



65. Left: Bamboo painting by Yi Chong (1541–1624). Bamboo painting was associated with integrity and highly regarded by Confucian scholars. Ink on silk, late 16th to early 17th century AD.
122.8 × 52.3 cm.



66. Right: Porcelain vase with underglaze iron-brown and cobalt blue decoration of grapevines, which were a favourite subject of Choson painters. Choson period, 17th–18th century AD.
Ht: 39.7 cm.

(1769–1847).⁴⁵ As in China, bamboo was associated with austerity and integrity. It was also painted together with prunus or pine, as in China.

Grapevines, like bamboo, offer the painter scope to use calligraphic brushstrokes in depicting tendrils and fronds. Grape-painting also appeared in Korea as early as the Koryo and can be seen on celadons painted with grapevines. During the Choson grapes were a popular motif for decorating inlaid lacquer boxes and became popular amongst painters from the sixteenth century. Two famous grape painters of this time were Sin Saimdang, mother of the philosopher Yi Yul-gok, and Hwang Chip-jung (born 1533). Both painted in the boneless technique, depicting unformed grapes and connecting the grapes using short, horizontal lines. Yi Kye-ho (1574–after 1645), Hong Su-ju (1642–1704) and Yi In-mun (1745–1821) were later specialists in grape-painting, although the latter was more famous for his landscapes. There was an unusually close relationship between painting and porcelain decoration in the Choson (fig. 66), brought about by the practice of commissioning

professional court painters to decorate porcelain wares destined for use by the court and officials. The result of this close cooperation can be seen in some very beautiful examples of porcelain decorated with grapes which are painted with elegance and subtlety.⁴⁶

Landscape painting

The Choson period was one of great development in landscape painting in Korea. Landscape was the most popular subject amongst painters, despite its being ranked second in importance in the official test given by the Court to recruit academy painters. Of the subjects tested, the first was bamboo, the third was figure painting (people, animals and birds) and the fourth was flower painting.⁴⁷ This order reflected the traditional Chinese order of priority. It was under the influence of various Chinese schools of painting that landscape painting developed in the Choson. Korean artists first followed the Guo Xi monumental landscape tradition of the Northern Song. Later, however, elements of the Southern Song academy tradition and the Zhe school of professional artists of the early Ming also played a part. It is probably true to say that a 'Korean' school of landscape painting did not really emerge until the eighteenth century, when Chinese influences had been absorbed and transformed.⁴⁸

The most important and influential landscape painter in the early Choson was the academy painter, An Kyon, who was active during King Sejong's reign in the fifteenth century under the patronage of Prince An-pyong (1418–53). The prince built up a large collection of Chinese paintings dating from the Tang to the Yuan, including seventeen by Guo Xi, who had a great influence on An Kyon. Unfortunately only one extant authenticated painting by An Kyon has survived, although others are attributed to him. In this work, called *A Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, An paints the dream of his patron, the prince. The style of this painting follows the Guo Xi tradition but the effect of monumentality is achieved by a combination and contrast of high distance and level distance and by a careful use of criss-crossing diagonal movements. These features were to become characteristic of later Korean landscape painting, as did the looseness and sketchiness of brushwork shown by An Kyon.⁴⁹

In the sixteenth century, Korean painters show influence from the Ming Zhe school, modified in a typically Korean way. There was a strong tendency to reduce volume and space to flat planes with simply curved outlines and to sprinkle them with small form-elements.⁵⁰ The Korean treatment of space has been attributed to the influence of the Chinese Southern Song academy style, as exemplified by Ma Yuan. The early-sixteenth-century Korean academy painter Yi Sang-jwa is an example of a Korean painter who adhered faithfully to the one-corner composition of Ma Yuan. An example of an early Korean painter influenced by the Zhe school is the scholar-painter and contemporary of An Kyon, Kang Hui-an (1419–64). He was the deputy leader of the embassy to Ming China in 1455 and therefore must have seen many Zhe school paintings in Beijing. His famous painting, called *A Scholar Contemplating the Water* (fig. 67), is evidence of his debt to the



67. *A Scholar Contemplating the Water* by Kang Hui-an (1419–64), one of the three masters of the early Choson along with An Kyon and Choe Kyong. This painting of a scholar is closely related to the Ming Chinese Zhe school. Ink on paper, Choson period, 15th century AD. 23.4 × 15.7 cm.

