

# THE ARTS OF KOREA

*A Resource for Educators*

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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## Foreword

Korea's rich artistic heritage has been formed by a remarkable blend of native tradition, foreign influence, sophisticated technical skill, and exuberant human spirit. Yet, of all the cultural and artistic traditions of East Asia, those of Korea have, until recently, received the least attention in the West. With the establishment of its permanent Arts of Korea gallery in June 1998, The Metropolitan Museum of Art undertook to present the best examples of Korean art and bring to the Western audience an awareness and understanding of the important role that Korea has played in the development of East Asian culture and art.

*The Arts of Korea: A Resource for Educators* is designed to assist educators in presenting Korea's distinctive artistic legacy to students of all ages, both in the classroom and in visits to the Museum's Arts of Korea gallery. The core of this publication is the discussion of works that illustrate the diversity and beauty of Korean art. Drawn from the Museum's permanent collection, they include elegant celadon wares and white porcelain vessels, exquisite Buddhist paintings, landscapes, inlaid lacquerwares, and traditional musical instruments. These works—together with a full complement of orientation materials—will enable a rewarding exploration of Korean art and culture.

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Philippe de Montebello, *Director*

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## Introduction to Korean Art

Korea—a mountainous peninsula in northeast Asia tied to the continental mainland in the north, facing China to the west across the Yellow Sea, and extending southward toward the Japanese archipelago—has always occupied a pivotal position in East Asian regional affairs. Korea's relations with its larger neighbors, China and Japan, and its role in cultural and technical exchange within East Asia, are a crucial part of the country's history. Yet, it is also important to understand and appreciate the separate and distinct character of Korea's cultural and artistic heritage.

The beginnings of Korea's artistic heritage may be traced back nearly 9,000 years, to the Neolithic period and the earliest known examples of pottery produced on the peninsula. Over the centuries, Korean potters distinguished themselves in the manufacture of celadon, *punch'ŏng* ware, white porcelain, and underglaze-painted porcelain. Korean artisans have produced objects in a variety of other materials—including metal, lacquer, silk, and wood—that, as in the case of ceramics, were initially meant for practical or ceremonial use but came to be appreciated as works of art. In ancient times, articles such as gold jewelry and bronze vessels, weapons, and horse trappings were placed in the tombs of royalty and the aristocracy to serve the deceased in the afterlife.

The introduction of Buddhism in the fourth century brought strikingly different kinds of images and artistic styles to Korea. The impact of this religion on Korean art can be seen in the temple complexes, stone and bronze statues, paintings, and illustrated manuscripts produced on the peninsula from the fifth century onward. Buddhism reached the peak of its influence under the Unified Silla (668–935) and Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasties, as evidenced by the exceptionally elegant and refined works of art dating from those periods.

In the late fourteenth century, with the adoption of Neo-Confucianism by the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) as the new state ideology and dominant social philosophy, the artistic tastes of the elite shifted dramatically in favor of simpler and more austere objects for everyday use. These included plain white porcelain wares and desk utensils made of

natural materials. During the same period, Korean artisans also crafted personal ornaments and domestic articles, especially for women, the nobility, and commoners that are less restrained and more exuberant in style. The weakening influence of Confucian teachings on the arts and the growing impact of foreign (including Western) influences, led in the mid-eighteenth century to a variety of new shapes, decorative techniques, and designs in the production of ceramic ware. This period also saw a new trend in Korean painting with the development of true-view landscapes, the practitioners of which advocated the depiction of actual Korean scenery as an alternative to the classical themes of Chinese painting.

Westerners first became aware of Korean art in the late nineteenth century, largely by collecting Korean ceramics. During the first decades of the twentieth century, when Korea was occupied by Japan (1910–45), Japanese archaeologists and connoisseurs helped to shape Western understanding and appreciation of Korean art. The founder of the early-twentieth-century *mingei* (folk art) movement in Japan, Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961), was particularly influential in inspiring interest at home and abroad in Chosŏn ceramics and decorative arts. World War II marked a turning point in Korea's international visibility, and subsequently, more Western collectors began acquiring Korean paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and metalware. However, compared with the attention given Chinese and Japanese art, which survives in much larger quantities and has been more widely studied, knowledge and appreciation of Korean art in the West is still in its formative stage.



## How to Use These Materials

This resource is designed to introduce the Arts of Korea gallery in The Metropolitan Museum of Art to teachers and their students, and to provide them with a general understanding of Korean culture. A wide range of materials is included to give readily accessible information to teachers of many disciplines instructing students of different ages. It is hoped that this publication will encourage educators to use the Arts of Korea gallery as an important part of their teaching activities.

### **Quick Guide to the Arts of Korea Gallery** *pp. 13–14*

For those who require quick information to prepare for classroom work, this concise summary provides basic information about the Arts of Korea gallery as well as a few questioning strategies.

### **Introduction to Korean Art and**

### **Key Themes in Korean Culture and Art** *pp. 7–8, 15–18*

These two sections provide a brief summary of the development of Korean art history and some of the most important factors that have influenced Korean culture and art. The **Key Themes** section presents possible topics that might form the basis of a gallery tour or class on Korean art.

### **Orientation Material** *pp. 19–50*

This section consists of background information for easy reference. The **Timeline of Korean History and Art** (pp. 19–20) provides a convenient list of important historical events and a chronological arrangement of most of the works of art illustrated in this publication. The **Dynastic Chronology of Korea, China, and Japan** (p. 21) and the three **Maps** (pp. 22–24) are useful references.

Because English-language resources about Korea are still limited in number, this publication contains a substantial amount of background material. The **Overview of Korean History** (pp. 25–34) and **Korean Religions and Systems of Thought** (pp. 35–50) outline the context in which Korean works of art were created and used.

### **The Arts of Korea** *pp. 51–76*

The **Overview of Korean Art History** is a synopsis of the development of Korea's artistic tradition. Works of art loaned to the Metropolitan Museum for the inaugural exhibition from several significant collections in Korea are illustrated in this section to supplement the Museum's own Korean art holdings. The section **Artists and Materials** gives general technical information about important types of art and identifies some of the major developments in each area. The **Korean Traditional Music** section is a brief discussion of key aspects of the subject and describes several examples of traditional musical instruments in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, some of which are illustrated in this publication.

### **Image Descriptions** *pp. 77–117*

The images in this publication (also provided in digital format on the CD-ROM as well as in slide format, and two of which are reproduced as posters) illustrate the highlights of the Metropolitan Museum's Korean art collection. The objects were chosen to represent the development of Korean art as fully as possible and to meet the needs of a wide range of educators. Each **Image Description** includes information about the individual work of art (or site) and some points to consider in classroom discussion. It is highly recommended that you show your students the slides and discuss the fundamental aspects of Korean culture before visiting the museum in order to encourage a more careful and critical response to the works of art on view.

### **Classroom Applications** *pp. 119–39*

This resource contains a variety of aids for classroom work, including **Lesson Plans and Activities** and suggested **Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Works of Art** in the Metropolitan Museum's collection. Both sections include activities and questioning strategies to focus students' attention on the works of art and help them understand the cultures that they represent.

### **Glossary** *pp. 141–46*

The **Glossary** provides brief definitions for important terms in Korean art history, along with their pronunciation and references to where they are mentioned in this publication.

**Appendixes** *pp. 147–52*

Korean Language and Literature

Symbols in Korean Art and Culture

**Resources** *pp. 153–60*

Korean Cultural Resources in the New York Metropolitan Area

Selected American Museums with Collections of Korean Art

Film and Video Resources

Selected Web Sites

Selected Bibliography for Educators

Selected Bibliography for Students

The CD-ROM included in this publication provides all the text and images in the Resource in an electronic form that can be downloaded and printed. The brochure “The Wild Ones in Korean Art” is suitable for younger students, from grades four to eight. (The other sections of the resource are meant for the use of educators and are not intended for most secondary school students without adaptation.)

**Note to the Reader**

Throughout the text, unless otherwise indicated, non-English words given in parenthesis are Korean. The abbreviations for other languages are Skt. for Sanskrit, Chn. for Chinese, and Jpn. for Japanese. Unless stated otherwise, the works of art illustrated are part of the Metropolitan Museum’s permanent collection. Footnotes provide supplementary information and sources for additional research. Publications listed in the Bibliography for Educators are referenced in an abbreviated form in the footnotes.



## Quick Guide to the Arts of Korea Gallery

Korea, a mountainous peninsula in northeast Asia, possesses an artistic tradition reaching back to the Neolithic period about 9,000 years ago. Through the centuries, Korean artists and craftsmen produced ceramics, lacquerware, metalware, sculpture, paintings, and textiles, for everyday and ceremonial uses by the imperial court and the wealthy, or to serve religious purposes at all levels of society. The objects they created were influenced by the aesthetic preferences of the time (compare, for example, the elegance and refinement of Koryŏ period art with the preference for spontaneity that characterizes works from the succeeding Chosŏn period), as well as the materials and technology then available.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a diverse collection of Korean art, a selection of which is on permanent display in the Arts of Korea gallery in the north wing. Opened in 1998, the gallery embodies traditional Korean aesthetics in its pristine white walls, diffused natural light, and wood floor patterned on that of a traditional temple design. In keeping with the East Asian tradition of displaying works of art for limited periods of time, and for purposes of conservation, most of the works on view are rotated twice a year. The Musical Instruments galleries display a diverse selection of Korean instruments, including drums, flutes, fiddles, and zithers.

When you bring students to the Arts of Korea gallery, encourage them to take a few moments on their own to examine the works of art and to formulate their own responses. Some fundamental themes of Korean art and culture are described below, along with related illustrative images provided in this resource. These topics can be used to organize tours of the gallery and classroom discussion.

### **Cultural Exchange in East Asia**

Korea's geographical location at the crossroads of East Asia—between its two larger neighbors, China and Japan—has had an enormous impact on its history and culture (see **Map 1**, p. 22). Throughout the millennia, many important cultural developments, including the Chinese writing system, Confucianism, Buddhism, and some ceramic production techniques, were imported from China into Korea, where

they were quickly adapted to native Korean needs and preferences. This process continued eastward with the transmission of these practices and concepts from Korea to Japan.

Images 10–14, 25, 26

Green-glazed ceramic wares (known as celadon in Western literature) and landscape paintings in ink are two examples of artistic traditions that originated in China and were transported to Korea, where they underwent innovative changes (for Korean examples, see **images 10–14, 25, 26** ).

The Metropolitan Museum has the most comprehensive collection of Asian art in the world. It is therefore possible for you to compare related works of art, such as celadon wares, ink landscape paintings, or grave furnishings, made in Korea, China, and Japan during a single visit to the museum. Comparisons with Chinese and Japanese works of art with similar themes and materials can provide insights into what makes Korean art distinctive. For more suggestions, see the section on **Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Works of Art** (pp. 129–39).

### Materials

Images 9, 11, 13, 14, 20

Images 15, 20

Images 8, 14, 17, 31, 32

Images 2, 10, 35

Korean artists and craftsmen worked in many media, including clay, bronze, gold, lacquer, and ink on silk or paper. Artisans frequently borrowed design techniques and decorative motifs from other media. For example, both lacquermakers and celadon potters used the technique of inlay to create designs (see **images 9, 11, 13, 14, 20** ). The same decorative motifs, such as scrolling vines (see **images 15** [the base of the altar], **20**), stylized clouds (see **images 8, 14, 17, 31, 32** ), and birds (see **images 2, 10, 35** ), can be found on objects made of different materials.

### Nature

Images 2, 7A, 10,

14, 26, 31, 32, 35

Images 25, 26

Images 6, 21, 23, 24, 28

Images from the natural world—mountains, plants, animals, birds, and waterfowl—are found throughout Korean art. Younger students might enjoy looking at different animals and learning about the stories and symbolic meanings associated with them (see **images 2, 7A, 10, 14, 26, 31, 32, 35** , and the brochure “The Wild Ones in Korean Art”). Landscape paintings not only suggest the appearance and mood of a certain place, but are also generally imbued with philosophical ideas about nature (see **images 25, 26** ). Works of art that convey a sense of spontaneity are said to express the freedom and spirit of nature (see **images 6, 21, 23, 24, 28** ).

## Key Themes in Korean Culture and Art

Discussed below are some of the major factors that have exerted a profound impact on Korean culture, including the production of art. These factors may be used to construct generalized themes for visits to the Metropolitan Museum's Arts of Korea gallery or for classroom discussion. Specific suggestions for the illustration of key themes with images provided in this resource are given in the **Quick Guide to the Arts of Korea Gallery** (pp. 13–14).

