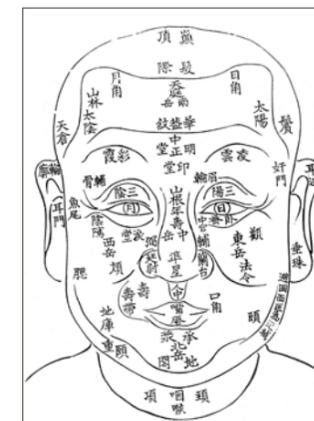
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A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF
KOREAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

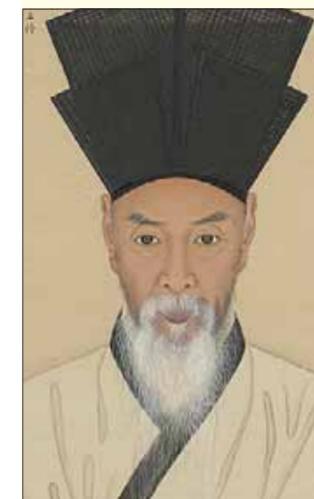
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Cho Sunmie

were required to dress in white (the funerary color in Joseon) and lamented for three days as if the royal family members depicted had really passed away. When disasters like a fire, the falling of trees, and heavy rain or snow occurred around the place where *eojin* were housed, Joseon held rituals to comfort the portrayed.²⁶ The rules and the customs in relation to *eojin* clearly demonstrate that how royal portraits were perceived by Joseon. Because of this perception of Joseon on portraits, whether they were members of the royal family or commoners, a greater number of traditional portraits have survived until today enabling us to analyze or appreciate the characteristics and the beauty of Korean portrait paintings. ≡



(Plate 49)
Reference material for portrait painting



(Plate 50)
Portrait of Yi Chae (in detail), 1807;
Ink and color on paper; 99.2x58cm;
National Museum of Korea

NOTES

1

Song Si-yeol. "Donghyeonhwasangbal." [Daeno yugo](#). Vol. 25; Yu ju-mok. [Jeonchaluyujip](#). Vol. 19; "Gamyo." [Gyedangjeonseo: Seungjeongwon Ilgi](#). Vol. 328. 1688.

2

'Learn about the spirit through shape,' quotation from writings of Gu Kaizhi, who lived under the Eastern Jin.

3

It is noticeable that Korea uniquely used "Eojin" to indicate portrait of a king when there were numerous terms to mean the same in China and Japan.

4

"Goryeo Ritual and Music." Treatise on Ritual and Music section of [History of the Later Tang Dynasty](#). Vol. 21, section 11, Ritual and Music 11. Given the name of Goryeo used in Tang China, Korean ritual and music is believed to have been introduced from Goguryeo Kingdom. The content of Goguryeo Musical Instruments section of *Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms)* vol. 21 deals with the same subject addressed in the Goryeo Ritual and Music section, *History of Later Tang Dynasty*.

5

Cho Sunmie. "Development of Royal Portraits in the Joseon Dynasty: Focusing on Records in Old Documents." [Gogo misul](#). No. 145 (1980). Art History Association of Korea.

6

In resistance against Japan's demand for King Gojong's abdication after the secret mission the king sent envoys to The Hague to appeal the injustice of Japan done to Korea and a movement to pin up a portrait of King Gojong started and spread nationwide, which resulted in increasing demand for portraits of King Gojong. Chae Yong-sin painted the first ever portrait of King Gojong, when the king was 49. Chae kept this original portrait painting and later produced a number of portraits of King Gojong based on the original. Accordingly, all the portraits of King Gojong by Chae Yong-sin depict the king aged 49 or older.

7

Inscription provides information on the name of the king portrayed and the year of the production of the portrait painting. It is thought that portraits didn't bear inscriptions in the early Joseon period. Inscriptions appeared in latter years. At initial stage, inscriptions were made on the back of scrolls. During the reign of King Sukjong, outstanding calligraphers among high-ranking officials were selected to write inscriptions. Afterwards, affixing inscriptions was indispensable for the production of a royal portrait. In some cases, the king or the prince wrote inscriptions.

