Painting

Buddhist painting

The story of the 'discovery' of Koryo Buddhist painting during the last twenty years is an exciting one. Many astoundingly beautiful Buddhist paintings, stored mainly in Japanese temples since at least the late sixteenth century, were for a long time attributed to China. The beginning of Western knowledge of the process of public re-attribution started with an exhibition in Japan in 1978 at the Yamato Bunkakan. Since then more than one hundred scrolls and murals have been located in Japan, Korea and the West.[43]

Koryo Buddhist paintings can be divided into three formats: those on illuminated manuscripts (see section above); wall-paintings; and hanging scrolls. There are very few extant wall-paintings, although these were the most numerous originally. Six frescoes in the Chosadang shrine at Pusok temple in Yongju are the best known. These depict deva kings and bodhisattvas and are dated to 1377. Fourteenth-century paintings of water-flowers and wild grass also survive on the walls of Sudok temple in Yesan.[44] Hanging scrolls usually depict either Amitabha (the Buddha of the Western Paradise), the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha or, occasionally, the ten judge-kings of hell. The predominance of Amitabha paintings was due to the growing popularity of Pure Land Buddhism. The paintings are often called 'Descending Amitabha' (Naeyong-do), as it is believed that when a devotee is close to death the Buddha Amitabha will descend with some bodhisattvas to take the person to the Pure Land. Amitabha paintings therefore often include two bodhisattvas (usually Amitabha and Mahasthamaprapta) and are called 'Amitabha triads'.[45] Examples can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum in New York, the Hoam Museum in Korea and the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 45). Paintings of Avalokitesvara (Kwanum posal) usually depict the bodhisattva sitting in a meditative posture, looking over water by moonlight or holding a willow branch and flanked by lotus flowers and a *kundika* or water-sprinkler. Beautiful examples of Kwanum posal paintings can be seen in the Musée Guimet in Paris and the Yamato Bunkakan Museum in Nara. Some examples, such as the ones in the Sumitomo Collection and the Asakusa-dera, both in Japan, are signed by individual artists. The former is by So Ku-bang and is dated to 1323 and the latter is by Hyeho.[46] Paintings of the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha (Chijang posal) are particularly characteristic of the Koryo, when he was very popular. He was generally believed to be able to help those in torment in hell and was closely associated with the ten kings of hell, who weigh all good and bad deeds committed by the dead during their lifetimes and judge them accordingly. The popularity of Ksitigarbha in the Koryo may have been prompted in part by nationalist pride and have arisen from the belief that a Korean prince of the Silla dynasty, who went to Jiuhuashan in China in the eighth century to meditate and whose body remained mysteriously undecayed after death, was an incarnation of Ksitigarbha.[47] The four most important bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism are generally thought to be Avalokitesvara (embodying the virtue of great compassion), Ksitigarbha (showing mercy in delivering sentient beings from hell), Manjusri (displaying knowledge and wisdom) and Samantabhadra (renowned for his teachings and practice of the Buddha). During the Koryo there was a marked preference for paintings of the first two. Fine examples of Ksitigarbha paintings can be seen in the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst in Berlin and in the Engaku-ji at Kamakura in Japan. It is curious that, by comparison with China and Japan, there are very few paintings of paradise or purgatory during the Koryo.[48]

In general, Koryo Buddhist paintings present the main figure as an overpoweringly large form, with secondary figures, such as attendants and devotees, crowded in the bottom half of the painting below the main subject's knees. A prominent halo usually surrounds the main figure's head. This separation of the main figure from the others has been seen as a reflection of Koryo society, with its unbridgable gulf between aristocrats and commoners.[49] The paintings were, of course, commissioned by aristocrats or the royal family. An important feature of the paintings is the elaborate and rich jewellery and silks depicted in them. The deities are bedecked in brooches, anklets, bracelets, arm-bands and earrings and the silk costumes with which they are draped are incredibly graceful. The painting of transparent silk is particularly fine and delicate, giving a feeling of lightness. The mineral colours used are predominantly orange-red, olive-green and white, with a fine gold outline. Occasionally bright blue is used for parts of the architecture or the hair of the divinities. The generous use of gold paste gave Koryo painting a characteristic luminous quality (in general Chinese paintings used a more intense red and a brighter green). The painting of the figures in Koryo paintings is characterized by distinctively arc-shaped eyebrows and relatively smaller and sharply drawn facial features. The composition of the figures is often very close together so that the haloes overlap.[50]

45. Amitabha triad painting in ink, colours and gold paint on silk. The breathtaking beauty of these Buddhist paintings, which are now mostly preserved in Japanese temples and museums, has only recently been recognized in the West. Koryo period, 13th century AD. 123 × 55.8 cm.