### **Geography**

The Korean peninsula lies at the easternmost end of the Eurasian land mass (see **Map 1**, p. 22). During the last Ice Age, which occurred approximately 15,000 to 18,000 years ago, neither the Korean peninsula nor the central islands of Japan existed as separate topographic entities. At that time, the area of the present Yellow Sea formed a wide, unbroken plain stretching between what are now the western shores of Korea and the eastern shores of China's Shandong peninsula. Similarly, to the south, the present Japanese islands of Honshū, Kyūshū, and Shikoku comprised a continuous landmass with the then undifferentiated Korean peninsula. With the melting of the great glaciers, the sea level rose and the map of northeast Asia as we know it was formed. Korea emerged as a mountainous peninsula tied to Manchuria in the north, facing China to the west across the narrow Yellow Sea, and extending southward toward the Japanese archipelago. More than 70 percent of the Korean peninsula's total area, which is approximately the same as that of England and Scotland combined, consists of mountains. The rocky backbone of Korea is fashioned from a long chain of mountains that dominates the eastern half of the peninsula from its northern borders on the Amnok and Tuman rivers almost to its southern extremity. Two notable lateral mountain ranges project westward from this great granite wall. One forms a protective barrier around the fertile Naktong River valley in the center of Korea's southern coast, while the other stretches most of the way across the peninsula's width to north of the Han River valley. Korea's climate is temperate, with

cold, dry winters and hot summers subject to monsoon rains. The land is fertile, and natural resources are abundant.

### **East Asian Cultural Interaction**

The peninsula's geographical location has exercised a critical role in shaping the history of the Korean people (see **Map 1**, p. 22). Archaeological finds reveal that Manchuria and lands to the north played a primal role in the formation of Korean culture, while China began to exert an enormous influence after the start of the first millennium B.C., if not earlier. Archaeology also indicates the steady growth of interaction between the inhabitants of Korea and the Japanese archipelago, which is a mere 130 miles away at the closest point. Because of its geographical position, Korea frequently functioned as a conduit between China and Japan for ideas and beliefs, material culture and technologies. Korea's participation in the interaction of East Asian cultures has often been mistakenly viewed as being entirely passive, with little recognition of the innovative role that Koreans have played throughout their history in the native adaptation and further transmission of such influences as the Chinese written language, Buddhism, ceramic production techniques, and ink-monochrome landscape paintings.

### **Nature**

In Korea, as in other East Asian cultures, the natural world and man's relation to it have inspired the creation of works of art as well as the development of philosophies and religions. Images from nature—animals and birds, plants and trees, mountains and rivers—are pervasive artistic themes, whether expressed in the form of a painting, a ceramic vessel, or a scholar-official's garden retreat.

This emphasis on nature also inspired the creation of artworks that convey an impression of accident and spontaneity, objects that capture the liveliness and spirit found in the natural world. A clay pot with an asymmetrical profile and an uneven glaze was appreciated for its sense of vitality and its unique beauty (see **image 24**). Similarly, in the depiction of a grapevine blown by the wind, the painter sought to go beyond mere representation to convey through line and form a certain mood and sense of rhythmic movement (see **image 28**). This understanding of what is natural differs from the art-historical concept of naturalism in Western art, in which images are often created to

**Image 24**

**Image 28**



reproduce as closely as possible the actual appearance of the subject in nature. The Korean word for landscape, *sansu*, exemplifies the holistic attitude toward the natural world. *Sansu* combines the words for mountain and water to represent landscapes and, by extension, encompass all the physical properties of the natural world. Drawing upon the ancient idea that everything in the universe is made up of interrelated opposites (*ūm-yang*; Chn. *yin-yang*), the characteristics of mountains and water represent nature's diversity—mountains are unmoving, hard, and solid, while water is fluid, soft, cool, and dark.

### **Religious Traditions**

During the course of the country's history, Koreans have adopted and practiced different religions and systems of thought: shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and, in recent centuries, Christianity (see **Korean Religions and Systems of Thought**, pp. 35–50).

Although the influence of each of these belief systems has waxed and waned through the centuries, all have played an ongoing role in Korean culture. As is true throughout East Asia, the different systems are neither exclusive nor strictly separated—many tenets and practices overlap, and people traditionally have followed more than one system. Most Buddhist temple complexes, for example, include a small shrine dedicated to Sansin, the native god of the mountains associated with shamanism.

### **Homogeneity and Continuity**

The Korean peninsula's regional partition by the major mountain ranges led to the development of distinctive cultures in the southeast and the southwest, along the central southern coast, and in the north. Cultural diversity among these regions engendered feelings of regional uniqueness, and at times even animosity, that still color intrapeninsular relations today. Yet concurrent with this divisive awareness of regional differences has been a countervailing consciousness of peninsular solidarity. The Korean peninsula has long been viewed by both its occupants and its neighboring societies as a discrete geographical unit inhabited by a population sharing an essentially common cultural identity.

Korean history has been marked by unusually long-lived dynasties, a factor that has enhanced the perception of unity. Having controlled

the southeastern part of the peninsula for at least 700 years, the Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) succeeded by the year 676 in unifying the peninsula under a single government, the Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), which ruled for nearly three centuries. The subsequent Koryŏ (918–1392) and Chosŏn (1392–1910) dynasties each ruled for about 500 years. This dynastic longevity imparted stability and long periods of peace, as well as conservative tendencies among the ruling elite.

### Foreign Intrusions

Chinese, Mongol, Manchu, and Japanese armies have attacked and looted Korea at various times in the country's history. In 1910, Japan formally annexed the peninsula, initiating a period of colonial rule that lasted until 1945. That so few historical records, artworks, or architectural monuments survive from before the late sixteenth century is largely a result of the destruction wrought by these incursions (see *Overview of Korean History*, pp. 25–34).

### Dynamic Art Style

Korean art is often described as vibrant, energetic, spontaneous, and sometimes whimsical. Certainly, such characteristics apply to many of the most distinctive works of art produced in Korea, especially the sculpted pottery vessels of the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.; see *image 2*) and the *punch'ŏng* wares (see *image 21*), late underglaze painted porcelains (see *image 23*), genre paintings, and folk art of the Chosŏn period. Yet, the breadth of Korean culture and the versatile skills of Korean artists and artisans are equally manifest in the Buddhist paintings and illustrated sutras, metalwork, lacquerware, exquisite gold ornaments, and celadon wares produced for the court, aristocracy, and religious establishments during the Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla, and Koryŏ periods, all of which reflect the refinement and sophistication that are characteristic of the highest-quality East Asian art (see, for example, *images 4, 9, 10, 12, 15–18*).

**Images 2, 21, 23**

**Images 4, 9, 10, 12, 15–18**

# A Timeline of Korean History and Art

(See also the Museum's online Timeline of Art History at [www.metmuseum.org/toah/splash.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/splash.htm))

NEOLITHIC PERIOD CA. 7000 – CA. 10TH CENTURY B.C.		BRONZE AGE CA. 10TH CENTURY – 3RD CENTURY B.C.		IRON AGE FROM CA. 300 B.C.		THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD 57 B.C. – 668 A.D.		UNIFIED SILLA DYNASTY 668 – 935	
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SILLA KINGDOM	57 B.C. – 668 A.D.
KOGURYŎ KINGDOM	37 B.C. – 668 A.D.
PAEKCHE KINGDOM	18 B.C. – 660 A.D.
KAYA FEDERATION	42 – 562 A.D.

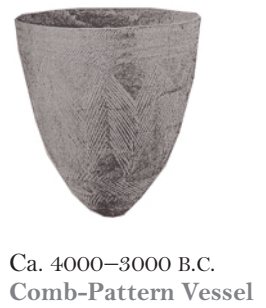
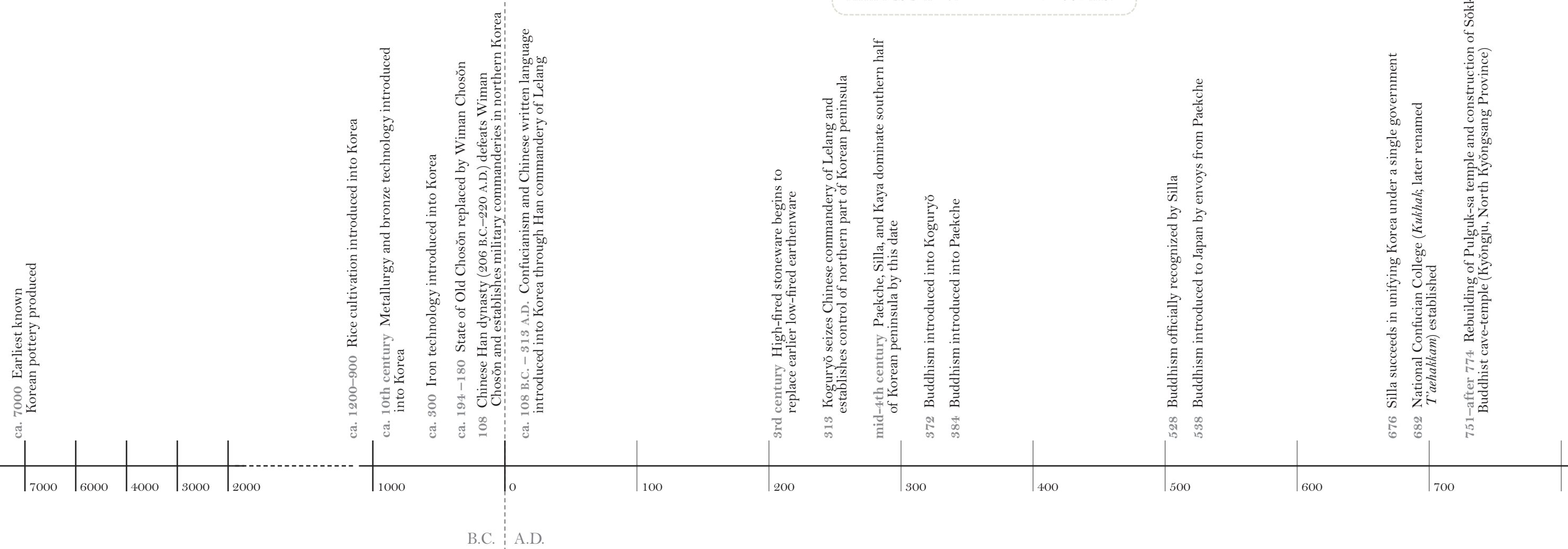