The school in its composition, its way of depicting cliffs and rocks and the importance of the human figure. Its close resemblance to an illustration in the Chinese *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* of 1679 is interesting as it presumably shows that an earlier Chinese painting must have been a model for both.⁵¹

Some painters of the middle Choson period adopted the literati manner deriving from the Ming Chinese Wu school of scholar-amateur painters, which had itself derived from the Four Masters of the Yuan. Although this school was associated with scholar-amateurs

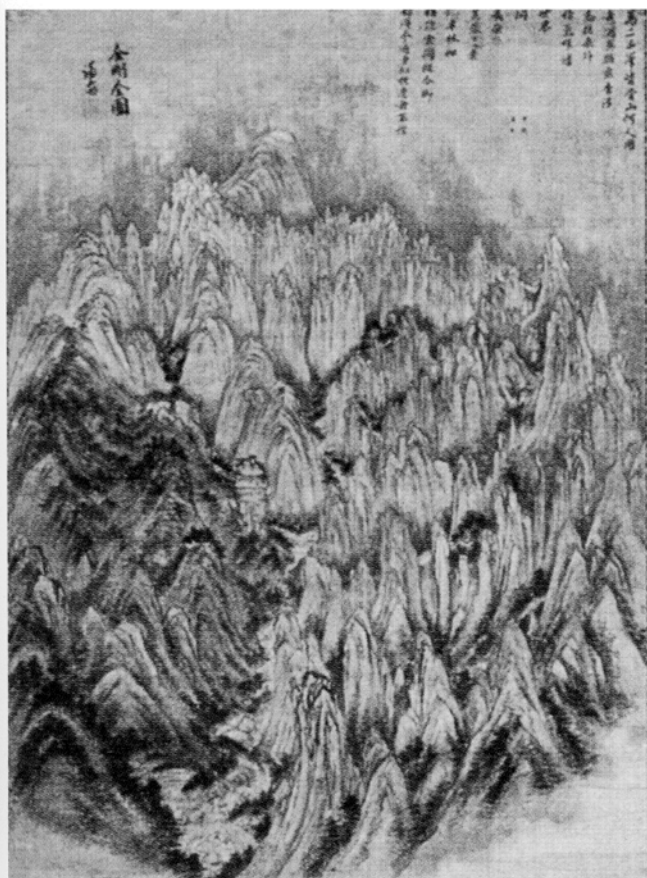
in China, this was not the case in Korea. It was the style of painting that was adopted, not the spiritual dimension that the painter wanted to express through the painting. In Korea this stylistic tradition is usually called Namjonghwa or Southern School. A professional or court painter could also be a Southern School painter in Korea, if he painted in that style.⁵² The Wu or Southern school did not become really popular in Korea until the eighteenth century, when the Four Masters of the Yuan became very influential. Chong Son (1676–1759), one of Korea's most famous painters, was responsible for the dissemination of the Wu-Southern School style, as well as for the development of realistic landscape painting of actual places in Korea, known as *chin'gyong sansu*. With this innovation, Korean landscape painting really came of age. The combination of Southern School and 'real place' landscape can be seen in many of Chong's paintings (fig. 68).

Other eighteenth-century artists who were influenced by the Chinese Wu school are Sim Sa-jong (1707–66), Kang Se-hwang and Yi In-sang (1710–60). Kang Se-hwang also painted landscapes in imitation of Shen Zhou via the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* but he tried also to explore a new style. This can be seen in his album entitled *A Trip to Songdo*, where he sought to introduce the shading techniques of Western painting. He also used rows of dots, in the style of Mi Fu. An almost

abstract design is formed, a graphic system based on planes and dots.⁵³

Kim Hong-do's landscape paintings also show a radical development out of reliance on Chinese models. He chooses places from his own country, instead of idealized landscapes, and shows a strong penchant for geometric elements and for organizing the picture in a network of powerful, angular lines. The abstraction and stylization is highly exaggerated. Kim and Chong Son are both protagonists of what could be called the 'Korean graphic style' (see fig. 68).⁵⁴

In the nineteenth century, the great poet, painter and calligrapher Kim Chong-hui (1786–1857; pen-name Chusa) and his followers carried on the Southern School style. The latest trends from Qing China were also absorbed. Kim Chong-hui introduced epigraphy and historiography of the Chinese classics from China as he was in close contact with Qing scholars and calligraphers. Many of his followers imitated his painting style, which combined a simple layout, an understated depiction of motifs using dry brushwork and a tendency to emphasize the spiritual. His disciple Ho Ryon and the versatile and eccentric