Koryo Buddhist paintings are a unique source of information about costumes and silks of the time. Furthermore, the motifs on the silk brocade costumes of many of the deities in the paintings can be compared with those on ceramics and lacquer of the same period to reveal interesting parallels. For example, medallions composed of chrysanthemum florets are common decorative motifs on silk and can also be seen on celadons, such as the British Museum's *kundika* (see fig. 49). Abstract scrolling motifs suggesting leaves, which are the basis of the spiral medallions seen on silk costumes, are reflected in the leaf scrolls on many celadons. Other motifs common to silk and celadons are the busy cloud motif and flying, long-tailed phoenixes.[51]

Secular painting

The lack of surviving examples means that secular painting from the Koryo dynasty is, unfortunately, very little known. The *Koryo sa* relates that a government bureau of painting was established (the Tohwawon) and Chinese records note that Koreans often went to China to buy paintings. A description of Korean fan-paintings of the eleventh century is given by Guo Ruoxu:

> These fans are made of blue-black paper; the paintings on them show persons of quality of the country of their origin, diversified by ladies and saddle horses. There may be streams with banks indicated in gold, or lotus blossoms, trees and waterfowl of various sorts, all most ingeniously worked out with decorative touches. Sometimes they have effects of mist and moonlight, done with silver paint; these can be extremely attractive.[52]

This description highlights several characteristics of Koryo painting: the use of gold and silver paint, indigo-dyed paper and the motifs of trees and waterfowl, which occur very often in Koryo decorative arts such as celadons, lacquer and inlaid bronze. Koryo's greatest professional painter, Yi Nyong, active in the early twelfth century, painted landscapes of actual places in Korea, demonstrating an important development in the history of Korean painting that was to reach a highpoint in the eighteenth century in the 'real

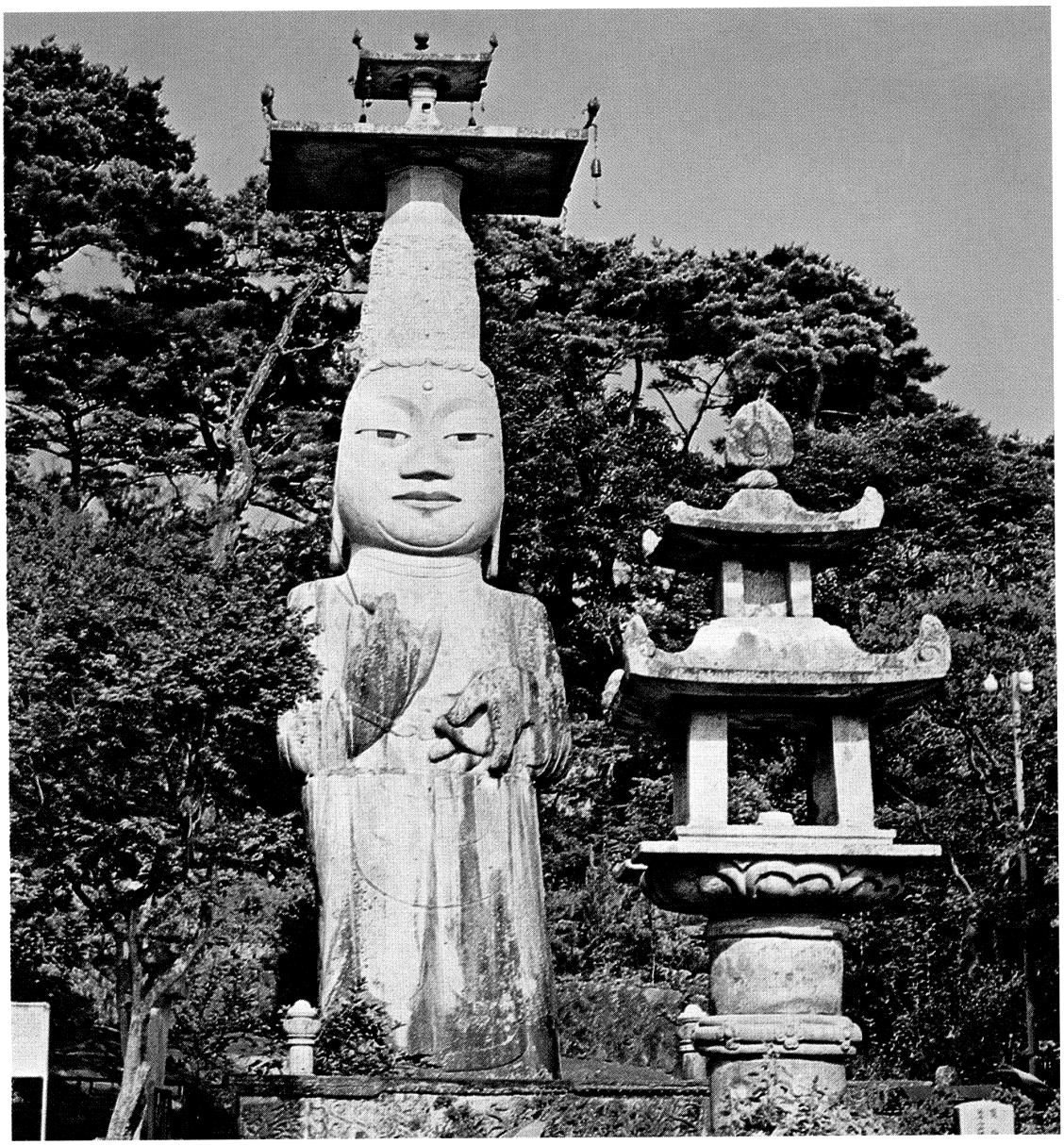
landscape' paintings of Chong Son in the following Choson dynasty. Another important trend was for paintings to be produced by scholars and aristocrats as a hobby, not always by professionals. Members of the nobility and ordained monks enjoyed painting for pleasure.[53] Some idea of Koryo landscape style can sometimes be gleaned from the backgrounds of Buddhist paintings. Strangely shaped rocks and pointed mountain peaks give a tantalizing glimpse of an individual and highly developed landscape painting technique.[54]