Fig. 2

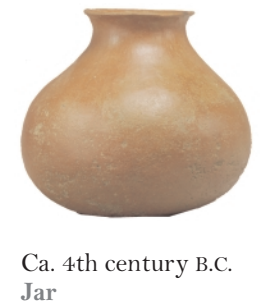


Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5

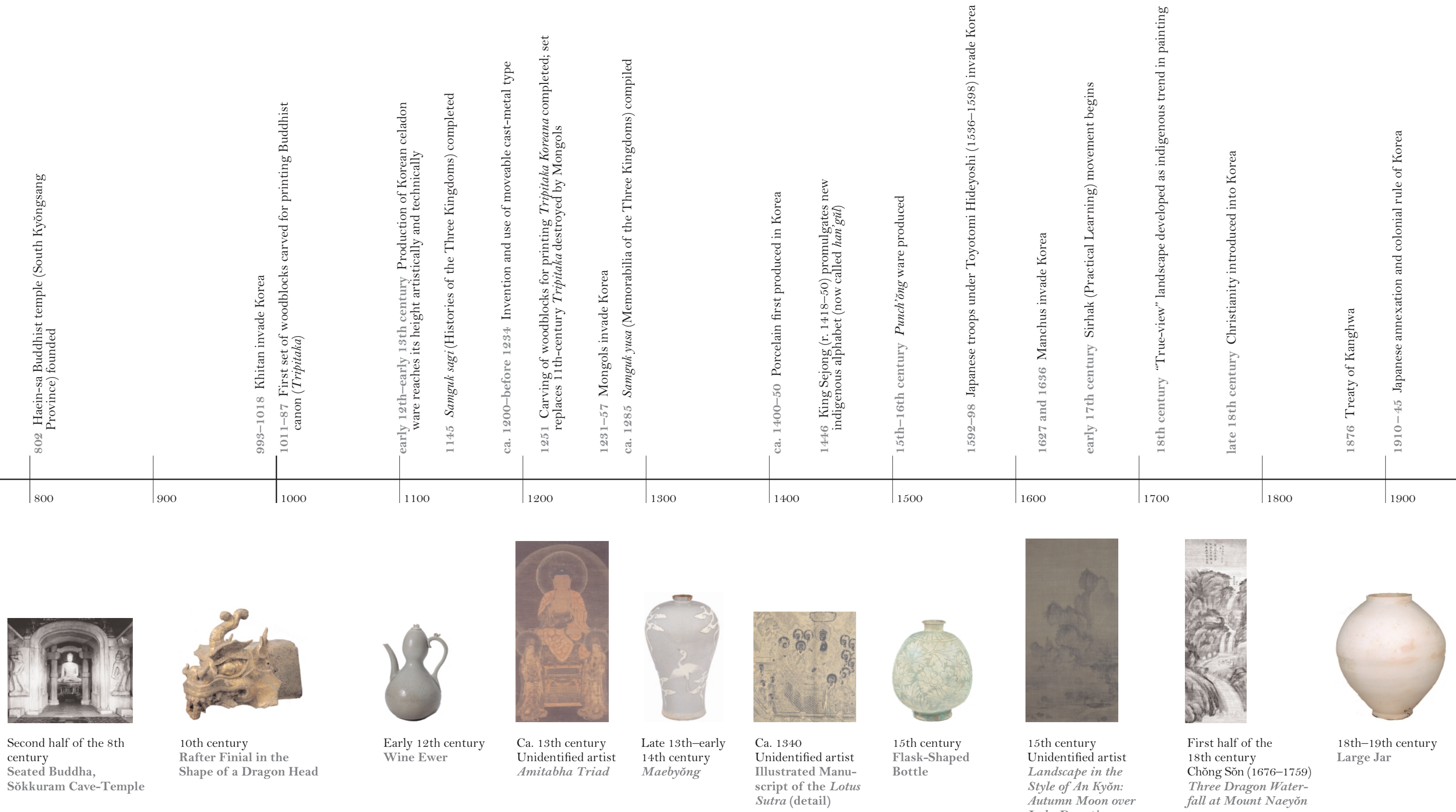


Fig. 7

Image 7A

Image 10

Image 15

Image 14

Image 17

Image 21

Image 25B

Fig. 8

Image 24

# Dynastic Chronology of Korea, China, and Japan

KOREA		CHINA	JAPAN
	B.C.		
	<b>8000</b>		Jōmon period, ca. 10,500 B.C.–ca. 300 B.C.
Neolithic period, ca. 7000–ca. 10th century B.C.		Shang dynasty, ca. 1600–ca. 1050 B.C.	
	<b>2000</b>		
Bronze Age, ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.		Zhou dynasty, ca. 1046–256 B.C.	
	<b>1000</b>		
	<b>500</b>		Yayoi period, ca. 4th century B.C.–ca. third century A.D.
Iron Age, from ca. 300 B.C.		Qin dynasty, 221–206 B.C. Han dynasty, 206 B.C.–220 A.D.	
Three Kingdoms period, 57 B.C.–668 A.D. <i>Silla kingdom</i> , 57 B.C.–668 A.D. <i>Koguryō kingdom</i> , 37 B.C.–668 A.D. <i>Paekche kingdom</i> , 18 B.C.–660 A.D.	<b>0</b>	Six Dynasties, 220–589	Kofun period, ca. 3rd century–538
<i>Kaya Federation</i> , 42–562 A.D.			
	<b>500</b>	Sui dynasty, 581–618 Tang dynasty, 618–907	Asuka period, 538–710
Unified Silla dynasty, 668–935			Nara period, 710–794 Heian period, 794–1185
Koryō dynasty, 918–1392	<b>1000</b>	Five Dynasties, 907–60 Liao dynasty, 916–1125 Song dynasty, 960–1279	
Chosŏn dynasty, 1392–1910	<b>1500</b>	Jin dynasty, 1115–1234 Yuan dynasty, 1272–1368	Kamakura period, 1185–1333
		Ming dynasty, 1368–1644	Nanbokuchō period, 1336–1392 Muromachi period, 1392–1573
	<b>1900</b>	Qing dynasty, 1644–1911	Momoyama period, 1573–1615 Edo period, 1615–1868
	A.D.		Meiji period, 1868–1911

## Note to the reader

Dates for the Three Kingdoms are traditional, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of all scholars.

Map 1: Korea in East Asia



Map 2: The Three Kingdoms at the Height of Koguryŏ Expansion (late fifth century)



Map 3: The Korean Peninsula





## Overview of Korean History

Traditional Korean sources present two contrasting accounts of the origins of civilization on the peninsula.<sup>1</sup> One credits the achievement to an indigenous demigod, Tan'gun, whose birth more than 4,000 years ago is attributed to the union of a sky deity and a bear-woman (for a synopsis of this legend, see Lesson Plan 3: Illustrated Manuscript, p. 126). The second account credits a Chinese noble and court minister, Jizi (Kr. Kija), who is believed to have emigrated to Korea with a large group of followers at the start of the Chinese Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 B.C.). The contrast between these two traditions reveals a tension that long conditioned premodern Korean perceptions of their own culture. On the one hand, there was proud awareness of cultural distinctiveness and, on the other hand, recognition of the extensive influence of Chinese civilization.

### **Paleolithic and Neolithic** (ca. 7000–ca. 10th century B.C.) **periods**

Modern archaeology has shed much light on the origins and civilization of the Korean people. Humans have inhabited the Korean peninsula from as early as the Pleistocene epoch, about 500,000 B.C.

Although few Paleolithic sites have been unearthed, archaeological evidence suggests that the inhabitants made stone and bone tools, relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering of fruit, and moved frequently.<sup>2</sup>

While Neolithic inhabitants of the Korean peninsula relied primarily on game, fish, and foraged vegetation, the first efforts at farming probably began during this time. These people lived in small settlements of semi-subterranean, circular dwellings near rivers or coastal areas, and fashioned tools of stone and bone.

Pottery is one of the defining features of all Neolithic cultures. Korea's Neolithic period is generally associated with the production of *chŭlmun* (comb-pattern) and *mumun* (undecorated) pottery. The earliest known Neolithic pottery in Korea has been dated to about 7000 B.C. The variety of shapes and decorative techniques of excavated wares reflects the diversity of material cultures during this period and points to contacts between populations living in different areas of the peninsula as well as with those on the continental mainland and the islands that constitute modern Japan.

### **Bronze Age** (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.)

Migration into the Korean peninsula from regions in Manchuria and Siberia to the north intensified in the Bronze Age. Additional waves of immigrant farmers moving onto the peninsula from China during the late Shang (ca. 1600–1050 B.C.) and Zhou dynasties most likely resulted in the introduction of bronze technology and rice cultivation. Continuing earlier practices, they also cultivated other grains and foodstuffs, such as millet, barley, and vegetables. Bones of domesticated pigs found at sites dating to the Bronze Age are evidence of a growing reliance on animal husbandry. Although clusters of homes built partially underground were still the norm, Bronze Age settlements often included a larger number of families and were located on hill-sides and inland. Stone tools and weapons, pottery vessels, weaving implements, and fishing equipment are among the artifacts of daily life most often found at domestic sites dating to this period.

Advances in metallurgy and agriculture encouraged the development of a more complex social hierarchy. Beginning in about 1000 B.C., the existence of an elite social stratum is indicated by increasingly elaborate burial practices. Dolmen tombs, most often formed of upright stones supporting a horizontal slab, are more numerous in Korea, where approximately 200,000 have been found, than in any other country in East Asia (see fig. 3, p. 52). Other forms of burial include cists (burial chambers lined with stone) and earthenware jar coffins (large pottery containers in which the deceased were interred). Furnishings found in these tombs indicate that the men, women, and children who occupied them enjoyed wealth and an elevated status, and were presumably members of the ruling class. Ritualistic bronze implements, including mirrors and rattles, suggest that some of the deceased were shamans or priests.

### **Iron Age** (beginning ca. 300 B.C.)

It is not yet clear when iron technology first appeared in Korea, but it seems to have been widespread by about 300 B.C. Presumably iron was imported from China, where it appears to have been cast since at least the sixth century B.C. Excavations of Chinese coins and mirrors at Korean sites, as well as observations of Korean political conditions and social practices in Chinese historical records of the time, confirm direct links between the peninsula and northeastern China. Locally mined and smelted iron in Korea was used in part to fashion utilitarian tools for farming and carpentry.

### **Three Kingdoms period** (57 B.C.–668 A.D.)

From the early Iron Age until the emergence of confederated kingdoms in the first to third centuries A.D., the Korean peninsula underwent further important changes. The most developed Korean state at the time, which was probably a tribal alliance, was Old Chosŏn, situated northeast of present-day Manchuria. Archaeological evidence suggests that this polity emerged around the fourth century B.C. One of the last rulers of this state, Wiman, seized power in the second century B.C.

Less than a century after Wiman's rise to power, Korea was for the first time subjected to Chinese aggression and direct political control. After the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) conquered Wiman Chosŏn in 108 B.C., Chinese officials established four military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula, the largest of which was Nangnang (Chn. Lelang), near modern P'yŏng'yang, which was to remain a Chinese colonial bastion for over four hundred years. The other three commanderies were abolished within thirty years of their establishment owing to the resistance of the local Korean population. In addition to administering the commandery, Han officials stationed at Lelang had responsibility for overseeing most of China's diplomatic and commercial contacts with the peoples of northeastern Asia. Over time, these contacts had manifold cultural and political effects upon native populations as far north as the Sungari River in upper Manchuria and as far south as the Japanese archipelago. The Chinese colonial officials were also responsible for recording the earliest extant data about the peoples of these far-flung lands.

In the first century B.C., powerful tribal clans on the Korean peninsula began to consolidate their authority over contending neighboring clans. While the Koguryŏ kingdom (37 B.C.–668 A.D.) secured control in the north, three new tribal federations, known as the Mahan, the Chinhan, and the Pyŏnhan, were established in the area south of the Han River, roughly along the lines dictated by the primary mountain ranges. By the middle of the fourth century A.D., the first two of these independent polities had evolved into centralized aristocratic states, the Paekche kingdom (18 B.C.–660 A.D.) in the southwest and the Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) in the southeast (see **Map 2**, p. 23). The third evolved into a federation of semi-independent principalities known as the Kaya Federation (42–562 A.D.), which occupied land in the south central area of the Naktong River basin between Paekche and Silla. During the next 350 years, Koguryŏ, Silla, and Paekche vied

for territory and supremacy through political maneuvers and violent clashes. These hostilities did not, however, preclude cultural interchange, and there are many examples of shared customs.

Koguryō, the largest of the three kingdoms, had succeeded in driving out the Chinese by overtaking Lelang in 313 B.C., and expanded its territory northeast into Manchuria. At the height of its power in the fifth century, Koguryō controlled over two-thirds of the Korean peninsula. There were frequent border clashes between Koguryō and China. Indeed, only Koguryō's tenacious resistance against the expansionist campaigns of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties prevented Chinese conquest of Korea. However, not all encounters with the Chinese were militant: the three Korean kingdoms actively traded with the mainland and sought to strengthen their own political positions by cultivating alliances with Chinese rulers. As a byproduct of these contacts, Koreans willingly embraced elements of Chinese statecraft and Confucianism, which, with its emphasis on loyalty to the sovereign and deference to elders and superiors, was adopted to bolster royal authority. Chinese writing, which had been introduced to Korea at about the same time as iron technology, was adapted to the Korean language. Koguryō exported gold, silver, pearls, furs, ginseng, and textiles, among other items, to China, and imported weapons, silk, books, and paper.

Buddhism also came to Korea from China, transmitted by Chinese monks to Koguryō, in 372, and then to Paekche, in 384. Silla, whose relative geographical isolation in the southwestern part of the peninsula generally slowed the penetration of Chinese culture, did not officially recognize Buddhism until 528. Like Confucianism, Buddhism was used by the royal houses as a means of consolidating their power and unifying their subjects. Buddhist deities were construed as protectors of the state, and the Buddhist clergy closely allied themselves with state institutions, sometimes serving as political advisors. The influence of Buddhism on the artistic developments of this time is evident in the surviving architecture and sculpture. Korea played a crucial role in the subsequent transmission of Buddhism and its accompanying architecture and art to Japan. In 538, the reigning monarch of the kingdom of Paekche sent the official diplomatic mission that introduced the religion to the Japanese court.