68. *Complete View of the Diamond Mountains* by Chong Son (1676–1759). Chong Son painted real places around Seoul and in the famous Diamond Mountains, now in North Korea. Ink and colours on paper, Choson period, 1734. 130.7 × 94.1 cm.

painter Chang Sung-op (1843–97) led two lines of development in late Choson landscape painting.⁵⁵

Genre painting

A growing interest in and concern for the lives of the common people during the second half of the eighteenth century was reflected in philosophy, literature and painting. In philosophy, it was expressed in the Sirhak or Practical Learning school of thought, while in literature, poetry by lower-grade officials of the chung'in and sang'in classes began to be published – a previously unheard-of phenomenon. There was a flourishing of novel writing in the Korean han'gul script. These novels usually concerned the corruption of yangban and the unfairness of the ban on marriage between the yangban and the lower classes or with the offspring of yangban and secondary wives. The living standards of some common people rose, to the extent that it was becoming more difficult to distinguish a man's class from the way he dressed. Nouveaux riches merchants were less bound by the yangban's strict rules of conduct. This behaviour was depicted in the slightly erotic genre paintings of Sin Yun-bok (1758–?). He painted scenes of gentlemen and courtesans (*kisaeng*) at drinking parties or illicit rendezvous, as well as portraits of beautiful women, who must have been courtesans if they contravened Confucian morality and sat for him. Sin's predilection for these risqué subjects led to his dismissal from the Bureau of Painting.⁵⁶

Kim Hong-do, on the other hand, concentrated on depicting the life of the common people. His most famous genre paintings are the twenty-five album leaves in the National Museum of Korea, representing everyday activities such as washing clothes, eating, tiling a house roof, and people such as wrestlers, entertainers, schoolboys, pedlars and farmers. The original paintings have been heavily retouched. Several copies of the album are in existence, including one in the British Museum, probably completed in the nineteenth century (fig. 69). Kim's paintings are characterized by the lack of any background and by the masterly arrangement of the figures in space, often in a circle. Another distinguishing feature of his work is the portrayal of round faces with large noses and horizontal, almond-shaped eyes.⁵⁷ Kim also painted gatherings of gentlemen (*ajip-to*) (fig. 70) and pictorial biographies (*pyongsaeng-do*) in which he included elements of landscape and buildings. He was one of the most versatile late Choson painters, mastering landscape, genre, religious, bird, flower and portrait painting. However, like a true artist, he had little regard for money and died in destitution.⁵⁸

Other genre painters of this period were Yun Tu-so (1668–1715) and his son Yun Tok-hui and grandson Yun Yong, Cho Yong-sok (1686–1761), Kim Tu-ryang (1696–1763) and Kim Tuk-sin (1754–1822).⁵⁹ They depicted the changing nature of Choson society in the eighteenth century.



69. Above: *Ssirum* (Korean wrestling) after the original late-18th-century painting by Kim Hong-do. Kim's genre paintings show ordinary life in a humorous light. Here a sweet-seller, spectators and a pair of wrestlers are painted with simple strokes. Choson period, 19th century AD. 31 × 26 cm.

70. Right: Detail from *Gathering of Elders* by Kim Hong-do, dated 1804. White porcelain tableware can be seen on each individual tray-table and in the centre. Ink and light colours on silk.

Sculpture

During the first half of the Choson, Buddhist sculpture showed some continuity from the Koryo, although displaying a certain naïvety. Few sculptures of great importance are known from the Choson, although many images continued to be made, mostly in bronze or wood. Common stylistic features are a squat and heavy shape, with thickly carved costumes. Votive wooden panels carved with many images in rows were particularly popular.⁶⁰

Non-Buddhist sculptures consisted primarily of stone tomb figures of animals and officials which lined the entrances to important tombs, after the pattern of Chinese imperial tombs. The sculptural style, is, however, much less ornate and the figures are generally shorter than in the Chinese model. The statuary at the 'emperor-style' tomb of the last ruler, Sunjong, was carved by Chinese stonemasons and is consequently much more elaborate than that of either the earlier kings' tombs or his predecessor, Kojong.⁶¹ Some non-royal tombs also featured stone tomb statuary, its elaborateness varying in accordance with the status and means of the family.