8

[Jeungbo munheon bigo](#) (expanded version of the late eighteenth century *Reference Compilation of Documents on Korea*). Vol. 217. Chungheonbu.

9

Gongsin status was conferred on as few as three meritorious subjects in 1722, the 2nd year of King Gyeongjong, and as many as 116 subjects in 1604, 37th year of King Seonjo.

10

See [Gimun](#) by Gwol Ram, [Ojepangi](#) by Jang Yu, and [Gigongakgi](#) by Yi Heol-ryeong.

11

To resign from a government post is to return the post to the king.

12

See [Goryeosa](#) (History of Goryeo) vol. 99 and [Yeoljeon](#). Vol. 12. p. 23.

13

Gwon Geun. [Yangchonjip](#) (Anthology of Yangchon). Vol. 19, sec. 12. Hugiyeonghoeseo.

14

Officials wear robes and black silk hats but without official emblem patches on their chests when conducting ordinary public duties.

130

131

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
KOREAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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15

When an elderly subject submitted a resignation to the king because of old age, the king did not accept the resignation. Instead the king bestowed a chair and a walking stick on the subject and asked him to stay, which was the greatest honor for the elderly subject.

16

[Dongmunseon](#) (Anthology of Korean Literature) vol. 33. Saeojejinchanpyo, Choe Chi-won.

17

Go Yu-seop. "Traces of Goryeo Paintings." [Hankuk misul munhwasa chongnon](#). Tongmunsa. 1974. p. 240-1.

18

Yi Gyu-bo. [Dongguk isang gukiip](#) (Collected Works of Minister Yi of Goryeo) Vol. 11; ---. [Dongmunseon](#) (Anthology of Korean Literature). Vol. 51; Yi Sung-in. "Hyangjeung jiamsa yeoru jininjakcheon." [Dongmunseon](#). Vol. 6; Yi In-no. "Baengnak cheonjinjeongtaewi." [Dongmunseon](#). Vol. 51; Yi Hyeon-jae. "Baengnakcheonjin." Introduction of "Seodongpajin."

19

The origin of yeongdang dates back to the one for Choe Chi-won during the Unified Silla period. During the Goryeo period, aristocrats not to mention kings, meritorious subjects, and Buddhist monks had portraits of great people in their residences to pay respects to them.

20

Jeong Man-jo. [Hankuksaron](#). Vol. 2. National Institute of Korean History, 1975.

21

Saengsa is a shrine, which was built to worship presently living figures with outstanding achievements.

22

[The Annals of King Sukjong](#). Vol. 29. August 1695, the 21st year of King Sukjong.

23

Yi Gyu-bo. "Namheang ilgi." [Donggu isanggukjip](#) (Collected Works of Minister Lee of Korea). Vol. 23; Uicheon. [Daegakguksa munjip](#) (An Addendum to the Collected Works of Preceptor of State of Daegak). Vol. 17; Bak Chun-ryeong. "Godaesan Biraebangjang Bodeokseongsajin." [Dongmunseon](#) (Anthology of Korean Literature). Vol. 19; [Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungram](#) (Newly Verified Survey of the Geography of Korea). Vol. 28.

24

For example, *Daegak guksa munjip (An Addendum to the Collected Works of Preceptor of State of Daegak)* mentions portraits of Buddhist monks including Jingwon seungdong jinchan, Anyangsa yeneung seungdongyeong, and Damjangsa Yehyesoguksayeong.

25

Cho Sunmie. "Introduction of Chinese Portrait Paintings into Korea in the Late Joseon Period and Development of Korean-style Portrait Painting: Focusing on Chinese Portraits Brought by Envoys." [Misulsachongnon](#). Vol. 14. Hangukmisulyeonguso. First half of 2002. pp. 124~54.

26

[The Annals of King Injo](#). Vol. 24. March 1631, the 9th year of King Injo; [The Annals of King Jungjong](#). Vol. 88, October 1538, the 33rd year of King Jungjong; [The Annals of King Myeongjong](#). Vol. 13, November 1486, the 17th year of King Myeongjong; [The Annals of King Sukjong](#). Vol. 11, June 1681.