### **Unified Silla dynasty (668–935)**

Through a series of military and political moves, Silla achieved dominance over most of the Korean peninsula by the end of the seventh century. Its campaign of unification began with the defeat of the Kaya Federation in 562, after which an alliance with the Chinese Tang court helped Silla to conquer the kingdoms of Paekche in 660 and Koguryō in 668. By 676, Silla succeeded in forcing the Chinese troops to withdraw into Manchuria, and for the first time in history the peninsula came under the sway of a single Korean government. In the succeeding Unified Silla dynasty, Korean culture flourished, creating a political and cultural legacy that was handed down to subsequent rulers of the country. Meanwhile, remnants of the Koguryō ruling family moved north into Manchuria and in 698 established the state of Parhae, whose territory included the northernmost part of the Korean peninsula. Parhae survived until 926, when it came under the control of northern nomadic tribes. Although the kingdom of Parhae is an important part of the history of Korea, its impact on the country's later cultural history is considered minor in comparison with that of Unified Silla.

Consolidation of the three kingdoms under a single absolute ruler led to an increase in the wealth of the aristocracy, whose status was secured by a rigid hereditary class system. Kyōngju, the capital of Unified Silla, was a prosperous and wealthy metropolis with magnificent palaces, imposing temples, and richly furnished tombs. The new government supported Buddhism as the state religion. The religion's influence on the arts intensified during this period as the number of Buddhist adherents increased and the religion began to permeate all layers of society. In fact, some of the most refined and sophisticated Buddhist art and architecture in East Asia was produced in Korea during this time.

The Unified Silla court maintained close relations with Tang China through trade and diplomatic and scholarly exchanges. The constant flow of Korean travelers to China, and the occasional intrepid pilgrim to India, contributed to a growing receptivity to foreign ideas. For example, Confucian philosophy, administrative systems, and education flourished under the rulers of Unified Silla, who established a state university (*kukhak*) and implemented an examination system to select candidates for official posts from members of the aristocracy. Throughout this period, Korea continued to play a crucial role in the transmission of technology and ideas to Japan.

### **Koryŏ dynasty** (918–1392)

Beset by power struggles between the court and the aristocracy, Unified Silla declined in the late eighth century. The rise of local military garrisons and landed gentry in the countryside, along with increasing unrest among the peasants, led to a steady deterioration of the social fabric. Rebel movements gradually encroached upon government authority and inspired two provincial leaders to establish competing regional states, Later Paekche in the southwest and Later Koguryŏ in the north, in 892 and 901, respectively. Together with the declining Unified Silla, the two states formed what is known as the Later Three Kingdoms period. In 918, Wang Kŏn (877–943), a high-ranking military official, seized control of Later Koguryŏ and established the Kingdom of Koryŏ with the capital at Song'ak (modern Kaesŏng). In 936, having subjugated Later Paekche, Wang Kŏn reunited the country under the new Koryŏ dynasty. (The name of this dynasty is the source of the English name “Korea.”)

As in the Unified Silla period, Buddhism, especially the meditative Sŏn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen) sect, was the dominant religion during the Koryŏ period and continued to flourish under the munificent patronage of the court and aristocracy. Temples increased in number and amassed ever more land, wealth, and political influence during the course of the dynasty. The spread of Confucianism during the Unified Silla period also continued unabated under the new government. A civil service examination system, established in 958 and based on the Chinese model, required a thorough knowledge of the Confucian classics and functioned to identify men capable of serving as government officials.

The vogue for Chinese culture permeated every aspect of Koryŏ court life, even though relations with the mainland were not always friendly. In the northern part of the peninsula, Koryŏ engaged in border struggles with northern China's conquerors, the Khitan and Jurchen tribes of skillful mounted warriors.<sup>3</sup> Koryŏ suffered three invasions by the Khitan between 993 and 1018. Although these incursions were eventually unsuccessful, the Koreans were inspired to build a thousand-*li* Long Wall (a *li* equals approximately one-third of a mile) to the south of the Amnok River. Koryŏ avoided invasion by the Jin only by becoming a vassal of the powerful state, at the same time still delicately maintaining relations with the Chinese court, now relocated in the south.

A little more than a century later, devastating assaults by Mongol forces overthrew first the Jin dynasty in 1234 and then the Southern

Song in 1279. The Mongol rulers thereupon established themselves as the emperors of China and designated their new regime the Yuan dynasty (1272–1368). Korea, too, was ravaged by Mongol armies, suffering six invasions between 1231 and 1257. In 1231 the Koryŏ court fled the capital and took refuge on Kanghwa Island, less than two kilometers offshore in the Yellow Sea. Eventually, by 1270, a peace was negotiated with the Mongol invaders, and the Koryŏ court entered an era of very close relations—including royal intermarriage—with the Mongol Yuan emperors.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Yuan dynasty had begun to deteriorate, gradually losing control in China as well as in its vassal state of Korea. In 1368, the Chinese rebel leader Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu emperor, r. 1368–98) successfully ousted the Yuan and established the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). In Korea, King Kongmin (r. 1351–74), the last authoritative ruler of the Koryŏ dynasty, adopted a pro-Ming policy and took action to suppress the powerful families who had benefited from cooperation with the Mongols. Although his reforms were broadly popular, they were not entirely effective. Kongmin was ultimately assassinated and succeeded by a series of puppet kings.

### **Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910)**

In 1388, a weakened and divided Koryŏ court sent a military expedition to invade Manchuria, in response to a declaration by the Chinese Ming government of its intention to claim Koryŏ's northeastern territory. One of the expedition commanders, Yi Sŏng-gye (1335–1408), renowned for expelling Japanese pirates who had terrorized Korea's coastline, favored a pro-Ming policy and opposed the idea of the expedition. Leading his troops back to the capital, he seized control of the government. Yi Sŏng-gye then instituted sweeping land reforms that in effect destroyed the power of the aristocratic families who had been the target of the earlier unsuccessful reforms of King Kongmin. With the support of the *yangban*, the educated elite who dominated both the civil and the military branches of government, he also set out to undermine the authority and privilege of the Buddhist clergy, who were seen as inextricably bound to the corrupt and decadent Koryŏ court. In 1392, having consolidated his power and eliminated his rivals, Yi founded a new dynasty, which he named Chosŏn, after the ancient Korean kingdom that had flourished in the fourth century B.C.

The royal house of Yi ruled Korea until the end of dynastic control in the early twentieth century. This new dynasty, with its capital at

Hanyang (modern Seoul), strove to distance itself from the former Koryŏ court. The practice of Buddhism was discouraged, and Neo-Confucianism was embraced by the court and aristocracy as the official state ideology and dominant social system. With Chosŏn government support, Neo-Confucianism's influence came to permeate elite Korean society and culture. Through observance of textually prescribed ceremonies and rites, all social interactions—from the public arena to the intimate circle of the family—were affected by Confucianism's ideals and hierarchical values.

The fortunes of the *yangban* improved markedly during the early years of Chosŏn rule, as they assumed the duties formerly fulfilled by the upper ranks of the aristocracy and landowning families of the Koryŏ. In theory, the *yangban* owed their position to their performance in the civil service examinations that had been formally established by the Koryŏ court and were ostensibly open to all educated free males. In fact, by restricting access to education and the examination system, the *yangban* maintained control over the bureaucracy.

The reign of King Sejong (r. 1418–50) was the cultural high point of the early Chosŏn dynasty. One of Sejong's most noteworthy accomplishments was the introduction in 1446 of an indigenous writing system, known today as *han'gŭl*. This phonetic writing system was devised for those—primarily women and non-*yangban* men—who had no opportunity to learn classical Chinese, an arduous system to master and one that ill matched the Korean language.

For much of the mid-Chosŏn period, Korea was in political and intellectual turmoil. The country was ravaged by two devastating military campaigns, in 1592 and 1597, waged by the Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598). In 1636, Manchu armies, taking advantage of the weakened and disorganized Ming court in China, also launched an invasion of Korea, but with less damaging results than the war with Japan. The indecision and ineffectiveness of Ming troops during the Japanese invasions, and the rise of the Manchus as a new regional power, intensified the debate at the Chosŏn court about the role of Chinese culture in Korea. Some officials supported continued political and cultural loyalty to the Ming, whereas others advised that the country abandon what was perceived as a slavish imitation of Chinese culture and concentrate instead on the development of indigenous institutions and traditions. Following the defeat in 1644 of the Ming dynasty and the subsequent establishment of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) by the Manchus, the debate grew even more heated. Pro-Chinese



factions argued for the support of Ming loyalist movements, while anti-Chinese cliques pointed to the fall of the Ming as a vindication of their position. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, promoters of an independent Korean culture prevailed at court and instigated the enactment of political, economic, and social policies that encouraged distinctive native traditions in the fine arts, literature, and the decorative arts.

The positive political and economic developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries notwithstanding, many causes of governmental instability and social unrest remained unaddressed within Korea. The enervating effects of these problems were aggravated in the nineteenth century, first by the protracted domination of the central government by avaricious royal in-law families, and second by the disruptive pressures exerted on the government by foreign imperialist powers. Motivated by regional strategic concerns, China, Russia, and Japan brazenly sought concessions and influence on the peninsula. The major European powers and the United States also pursued advantageous concessions, sometimes arguing that such arrangements also benefited the Koreans. The Chosŏn government proved to be too weak and ill prepared to resist the rising tide of foreign domination. After its victory in 1905 in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan formally annexed the peninsula in 1910, beginning a period of colonial rule that lasted until 1945.

### **Korea and the West**

Reports made by Arab traders in the ninth century provide the first known accounts about Korea circulated west of India.<sup>4</sup> The traveler Ibn Khordhbeh, who served the Abbassid Caliph Ahmed al-Mutamid alallah (r. 870–92) of Syria, mentioned the high mountains, abundant gold, and presence of such uncommon materials as ginseng, lacquer, porcelain, and cinnamon in his descriptions of Korea. The thirteenth-century merchant Marco Polo, who claimed to have journeyed from Italy to China, briefly noted the existence of Korea in his travel memoirs, referring to it as the land east of China that had been annexed by Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–94).

More extensive (although still vague) reports about Korea were sent by Jesuit missionaries working in China and Japan in the seventeenth century. These priests also made the first attempts to introduce Christianity into Korea, although these efforts proved futile. During the next two centuries, a few European priests tried to establish an

official presence in Korea but were martyred as part of the Chosŏn government's strict determination to suppress the spread of Christianity in the peninsula. The most complete written account circulated in Europe in this era was the seaman Hendrik Hamel's record of his thirteen years spent in captivity in Korea after his ship was stranded off Cheju Island, off the southwest coast of the peninsula. Hamel offered one of the first eyewitness accounts of the country made by a European and, in particular, noted the Korean enthusiasm for education and literacy and the differences between the homes of the nobles and commoners.

Under duress, Korea signed the Treaty of Kanghwa with Japan in 1876. This agreement succeeded in opening Korea to the outside world and was followed by other unequal treaties with the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, France, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Korean-French Treaty of 1886 allowed the propagation of Christianity in Korea, thereby initiating a flood of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries from the West into the peninsula.

#### Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of Korean history, see Jonathan W. Best, "Profile of the Korean Past," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 14–38. On the subject of Korean state-formation theories, see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center and Harvard University Press, 2000).
2. It should be noted that many scholars consider the terms "Paleolithic" and "Neolithic" inaccurate descriptions of Korea's earliest developmental stages. Some prefer to identify various periods by the dominant pottery type of the time, while others emphasize the stage of economic or social development.
3. The Khitan were semi-nomadic people from the Mongolian steppes. After consolidating control over the other tribes in the territory north of China, they established the Liao dynasty (916–1125) and occupied part of northern China. The Jurchen, another semi-nomadic people from Manchuria, who founded the Jin dynasty (1115–1234), defeated the Khitan Liao and in 1126 attacked Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), bringing the Northern Song to an end.
4. Beginning in the Three Kingdoms period, Indian and Central Asian monks were known to have traveled to Korea to promote Buddhism, while Koreans traveled westward to study the religion at its source.

## Korean Religions and Systems of Thought

In the course of its long history, Korea has developed and assimilated a number of diverse religious and philosophical traditions. Although their influence on Korean society has varied over time, these traditions, once established, became a fixed part of Korean life. Not only have these traditions coexisted but they have also influenced each other, exchanging and sharing ideas, practices, and sacred figures. This tendency to accommodate diverse religions and systems of thought is found throughout East Asian cultures.