Sculpture

Buddhist sculpture in the early Koryo period carried on the styles and traditions of the Unified Silla period, with the production of large iron seated Buddha figures, such as the 'Kwangju Buddha', 2.88 m (9.44 ft) high, now in the National Museum of Korea.[55] There are not a large number of extant early Koryo sculptures, but enough remain to show that sculpture was produced in a variety of materials: iron; marble (such as a plump-faced bodhisattva wearing a high, conical headdress from Hansong temple at Kangnung in Kangwon province); clay (for example, a lacquered and gilt-clay seated Buddha of the tenth century at Pusok temple, surrounded by a wooden, flame-like mandorla); and stone (such as an unusual eleventh-century Buddha seated with leg pendant on a lotus flower, cut out of the rock at Popchu temple in North Chungchong province). General characteristics of early Koryo Buddhist sculpture are a flat face with elongated eyes raised at both ends and a rather unfriendly expression. These can be seen in the Popchu-sa image.[56] An interesting development in early Koryo stone sculpture was the appearance of gigantic statues of Buddhas, usually Miruk (Maitreya), the Buddha of the future. Sometimes these images were cut out of natural boulders *in situ*, such as the eleventh-century standing Buddhas, 17.4 m (57 ft) high, at Paju in Kyonggi province. The largest of the gigantic Koryo sculptures is the Miruk, 18.1 m (59.3 ft) high, at Kwanchok temple at Nonsan in South Chungchong province. These very large, big-headed figures seem to be meant to overpower the worshipper and are characterized by minimal detailing of form and a greater abstraction. Their crudity of form is, however, compensated for by their impressive size. It has been suggested that they were not entirely Buddhist, but also had shamanistic associations.[57] The tall hats worn by these figures are a new and unusual feature (fig. 46). There was also quite a variety of local styles of Buddhist sculpture in the early Koryo[58] and the extent of the influence of local shamanistic religious practices on Buddhist sculpture is evident.

Later Koryo sculpture is marked by a reduction in size. Large-scale stone and iron Buddhas disappeared, to be replaced by small, gilt-bronze figures, often showing influence from the Lamaistic Buddhism of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China. This was a consequence of the large numbers of Yuan artists who settled in Songdo in the thirteenth century following Koryo's forced capitulation to the Mongols. The gilt-bronze Medicine Buddha at Changgok temple in South Chungchong province is typical of late Koryo sculptures, with balanced proportions, flowing garments and a benevolent expression. It can be dated to 1346 on the basis of a votive inscription found inside.[59]

Non-Buddhist sculpture is provided in the figures of military and civil officials at the approach to Koryo tombs, their employment and arrangement in pairs deriving from Chinese burial practice.[60] The wooden masks made for the traditional mask dance in Hahoe village in North Kyongsang province are further intriguing examples of non-Buddhist



46. Gigantic stone Miruk (Maitreya Buddha) and lantern at Kwanchok temple in west-central Korea. Somewhat crudely modelled, the figure may originally have had shamanistic associations. Early Koryo period, 10th–11th century AD. Ht: 18.1 m.

sculptural style in the Koryo. The deep-set eyes and long, aquiline nose reflect foreign influence, possibly from Central Asia. There may also be influence from the Liao, where gold and silver masks were placed on figures in high-level burials.[61] The link between the Hahoe masks and Japanese No-masks has yet to be fully explored (see fig. 87).[62]

Metalware

Koryo inherited the metal craftsmanship of Silla and combined this with influence from Song and Yuan China to produce some fine metalwork. Much metalware was made for use in Buddhist ritual but there were also many examples of utilitarian secular objects of high quality. Evidence of the importance of metalwork at this time is given in the *Koryo sa*, which states that the golden tower of Hungwang temple was made in 1067 with 427 *kun* (about 256.2 kg or 563.6 lb) of silver and 144 *kun* (about 86.4 kg or 190 lb) of gold. A thirteen-storey tower and several vases are further recorded as having been made in 1223