Lacquer

During the Choson period, lacquer was used predominantly on boxes and furniture for domestic use by the aristocracy, whereas in the Koryo it had been popular for Buddhist objects. Chests, low tables, clothes boxes, cosmetic cases, document boxes and sewing utensils were all decorated with lacquer and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, tortoise-shell and sometimes sharkskin. A considerable quantity of lacquer from the late Choson period remains but early Choson lacquer is rare.

The dating of early Choson lacquer is problematic and there is, at present, no clear chronology. A predominant feature of early Choson inlay is the use of scrolling vines or flowers, usually peonies or lotuses. In general early Choson inlaid lacquer does not use metal wire for the vine or flower scroll, but thin strips of shell. Several different types of flowers moreover grow from the same scroll. Very early fifteenth-century pieces frequently feature ogival panels and backgrounds densely filled, often in the form of circular dots. Leaves and petals are represented on the inlaid shells by a cracked pattern. By the seventeenth century the flowers and leaves are simpler and the flower or vine scroll becomes more regular and geometric, with the flowers being open rather than closed. Metal wire is again used and there is only one type of flower on each scroll.⁶² On the basis of these features, the British Museum's box inlaid with peony scrolls can be dated to the

71. Lacquered wooden box with inlaid decoration of peony scrolls in mother-of-pearl. Choson period, 16th–17th century AD. Length: 39 cm.



sixteenth–seventeenth century (fig. 71). Lacquer pieces decorated with birds have been dated both to the very early Choson and to the sixteenth–seventeenth century.⁶³

Three pieces of Choson inlaid lacquer in the Tokyo National Museum could be used as a basis for dating sixteenth-century Choson lacquer because they were commissioned by Ouichi Yoshitaka (1507–51). However, they are not typical because the shapes of two of the pieces, a writing desk and writing box, are Japanese, and the decoration is in a Chinese-influenced style. The third item in this set, a large box, is much more typically Korean.⁶⁴

In the eighteenth century, inlaid flower scrolls became thicker and the flowers larger. Nineteenth-century lacquer was increasingly decorated with folk symbols of good luck and long life. Decorated objects inlaid with mother-of-pearl came to be associated with women and were used increasingly as cosmetic boxes, comb cases and sewing equipment. Some very high-quality boxes from this period feature lively decoration of large dragons using tortoise-shell and sharkskin to great dramatic effect combined with mother-of-pearl.

Painted ox-horn was also used in the Choson period to decorate boxes, sewing equipment, combs, pillow-ends and other small items. Some Korean scholars believe it is possible that this technique dates back to the Silla period in Korea, if a painted ox-horn ruler in the Shoso-in in Japan, closed in 756, is of Korean manufacture. However, this is a subject of some debate. The technique involves painting the thin, transparent slices of ox-horn on the reverse in bright colours mixed with glue and then sticking them on to the surface of wooden objects. Auspicious symbols were the main decorative motifs and the objects made were usually for the use of aristocratic women.⁶⁵

Ceramics

During the Choson, ceramics were used for a variety of functions, including epitaph tablets, tomb furnishings, tablewares, ritual vessels and reliquaries. With the decline of Buddhism as a state religious cult, production of temple and other sacred vessels gave way to the manufacture of ceramics used for Confucian ritual. Chinese porcelain was imported and used by the kings and by aristocrats. This had a considerable effect on the development of people's taste and the Choson dynasty saw a progression from the widespread use of punchong wares at the beginning of the dynasty to the development of a native Korean porcelain in emulation of Chinese porcelain but with uniquely Korean shapes and designs.

Punchong wares

It is difficult to distinguish very late Koryo inlaid celadons of the late fourteenth century from early Choson inlaid punchong of the early fifteenth century (fig. 72). The late celadons became greyish-green in colour and the body became coarser. Both these features were also characteristic of punchong wares (*punchong sagi*), the name punchong being translated as 'powder green' or 'greyish-green'. Punchong was made throughout the first half of the Choson period, until the late sixteenth century. After the potters were abducted by the Japanese invaders at the end of the century, punchong died out and was replaced by porcelain. However, the demise of punchong had already started before the Japanese invasions and its total disappearance cannot be attributed solely to the capture of the potters. Its popularity decreased and it was gradually supplanted by white porcelain.