Shamanism is Korea's earliest belief system and forms an enduring part of its cultural foundation, affecting the other religions that followed. Knowledge of Chinese Confucianism and Daoism reached Korea between 108 B.C. and 313 A.D., when China's rulers maintained military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula. However, neither exerted a strong impact on Korean society for several centuries. Buddhism was imported from China into the peninsula in the fourth century and dominated religious, cultural, and artistic life from the latter part of the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) through the Unified Silla (668–935) and Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasties. During the subsequent Chosŏn period (1392–1910), Confucianism, which had been used to a limited extent by the Unified Silla and Koryŏ monarchies for its political, social, and educational benefits, gained primacy and became the dominant social system. Koreans learned of Christianity in the seventeenth century, primarily from European Jesuits and Chinese converts in China. Despite the Chosŏn court's strenuous efforts to eradicate Christianity in Korea, the country today has the largest Christian following in East Asia (although Buddhism remains the dominant religion).

### **Shamanism**

Shamanism (*musok*), according to a narrow definition, originated in the Ural-Altai regions northwest of Korea. This collection of customs and practices, brought to the peninsula in ancient times by migrants from the north, centers on the powers of a priest to act as

an intermediary between the human and spirit realms. In Korea, a supreme deity, Hananim, presides over a world in which the sun, moon, stars, earth, mountains, trees, and various parts of the household are imbued with a divine spirit, often manifested in the form of folk deities. Since at least the Koryŏ period, most shamans have been women, usually from the lower classes. Shamanism's relationship with Korea's rulers and the state has vacillated over the centuries. Ancient tribal chieftains are thought to have been shamans, and during the early Three Kingdoms period, shamans exerted considerable influence in political and military affairs. In later times, especially during the Chosŏn period, Confucian bureaucrats often attempted to suppress shamanistic practices. Throughout Korean history, however, members of all levels of society have from time to time sought the assistance of shamans to cure illness, appease the dead, learn about the future, and secure good fortune, among other concerns.

***Kut.*** This ritual performance, the most important ceremony in shamanism, marks the occasion when a spirit is invited to take possession of a shaman in order to communicate with the supplicant. A *kut* may be conducted to dispel evil spirits, summon rain, give thanks for a bountiful harvest, cure illness, or ensure good fortune. During a *kut*, Korean shamans typically dress in costumes and dance to music and drumming, display pictures of folk gods, and make offerings of food, money, or paper reproductions of valuable objects.

***Mudang.*** This term refers to Korean female shamans, who are more numerous than male shamans. Their primary work is to communicate the wishes of a spirit or deity (benevolent or evil) who takes possession of them during a ritual trance. It is thought that these women, who are usually the daughters or adopted daughters of other *mudang*, assume their profession in response to a call from the spirits. If this summons is ignored, sickness, especially in the form of dreams or hallucinations, is said to afflict the individual. A woman becomes a *mudang* in an initiation ritual during which she learns the identity of her personal deity and receives the cult objects that she will use. *Mudang* are not part of an organized clergy and do not use an established liturgy.

## Shamanism and Art

The objects and ornaments used in ceremonies and for communication with the spirits are the most direct expression of shamanism in art. Ritual implements such as bronze rattles, and decorative accessories such as gold crowns and belts with antler-shaped appendages and curved jade pendants (*kogok*), found in tombs of the Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.) to the Silla period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), suggest that in ancient times the role of shaman was performed by members of the ruling class. In later periods, paintings and sculptures of folk deities were produced for use during *kut* and related rituals. The concept of representing sacred beings in anthropomorphic form was first inspired by Buddhism.

The ideas, practices, and imagery associated with shamanism have strongly influenced Korean native myths, literature, and the visual arts, especially folk art. Symbolic images of animals, plants, and deities derived from shamanism can be found in a variety of sacred and secular objects. For example, images of Sansin, folk god of the mountain spirits, are used in shamanistic rituals and are also placed in shrines dedicated to him in Korean Buddhist temples. Sansin is often shown accompanied by a tiger, a symbol of power and courage and one of the most popular images in Korean decorative painting and Chosŏn ceramics.

Although the connection is less obvious, the directness and familiarity that characterize much of Korean art are reminiscent of the energy and vitality of the *kut*, which serves to connect humans with the realms of nature and the spirits.

## Buddhism

Buddhism (*pulgyo*), founded by the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama (d. ca. 400 B.C.; traditional dates ca. 556–483 B.C.), revered today as the Buddha or Buddha Shakyamuni, is one of the great world religions. The basic tenets of Buddhism are that life is impermanent, illusory, and filled with suffering, which is caused by desire and ignorance and gives rise to a continuous cycle of death and rebirth. The cessation of suffering (Skt. nirvana) is achieved when desire and ignorance are extinguished, which is possible through a life of moderation, moral conduct, and meditative practice.

The early form of Buddhism, known as Theravada (also called Hinayana), focuses on personal salvation, possible only for those who join a monastic order. The later form of Buddhism, Mahayana (the Great or Universal Vehicle), offers salvation for all sentient beings. In

their pursuit of this goal, followers of Mahayana seek the assistance of saviors and guides known as bodhisattvas. Mahayana was the branch of Buddhism most widely disseminated across northeast Asia. The Esoteric sects, which evolved somewhat later and offered immediate salvation through elaborate rituals and powerful deities, were especially appealing to the ruling classes of China, Korea, and Japan.

Buddhism was transmitted throughout Asia along sea and land routes by traders, monks, and travelers. The religion spread eastward across Central Asia, reaching China in about the first century A.D. It was transmitted to Korea in the fourth century by Buddhist monks sent from China, and subsequently became the official religion of the kingdoms of Koguryō (37 B.C.–668 A.D.), Paekche (18 B.C.–660 A.D.), and eventually Silla. It was through Korea that Buddhism was formally introduced to Japan in the sixth century, initially by official envoys from the Paekche court.

Buddhism in Korea found greatest favor among the court and aristocracy, who looked to the religion to assist in the development and protection of their emerging centralized states. The rulers attempted to legitimize their authority and garner support by likening themselves and their kingdoms to the enlightened buddhas and paradise realms described in Buddhist scriptures. The close relationship between early Korean Buddhism and the welfare of the state is echoed in the Five Precepts for Lay People, an influential code of conduct formulated by the famous monk Wōn'gwang (d. ca. 630) especially for young male aristocrats: Serve the king with loyalty; Serve one's parents with devotion; Treat one's friends with trust; Do not avoid combat; and Do not kill indiscriminately. These rules also reveal a strong Confucian influence, and thus exemplify the Korean tendency to merge aspects of different belief systems.

Many schools of Buddhism were imported during the Unified Silla and Koryō periods. During the latter dynasty, these sects were divided into two broad groups: the textual sect, Kyo, which stressed mastery of the scriptures, and the contemplative sect, Sōn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen), which emphasized meditation and a more individual approach to spiritual understanding. The principal schools in the Kyo tradition were the philosophical Avatamsaka (Hwaōm) school and the devotional Pure Land sect, which focused on the worship of Amitabha (Amit'a), the Buddha of the Western Paradise. From the twelfth century on, however, Sōn was the primary form of Buddhism practiced in Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The Unified Silla and Koryŏ royal courts and aristocracy actively patronized Buddhism, donating large amounts of money and land to support the construction of Buddhist temples and monasteries and the production of exquisite works of art. By the end of the Koryŏ period, however, the wealth and political power amassed by the Buddhist establishment, the reported corruption of the clergy, and the expense of publicly funded Buddhist rituals generated increasing criticism. While several Chosŏn monarchs and female members of the royal family remained devout Buddhists, the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, which suppressed Buddhism and embraced Neo-Confucianism as the new state ideology, marked the end of Buddhism’s golden period in Korean history.<sup>2</sup>

In the following section, the names of Buddhist deities are given in Sanskrit, the ancient Indic language that is the sacred and classical language of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Korean equivalent is given in parentheses.

**Amitabha** (Amit’a). The principle deity of Mahayana Pure Land Buddhism, the Buddha Amitabha, whose name means “Infinite Light,” presides over the Western Paradise, one of many Buddhist “pure lands” where one may blissfully reside until nirvana is achieved. Motivated by compassion and wisdom, Amitabha leads devotees after their death to his realm, regardless of their past deeds, if they call out his name with sincerity. Amitabha is often shown as a meditating buddha, as the central figure of the Western Paradise, or descending from above to lead souls to his paradise (see **image 15** ).

**Image 15**

**Avalokiteshvara** (Kwanŭm). This bodhisattva is one of the most important and popular figures in Mahayana Buddhism. Revered for his great compassion and wisdom, Avalokiteshvara is the manifestation of the power of Amitabha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise. Avalokiteshvara’s association with Amitabha is often indicated by a small, seated representation of the buddha in the crown of his head-dress. Although he has a variety of attributes, he is most commonly shown holding a flask of holy water, a willow branch, or a lotus blossom. Avalokiteshvara can assume many guises, both male and female, human and suprahuman, depending on the intended function and setting of the image (see **image 16** ).

**Image 16**

**Avatamsaka** (Hwaōm). After three decades of study in China, the eminent Silla monk Ŭisang (625–701) returned to Korea and established the Avatamsaka school, the principle school of Mahayana Buddhism. Known in Korea as Hwaōm, it became the dominant philosophical Buddhist sect and appealed in particular to intellectuals among the Unified Silla and Koryō aristocracy. Followers of this powerful school stressed that all things were part of a single, higher whole, comparable to the waves that make up the sea. During its period of florescence, the Hwaōm school inspired not only a rich body of intellectual and theological interpretations but also numerous visual representations of the scriptures.

**Bodhisattva** (*posal*). A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, despite having accumulated sufficient wisdom and merit to achieve nirvana, renounces complete freedom from the world of suffering until all sentient beings can be saved. Motivated by compassion, bodhisattvas actively assist those in need and therefore are common objects of devotion and supplication. Their engagement with this world is often expressed in their depiction as bejeweled and richly ornamented figures.

**Buddha** (*pul* or *puch'ō*). A buddha, or “enlightened one,” is a being who, having realized the truths espoused in Buddhism, has freed himself from the attachments and desires that bind one to the painful cycle of death and rebirth. Having achieved full liberation (nirvana) from the cycle of reincarnation, a buddha is no longer influenced by sensations, emotions, and events. While the name “Buddha” customarily refers to the founder of the religion, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, there are numerous buddhas. They are often depicted as monks dressed in simple robes and bearing the physical markings (Skt. *lakshana*) of enlightenment (see fig. 1, p. 43), but in certain manifestations they are shown as richly ornamented regal figures (see images 5, 15, 17 ).

Images 5, 15, 17

**Esoteric Buddhism.** This version of Buddhist practice, which is also known as Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana, represents the last major phase of the religion in India. Developed between the fourth and sixth centuries, Esoteric Buddhism was transmitted to East and Southeast Asia, and reached its greatest level of influence in Tibet. Generally taught to initiates by a highly revered teacher, Esoteric Buddhist practices include rites that use magic, incantations, and ritualized actions to achieve enlightenment in one’s lifetime. This form of Buddhism also



incorporates a diverse pantheon of male and female deities that can assume many different manifestations and forms

**Kshitigarbha** (Chijang). Kshitigarbha (literally, “womb of the earth”) is a bodhisattva who is dedicated to the rescue of beings in hell. Depictions of this deity typically show him dressed as a monk, carrying a six-ringed staff in one hand and a wish-granting jewel in the other (see **image 18** ).

**Image 18**

**Mahayana.** Mahayana, or the Great Vehicle, so named because it is meant to deliver all beings from the cycle of suffering to salvation, developed out of the older Theravada, or Hinayana, tradition around the first century A.D. Mahayana offers the assistance of compassionate buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are able to alleviate the suffering of supplicants and assist them in their quest for enlightenment. This branch of Buddhism, which gained prominence in East Asia, teaches that all sentient beings possess the potential for enlightenment and attainment of buddhahood.

**Maitreya** (Mirūk). Maitreya (meaning “benevolence”) is the all-compassionate buddha, who, after the conclusion of the current period dominated by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, will come to earth as the last earthly buddha. Until the time of his appearance as a buddha, Maitreya resides in the Tushita Heaven as a bodhisattva. He is therefore depicted as either an unornamented buddha or a bejeweled bodhisattva. He occasionally wears a miniature stupa in his headdress, and may hold a vase or a wheel representing Buddhist teaching. A cult dedicated to Maitreya was popular during the Three Kingdoms, especially among the young male aristocrats known as *hwarang* (flower youth) who honored the five injunctions laid down by the monk Wŏn’gwang, and in the Unified Silla period.

**Meditation.** This term encompasses a variety of techniques and types of religious practices derived from ancient yogic teachings that are designed to calm and concentrate the mind, making possible the ultimate goal of developing the practitioner’s consciousness to the point of inner enlightenment.

**Nirvana.** Considered by Buddhists to be beyond description and definition, nirvana is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. It refers to the

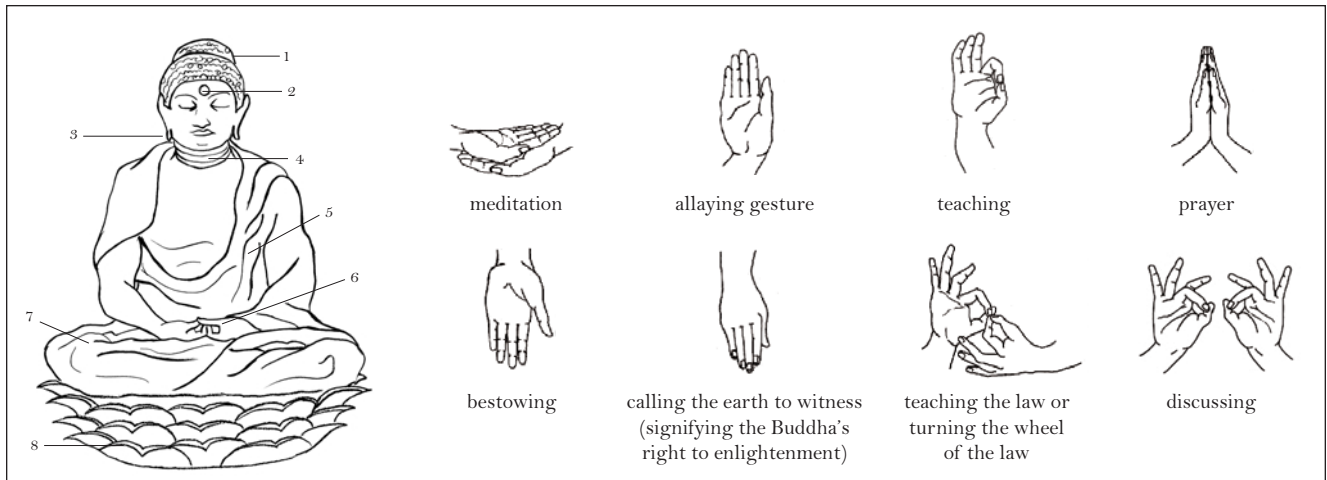
state of bliss attained when one is no longer deluded by ignorance, influenced by attachments and desires generated by the ego, or subject to the cycle of rebirth, the nature of which is conditioned by the deeds (Skt. karma) of former lives. In Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana also includes the awareness of one's unity with the absolute.

**Pure Land school.** This school of Buddhism, which had reached Korea by the seventh century, emphasizes faith in Amitabha, expressed primarily through recitation of his name and the desire to be reborn into his Western Paradise. Because it offers a simple and direct route to salvation, Pure Land Buddhism became very popular among the common people in Korea.

**Shakyamuni** (Sökkamoni or Söka-bul). The name “Shakyamuni,” meaning “Sage of the Shakya clan,” refers to Prince Siddhartha (d. ca. 400 B.C.; traditional dates ca. 556–483 B.C.) of the royal Gautama family, the founder of Buddhism. Born in northeastern India, as a young adult Shakyamuni became distressed over the human condition of suffering and death. He abandoned worldly life to seek the cause of pain and discover a means of attaining release. After achieving enlightenment, Shakyamuni spent the remaining decades of his life traveling and teaching his doctrine of meditation and moderate living. He is most often shown as a monk with physical marks that signify his enlightened status, such as a cranial protuberance, tuft of hair in the middle of his forehead, and elongated earlobes (see **image 5** and fig. 1).

**Image 5**

**Sön** (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen). Sön is the Korean version of the Chan school of Mahayana Buddhism, which developed in China between the sixth and seventh centuries. The origins of this school are traced to the legendary Indian monk Bodhidharma, who is said to have traveled to China in the early sixth century and guided his followers in their search for a direct, intuitive approach to enlightenment through meditation. A form of Chan Buddhism was transmitted to Korea perhaps as early as the seventh century, reportedly by a Korean monk who journeyed to China and studied with the fourth patriarch Daoxin (580–651). Sön developed in nine independent mountain centers (*kusan sonmun*) and, after the twelfth century, became the dominant form of Buddhist practice in Korea.



**Figure 1.** Buddhist corporeal iconography and symbolic hand gestures, or *mudras*

1. skull protuberance – wisdom
2. tuft of hair or gem – enlightenment
3. extended earlobes – princely wealth, rejection of materialism
4. three neck folds – auspiciousness
5. monk's robes – ascetic life of the Buddha
6. *mudra* – symbolic hand gesture (here indicating meditation)
7. seated in lotus position
8. lotus platform – purity

### Buddhism and Art

Buddhism, which had deeply permeated Korean elite culture long before the political unification of the country in the seventh century and served as the national religion until the end of the fourteenth century, had an enormous impact on the arts of Korea. The majority of Korea's most important surviving art treasures were inspired by the practice of this religion. According to Buddhist teachings, devotees attain religious merit through the commissioning and production of images and texts. This belief motivated the creation of enormous numbers of votive figures, ritual implements, paintings, and illuminated manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures. Many of these objects were made for the numerous temples built by the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla kings as well as the Koryŏ monarchs and nobles. Because members of the upper classes were for centuries the primary proponents of Buddhism in Korea, huge sums were lavished on the production of exquisite devotional objects.

Religious texts, or sutras, provide the foundation of Buddhist belief. Sutras were copied and often illustrated by hand or produced in multiple copies with the technique of woodblock printing. Highly skilled calligraphers and painters were employed by the royal court and aristocracy to produce these sacred works using the finest materials.

The representation of deities and spiritually perfected people is a fundamental artistic expression of Buddhist thought. The enlightened status of these figures is visually conveyed in part through their appearance as idealized beings. Specific attributes and distinguishing marks — such as a protuberance on top of the head and a tuft of hair in the middle of the forehead (generally represented by a dot between

the eyebrows)—as well as hand gestures (Skt. *mudra*) communicate information to the viewer about the identity of the figure or convey a message (see fig. 1). Buddhist deities are frequently depicted with a halo or nimbus surrounding their heads and/or an aureole, or mandorla, around their entire bodies. As in the West, these representations of emanating light indicate the figure's spiritual radiance. The magical abilities and power of deities in the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon are often represented by such suprahuman characteristics as multiple arms and heads. The setting in which a figure is depicted can also reveal clues to the deity's identity. For example, the Buddha Amitabha is often shown presiding over his Western Paradise flanked by the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta (see **image 15**).

**Image 15**

Ideas about physical perfection and beauty are closely connected with the culture in which they prevail. Modern viewers, therefore, must keep in mind that their own concepts of physical beauty may differ from beliefs held by people in other places and times. Specifically, the soft, rounded physiques and gentle expressions of Buddhist images, especially bodhisattvas, often look feminine to modern Western viewers. The makers of these images were responding to a number of impulses, including their own ideas about physical perfection and a desire to depict deities that transcend the limitations of age, gender, and human physical features.

### **Confucianism**

Confucianism (*yugyo*) is the philosophical, social, and political doctrine developed in China based on the teachings of Confucius (ca. 551–479 B.C.) and his principal followers. This ideology was developed in response to the need for a new system that could provide the social cohesion and moral imperatives demanded by the shift during the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 B.C.) from a society dictated by the belief in the power of ancestral spirits to one in which man assumed the central position. Through the writings attributed to Confucius and his followers, Confucianism offered a code of proper social conduct motivated by virtue and tempered by humanism. During his lifetime, Confucius had little success in convincing rulers to adopt his system, and his precepts did not become guiding principles in China until the Han period (206 B.C.–220 A.D.).

Confucius exhorted rulers to govern by example. He believed that if a king behaved properly and observed the necessary rituals, society

would be stable and harmonious. Rituals held a central position in Confucian ethics because their performance was thought to encourage the best aspects of human nature and to correct character flaws. Confucianism emphasizes five fundamental relationships, which if properly maintained will result in a harmonious, virtuous society: ruler and minister, father and son (filial piety), husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. Filial piety, for example, requires that a son defer to and care for his parents while they are alive and after their deaths honor them with a suitable funeral, a properly observed mourning period, and timely acts of veneration through the presentation of offerings. Because Confucius also advocated the appointment of learned and capable administrators to government posts rather than dependence on a hereditary system, Confucianism became closely associated with education and an examination system whereby the government could identify talented men.

Confucius expressed little interest in metaphysical matters, and limited his comments on the spiritual realm to general references to an impersonal Heaven. Although shrines dedicated to Confucius and worthy dignitaries and heroes were established in later times, Confucianism is not, strictly speaking, a religion. It never developed a formal clergy, and the most important rituals associated with its practice are ancestral rites.

Introduced into Korea with the establishment of the Chinese Han military commanderies in the northern part of the peninsula at the end of the second century B.C., Confucianism was utilized by the rulers of the Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla, and Koryŏ to enhance their political authority. They embraced the Confucian virtues of loyalty, social harmony, and class stratification, established academies in which Confucian classics were taught to the sons of the aristocracy, instituted civil service examinations for members of the upper classes, and adopted Chinese-style rites.

In the final decades of the Koryŏ dynasty, bureaucrats steeped in Confucian learning increasingly opposed the political and economic power of the Buddhist clergy, whom they considered to be a corrupt and enervating influence. With the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, Confucianism emerged as the dominant ideology in Korean society, with a strict emphasis on the proper observance of ancestral rites and interpersonal relationships. This expansion of Confucianism's reach coincided with the growing influence in Korea of Neo-Confucianism, called *sŏngri-hak* (philosophy of mind and principle) or

*chuja-hak* (philosophy of Master Zhu, or Zhu Xi [1130–1200], the great Neo-Confucian scholar of the Chinese Song dynasty). Incorporating concepts from Daoism and Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism shifted attention to the cultivation of the self through the study of metaphysical and cosmological ideas.

After the devastating Japanese invasions of the peninsula in the late sixteenth century, followed a few decades later by the fall of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in China, which had been viewed as Korea's role model, many Korean intellectuals recognized a need for reform. The faction known as Sirhak-p'a (School of Practical Learning) became a formidable intellectual force in the late seventeenth century. The Sirhak scholars, who advocated political, economic, social, and educational reforms, took practical affairs as their point of departure, emphasizing not only the traditional humanistic disciplines but also the study of science, natural science, and technology. Their interest in promoting a new understanding of the country's history and culture led to a surge of publications on various aspects of Korean history, literature, language, and geography.

**Neo-Confucianism.** Based on the writings of the twelfth-century Chinese scholar Zhu Xi, Neo-Confucianism represented a major intellectual breakthrough in Chinese philosophy. It grew out of a revival of the ancient moral philosophy of Confucianism combined with metaphysical concepts borrowed from Daoism and Buddhism. Neo-Confucian philosophers developed a metaphysical system of heavenly principles, which embraced both a transcendent reality and the cultivation of the self.

**Yangban.** Members of the educated elite, the *yangban* dominated society in the Chosŏn period. They were typically educated in the Confucian classics, which prepared them for the official civil and military service examinations and positions in the government bureaucracy. While not all *yangban* were wealthy, their status as officials and landholders allowed many to become affluent. Although, theoretically, all educated men were eligible to take the exams necessary for entry into the ranks of the bureaucracy, in practice, membership in the *yangban* class was largely restricted to established upper-class families: access to education was restricted, land and property were inherited by the eldest son, and endogamous marriages were preferred. Beginning in the seventeenth century, attitudinal changes caused an expansion in

*yangban* ranks, weakening class exclusivity. Eventually, the term became a polite reference for any gentleman.

**Zhu Xi** (1130–1200). Zhu Xi was one of China’s most influential philosophers and the founder of the Neo-Confucian orthodox School of Principle, which taught that the mind is disciplined and morality is learned through “the investigation of things”—an objective study of the many aspects of the material world.

### **Confucianism and Art**

Confucius is said to have advised gentlemen to cultivate their moral character in part through the appreciation of music and the study of literature and history. Confucianism exerted its strongest impact on the fine arts through the aesthetics it espoused. Restraint, modesty, and naturalness were encouraged in the form of muted colors, subtle decoration, and a preference for organic materials. White-bodied porcelains, scholars’ utensils made of bamboo, wood, or stone, and simple white silk robes epitomized Confucian sensibilities.

Confucian veneration of ancestors and teachers prompted the rise of private Confucian academies (*sŏwŏn*) and the production of portraits of ancestors as well as those of renowned Confucian masters. Domestic rites, the most important of which were coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and veneration of the ancestors, constituted the most essential aspects of private Confucian practice during the Chosŏn period. Ancestral rites were typically carried out by men of the upper class in family shrines, which were usually located within the domestic compound of the eldest male. Offerings of wine, food, and tea were presented to the ancestors, represented by inscribed name plaques placed on an altar. While food was usually presented on wood or metal plates and bowls, wine was offered in small cups made of white porcelain or metal (see **image 22** ). After the service, the relatives of the deceased would consume the food and drink in a family meal.

**Image 22**

Confucian scholars were usually active practitioners and patrons of calligraphy and literati painting. Ideally, these arts were enjoyed as a means of personal expression, either alone or among like-minded friends. Ink paintings of bamboo, orchids, and landscapes rendered with little or no color and employing calligraphic brushwork are typical examples of literati art (see **image 28** and **Artists and Materials** , pp. 70–72).

**Image 28**

## Daoism

Daoism (sometimes romanized as Taoism) is native to China, and encompasses various ancient practices and schools of thought ignored or rejected by Confucianism. The older form of Daoism, philosophical Daoism (*toga*), consists of concepts credited to Laozi (5th century B.C.) and Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 B.C.), who advocated a passive acquiescence to the Dao (The Way of the Universe) and a close relationship with nature. Around the second century A.D., Daoism absorbed components of shamanism, alchemy, medicine, and various primitive cults and developed into religious Daoism (*togyo*).

Chinese inhabitants of the Han military commanderies in northern Korea are presumed to have introduced Daoist texts and beliefs into the peninsula as part of the transmission of Chinese culture. Members of the Koguryŏ aristocracy, for example, are known to have requested information about Daoist practices from China. Although many Daoist ideas were absorbed into Korean society, Daoism never became established in an organized form but was an important feature of the cultural background.

Because of the many similarities between religious Daoism and shamanism, practices not associated with Buddhism or Confucianism—such as the use of charms and certain symbols—are sometimes incorrectly identified as being Daoist. Moreover, some concepts, such as the two alternating principles of the universe, *yin* and *yang* (*ŭm* and *yang*), and geomancy, are commonly attributed to Daoism, although they actually predate it. In general, conceptions of the immortals and their realms and the pursuit of immortality through alchemical means are the most authentic expressions of religious Daoism.

**Dao.** The Dao (or The Way of the Universe) is a fundamental term in Chinese philosophy for the unchangeable, transcendent source of all existence. This principle, which is vast and indescribable, encompassing action and nonaction, void and matter, knowledge and ignorance, remains constant as all else changes.

**Laozi** (5th century B.C.). The semilegendary founder of Daoism and author of the classic *Daodejing*, Laozi is said to have been a government official until he grew dissatisfied with political conditions in China and left the country to travel westward. He is thought to have been an acquaintance of Confucius, and his followers claim that he taught the Buddha Shakyamuni.



**Zhuangzi** (ca. 369–ca. 286 B.C.). Zhuangzi was one of the most important early developers of Daoist philosophy. He is credited with a book of poems, parables, and fantasies describing the importance of passivity and the maintenance of a close connection with nature, as well as criticizing government service.

### **Daoism and Art**

As mentioned above, it is often difficult to separate Daoist ideas from those of shamanism. While figures such as the God of Longevity—known as Shoulao in Chinese and frequently pictured as a wizened old man carrying a large peach—have Daoist origins, over time they have been conflated with Korean folk deities associated with shamanism. In this case, Shoulao has been combined with the popular deities Namguksong (the Southern Star spirit) and Ch'ilsong (Seven Stars). Similarly, symbols of longevity, including the pine tree, crane, and fungus of immortality, are found in both Daoist and shamanist contexts.

Philosophical Daoism emphasizes the maintenance of a strong connection with the natural world, which is seen as necessary to the proper development of human character. In part resulting from Daoism's influence, nature holds a critical position in East Asian culture and thought. This attitude bolstered the development of landscape painting, which by definition in East Asia consists of mountains and water—elements made up of opposite physical characteristics (see **Key Themes, Nature**, p. 16). Up until modern times, whenever humans are included in landscape compositions, they typically reflect the Daoist ideal of man in harmony with nature.

### **Christianity**

Korean art from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and objects associated with Christianity are not represented in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, thus the religion is only briefly discussed here.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, European missionaries attempted but failed to establish a foothold in Korea as part of their proselytizing efforts in other parts of Asia. After encountering Jesuit priests in Beijing in the second half of the seventeenth century, Korean emissaries were the first to introduce Christian texts and ideas to Korea successfully. Initially, Roman Catholicism's most receptive audience were upper-class intellectuals, especially those of

the Sirhak (Practical Learning) movement, which advocated using Western scientific knowledge to reform Korean commerce and agriculture. These men met secretly and their numbers, which came to include many commoners, swelled to approximately 10,000 in the early years of the nineteenth century. They sent requests to the Europeans to send priests, many of whom were eventually martyred. During the nineteenth century, the Korean government, fearing Western incursions, the prevalence of political opposition among Christian ranks, and Catholicism's ban on ancestor worship, enacted a number of brutal persecutions that killed tens of thousands of people and drove the Christian church underground until the 1870s.

Protestantism was established in Korea in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In addition to their evangelical efforts, Protestant missionaries, the majority of whom came from the United States, Canada, and Australia, instituted important changes in the areas of education and modern medicine. The use of *han'gŭl*, the native syllabary system, in religious books was instrumental in increasing the literacy rate among the population, especially among women. Missionaries founded several important hospitals and educational institutions, including Yonsei University and Ewha Woman's University in Seoul.

#### Notes

1. For further information on the development of various schools of Buddhism in Korea, see Pak Youngsook, "The Korean Art Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 424–26. A more detailed account is provided by Lewis R. Lancaster and Yu Chai-shin in *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*, vol. 3, and *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty*, vol. 4, Studies in Korean Religions and Culture (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989 and 1991).
2. Jonathan W. Best, "Imagery, Iconography and Belief in Early Korean Buddhism," *Korean Culture* (Fall 1992), pp. 23–33, is a useful overview of Korean Buddhist history, and includes a description of important deities in the Korean Buddhist pantheon and their iconography.

## Overview of Korean Art History

### Neolithic period (ca. 7000–ca. 10th century B.C.)

Archaeology in Korea is a relatively recent discipline.<sup>1</sup> The period recognized as Korea's Neolithic era, which spanned approximately 6,000 years, has been studied only during the last century through the excavation of sites and analysis of physical remains. This period is marked by the appearance of pottery and small settlements with semi-subterranean dwellings. The variety of shapes and decorative techniques of excavated pottery wares reflects a diversity in the material cultures of the Neolithic period and suggests contacts between populations living in different areas of the peninsula, as well as with those on the continental mainland and the islands that constitute modern Japan.

The Neolithic inhabitants of the Korean peninsula fashioned chipped and polished stone spears, arrowheads, and tools, as well as bone fishhooks and needles. The earliest known Neolithic pottery in Korea has been dated to about 7000 B.C. These pots were handmade with sandy clay, and fired in open or partially covered pits at relatively low temperatures of about 700°C. Used most likely for the storage of foodstuffs and as cooking containers, they typically had deep interiors, wide mouths, and pointed or flat bases. While several decorative methods, including relief appliqué, pinching, and stamping, were employed to ornament the exterior surface of the pots, the most commonly found design is the comb-pattern (*chŭlmun*) motif, made by incising diagonal lines into the damp clay, perhaps with a toothed implement, before firing (fig. 2).

In the late Neolithic period, around 2000 B.C., Korean potters began to produce plainer pottery, possibly as the result of the migration of new groups of people from Manchuria and Siberia onto the peninsula. Compared with the earlier comb-pattern wares, these pots, known as *mumun* ware, are made of coarser clay, have thicker walls, and bear minimal or no decoration. A wide variety of shapes were produced, including jars with handles and bowls on pedestals. The hardness of the bodies of some of these wares indicates improvements in kiln technology, which made it possible to fire pottery wares at higher temperatures.



**Figure 2.** Comb-Pattern Vessel.  
Neolithic period, ca. 4000–3000 B.C.,  
from Amsa-dong, Kangdong-gu, Seoul.  
Earthenware with incised decoration;  
H. 15½ in. (38.4 cm). Kyōnghŭi  
University, Seoul



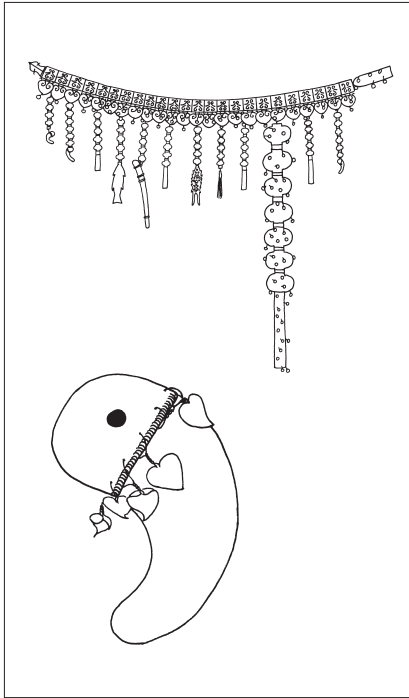
**Figure 3.** Dolmen tombs, burial sites that first appeared in the Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.), are more numerous in Korea than in any other country in East Asia. (Photograph of a dolmen from Unsŏng-ni, Ŭnyul-kun, South Hwanghae Province)

### **Bronze Age** (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.)

Bronze technology was introduced into Korea from the northern part of the continental mainland around the tenth century B.C. Early bronze objects include imported daggers, swords, spearheads, mirrors, and small bells. By the seventh century B.C., a Bronze Age material culture of remarkable sophistication was flourishing on the peninsula, influenced by northeastern China as well as Siberian and Scythian bronze styles. Found primarily in burial sites, the earliest Korean bronze objects are mostly swords, spearheads, and objects that seem to have served ritual functions, notably mirrors, bells, and rattles. In its chemical composition, Korean bronze is different from that of neighboring bronze cultures, containing a higher percentage of zinc. Recent archaeological discoveries show that bronze weapons and implements were cast using stone molds. However, the extraordinary fineness of the linear decoration on some mirrors of the late Bronze Age suggests that clay molds were also used.

From the end of the Neolithic period and continuing into the Bronze Age, high-ranking members of Korean society began to be buried in more elaborate graves. The most common forms of burial are stone cists (chambers lined with stone) and dolmens (above-ground constructions of large stone slabs; fig. 3). Dolmen burials are more numerous in Korea than in any other country in East Asia. The richness and variety of objects recovered from these burials indicate the elite status of the occupants. Among these objects are stone and bronze weapons such as daggers and spearheads; bronze mirrors and other ritual implements; pottery vessels, both painted and burnished red and black wares (see **image 1**); and polished stone tubular beads or curved, comma-shaped beads (*kogok*), often made of nephrite (fig. 4). These curved ornaments are sometimes associated with Siberian bear cults. Similarly shaped stone beads (Jpn. *magatama*) have also been found in Japan in upper-class graves of the Yayoi (ca. 4th century B.C.–ca. 3rd century A.D.) and Kofun (ca. 3rd century–538) periods.

**Image 1**



**Figure 4.** Illustration of an individual *kogok* (below) and several of these comma-shaped ornaments (usually made of jade) suspended from a necklace (above)

### **Iron Age** (beginning ca. 300 B.C.)

Iron implements, imported from China, were present in Korea by the beginning of the fourth century B.C. The use of locally mined and smelted iron for the production of weapons, woodworking tools, and agricultural implements seems to have been widespread in the southern part of the Korean peninsula a century later. The standard Chinese history *Sanguo zhi* (Record of the Three Kingdoms), written in the late third century A.D., notes that at that time iron was produced in Pyōnhan, one of the three southern Korean tribal confederations, and exported to the Chinese commanderies in northern Korea and to Japan.

The establishment of Chinese commanderies on the peninsula at the end of the second century B.C. brought Korea into China's cultural, economic, and political sphere of influence. Tombs in the region under Chinese control consisted of a series of chambers constructed of wood, brick, or stone and covered by earthen mounds in the Chinese style. The occupants of these tombs (Chinese or Korean) were accompanied by a large number of imported Chinese luxury items, such as bronze vessels and mirrors, lacquer containers, ceramics, silk, and horse trappings. Following Chinese practice, the walls of the tomb were decorated with paintings depicting people engaged in a variety of activities. The vogue for Chinese burial goods extended into southern Korea, where pit graves dating to the first and second centuries have been found containing such items.

The ceramics of the Iron Age take on diverse forms. Unlike the previous period, when clay objects were hand-built, the Iron Age saw the introduction of the potter's wheel. The introduction of iron technology and the influence of Chinese ceramic technology also led to the production of higher-fired wares during the Three Kingdoms period (see below). It is thought that the Koreans fired their pottery in climbing kilns (see *Artists and Materials*, fig. 9, p. 66). The soft-bodied, low-fired, grayish wares known as *wajil t'ogi* (brick-clay pottery) found in tombs of the Iron Age period are clearly distinguishable from the more utilitarian pots recovered from residential sites and were probably produced solely for ritual or mortuary purposes.



**Figure 5.** Crown. Three Kingdoms period, Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), 5th–6th century. Gilt bronze with gold foil and wire; H. 8½ in. (20.6 cm). Ho-Am Art Museum, Yongin.

**Image 4**

### Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.)

Among the earliest surviving examples of painting in Korea are the wall murals in the interior rooms of tombs of the Koguryŏ kingdom (37 B.C.–668 A.D.), the northernmost of the three states that dominated the Korean peninsula during the Three Kingdoms period. (Traces of wall paintings have also been found in the tombs of the kingdom of Paekche [18 B.C.–660 A.D.], in the southwest.) These murals, which depict scenes of daily life and hunting, portraits of the tomb occupants, and Buddhist and Daoist themes, provide valuable information about local customs and beliefs, dress, and architecture. They also represent the beginning of landscape painting in Korea. Because of their style of construction—a stone chamber covered by an earthen mound—Koguryŏ tombs were frequently looted, and thus little is known about their furnishings. The abundant funerary goods that have been excavated from tombs in the southern states of Kaya (42–562 A.D.) and Silla (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) reveal possible contacts with lands along the Silk Route, the famed trade road that linked West Asia, Central Asia, and China.

The skill of Korean metalworkers can also be seen in tomb furnishings. Using local raw materials, each of the southern states produced intricately crafted gold, bronze, and iron weapons, vessels, and personal ornaments for use in the afterlife. Kaya, a federation of semi-independent principalities, was especially known for producing and exporting iron, which was used to create weapons, armor for men and horses, and tools. Tomb furnishings excavated from the securely constructed wood and stone burial chambers that served as the resting places of royalty and the aristocracy in Silla and Kaya attest to the elegant tastes of the elite, as well as the fascination with foreign motifs and products. Silla, which had such a rich supply of gold that its capital was named Kŭmsŏng (“city of gold”), is noted for the glittering gold crowns, belts, shoes, and jewelry that ornamented the bodies of kings and queens (see [image 4](#) and [fig. 5](#)). The decorative motifs of many of these items reveal the intermingling of Chinese, Buddhist, and shamanistic influences.

In their design—notably the vertical projections that suggest antlers, dangling pendants, and treelike shapes—and goldworking techniques, Korean crowns are similar to ones excavated from various parts of the Eurasian steppes, suggesting not only connections between these regions but also that Korean shamanism derived from Scytho-Siberian shamanism. The existence of active land and sea trade linking Korea with lands far to the west and south is evidenced by

glass vessels and beads, some of which were imported from as far away as the Mediterranean. Gilt-bronze saddle fittings, iron stirrups, and other horse trappings recovered from graves demonstrate the importance of horses in Korea at the time.

Large quantities of high-fired stoneware were produced for tombs throughout southern Korea during this period. With the exception of Chinese stoneware, Korean stoneware of the Three Kingdoms period is the earliest known stoneware in the world. Among the most distinctive forms are footed vessels and sculptural vessels and stands decorated with incised patterns and/or appliquéd images of animals and humans. These wares typically have gray bodies, and some are also coated with accidentally produced ash glaze. Footed vessels, which were presumably used in rituals, generally consist of shallow bowls or cups set on tall pedestals, with rectangular or triangular perforations (see **image 3**). Formed using the potter's wheel, these wares were fired in sloping kilns at temperatures in excess of 1000°C, sufficient to produce stoneware. Kaya and Silla potters made a variety of vessels in the shapes of animals, boats, and mounted warriors, apparently for ceremonial use (see **image 2**). A few tombs have yielded three-dimensional pottery figurines, including images of entertainers, officials, foreigners, horses, and animals of the zodiac.

**Image 3**

**Image 2**



**Figure 6.** Seated Maitreya. Three Kingdoms period, late 6th century. Gilt bronze; H. 32¾ in. (83.2 cm). The National Museum of Korea, Seoul, National Treasure no. 78

The growing influence of Buddhism in Korea during the Three Kingdoms period is evidenced in excavated remains of temples (many of which appear to have been impressive in size) and surviving sculptures and rock carvings of deities. Fashioned of stone, bronze, gilt bronze, and wood, the images generally reflect the influence of artistic styles in vogue at the time in different parts of China. Buddhist statues made in Koguryō, which was linked by overland routes to northern China, bear a strong resemblance to the distinctively angular, attenuated sculptures of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). Paekche statues, which are among the most sophisticated produced at the time, are characterized by serene faces, flowing drapery, flame-shaped aureoles, and openwork jewelry, reminiscent of the sculpture of the Liang dynasty (502–557) in southern China, with which Paekche traded by sea. One of the most famous and technically accomplished examples of Korean Buddhist sculpture is a large gilt-bronze image of the bodhisattva Maitreya seated in a pensive pose, produced in the late sixth century (fig. 6). In its refined casting technique and skillful modeling, this statue exemplifies the highest level of craftsmanship of the Three Kingdoms.

### Unified Silla dynasty (668–935)

In the late seventh century, after years of internecine warfare and constantly shifting alliances among the peninsular powers, the southeastern kingdom of Silla succeeded in uniting the Korean peninsula for the first time under a single government. The rulers of Unified Silla continued the close relationship between the state and Buddhism initiated by their predecessors, and the Buddhist establishment flourished under the patronage of royalty and the aristocracy. The cosmopolitan Unified Silla court pursued extensive contacts with Japan as well as with the Tang dynasty (618–907) in China. Moreover, the numerous Buddhist pilgrims who traveled from Korea to China and India also brought a greater awareness of other cultures to the peninsula. While newly introduced types and styles of Buddhist images from China and India enriched the iconographic repertoire and contributed to the common international style that characterized Buddhist sculptures of the period, artistic traditions inherited from the fallen Koguryŏ and Paekche kingdoms played a role in the formation of Unified Silla art. The indigenous traditions of the Silla kingdom likewise contributed to the development of Unified Silla sculpture (see **image 5**).

Image 5



**Figure 7.** Seated Buddha. Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), second half of the 8th century. Granite; H. 127 in. (326 cm). Sŏkkuram Cave-Temple, Kyŏngju, North Kyŏngsang Province. National Treasure no. 24

The concern for the worldly benefits of Buddhist practices and rites evidently remained paramount for the majority of adherents during the Unified Silla period. Not only does the thirteenth-century history *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) contain many accounts of divine intervention credited to this era, but it is also known that Buddhist rituals to strengthen and protect the state continued to be regularly performed at court and at important monasteries throughout the nation. The construction of temples and the creation of major works of art were commissioned with the same purpose. Two prime examples are the late seventh-century Sach'ŏnwang-sa (Temple of the Four Heavenly Kings), built in Kyŏngju, the capital of Unified Silla, at royal order to bolster resistance against the Tang imperialist threat, and the famous eighth-century cavelike granite sanctuary of Sŏkkuram, on Mount T'oham east of Kyŏngju, that is commonly believed to have been created, in part, to protect Korea from Japanese aggression (fig. 7). The magnificent stone image of a seated Buddha within the sanctuary gazes out over the East Sea in the direction of Japan, an orientation that has given rise to the tradition concerning the image's protective function. Another major project undertaken at this time was the rebuilding of Pulguk-sa (Temple of the Buddha Land), which had been founded in 553. Located in the foothills of Mount T'oham near Sŏkkuram, it is Korea's oldest surviving Buddhist temple.



### **Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392)**

The Koryŏ period produced some of the most outstanding achievements in Korean culture and the arts. The elegant, refined lifestyle of the Koryŏ court and aristocracy is clearly reflected in the arts of the period, which inherited and maintained the aesthetic sophistication of Unified Silla. As in the preceding era, Buddhism, lavishly patronized by the royal court and aristocracy, was a major creative force in the arts. Frequent official exchanges and trade with China, especially in the early part of the Koryŏ dynasty, offered Korean artisans a rich array of new technologies and motifs, which they adapted and refined to reflect native tastes. Further stimulus was provided by interaction with countries beyond East Asia, facilitated by the travels of Buddhist monks to and from India and the arrival of merchants by sea from the Middle East.

Examples of cultural contact between China and Korea during the Koryŏ period abound. Early Koryŏ trade missions took gold, silver, ginseng, paper, brushes, ink, and fans to China and imported silk, porcelain, books, musical instruments, spices, and medicine. Korean intellectuals prided themselves on their knowledge of China's classical literature and their ability to write and compose poetry in Chinese. Similarly, many Buddhist monks traveled to China for lengthy periods to study religious doctrines and texts, which they then brought back to Korea. The importation of Chinese luxury goods such as lacquer and celadon wares inspired Korean artisans to experiment with new technologies and artistic styles.

Buddhism was an integral part of daily life during the Koryŏ period. The founder of the dynasty, Wang Kŏn, known by his posthumous title of T'aejo, or Grand Founder (r. 918–43), declared Buddhism the state religion. The influence of Buddhism extended into all realms of artistic activity, but it is best appreciated in the many objects and paintings created for use in the Buddhist ceremonies regularly held in temples and palaces. Numerous temple complexes were constructed in the new capital Songdo (modern Kaesŏng) and in local areas. The proliferation of temples — with their elaborate stone pagodas, decorative ceramic roof and floor tiles, brightly colored wall paintings, statues fashioned of wood, marble, stone, and gilt bronze, and refined ritual utensils — attests to the growing power of the Buddhist establishment. Koryŏ illuminated manuscripts of Buddhist sutras, executed in minute detail and lavishly embellished with gold, elegant paintings of Buddhist deities commissioned by aristocratic devotees, finely wrought

Images 7, 9, 15–18

lacquerware inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and delicate metalwares, were hallmarks of this period and exemplify the use of sumptuous materials in the service of Buddhism (see images 7, 9, 15–18 ). While the invasions suffered by Korea during this and later periods destroyed the majority of artworks produced, regular contacts with Japan resulted in the preservation of many Koryŏ Buddhist paintings and objects in that country.

Image 19

Two important developments in the history of Korean printing and book production occurred during the Koryŏ period. Motivated by the desire to invoke the protection of Buddhist deities in response to armed incursions by the Khitan—the semi-nomadic tribe who founded the northern Chinese Liao dynasty (907–1125)—and by the attempt to solidify the authority of the state religion, the Koryŏ court ordered the carving of woodblocks for printing a complete edition of the Buddhist canon (*Tripitaka*). This project, a monumental undertaking, was begun in 1011 but not completed until 1087, long after peace with the Liao had been established. The set of woodblocks was destroyed by the Mongols in 1232, during their invasion of the peninsula, and the Koryŏ subsequently commissioned the carving of a new edition. Known as the *Tripitaka Koreana*, this set of just over 80,000 woodblocks was completed in 1251. It is now kept at Haein-sa temple, in South Kyŏngsang Province (see image 19 ). The second major development in printing, the invention and use of cast-metal movable type, took place in the early decades of the thirteenth century, some two centuries before Gutenberg’s invention of metal movable type in Europe. The skill of Korean craftsmen in producing sufficiently strong and thick paper and an oilier grade of ink was crucial to the success of this new printing technique.<sup>2</sup>

The production of celadon or green-glazed (*ch’ŏngja*) wares, among the most widely admired of Korean ceramics, represents the outstanding achievement of Koryŏ artisans. By the ninth to the early tenth century, with the adoption of celadon production techniques used at the Yue kiln complex in southeastern China, Korean potters had perfected the high-fired glaze techniques that enabled them to undertake the manufacture of celadon ware. The Koryŏ celadon industry reached its pinnacle both technically and artistically between the early twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, when it achieved the celebrated translucent glazes, refined forms, and naturalistic designs that won high praise from the Chinese, one of whom pronounced Korean celadons as “first under Heaven.” It was during this period that Koryŏ celadon ware

Images 11, 13, 14

acquired a character independent of its Chinese counterparts, developing distinctive features in shape, design, color, and decoration. While potters employed several methods to decorate these wares, including incising and carving, the technique of inlay (*sanggam*) was the most innovative and highly regarded decorative method (see images 11, 13, 14, and *Artists and Materials*, p. 66).

The quality of celadon declined sharply in the second half of the thirteenth century, a reflection of the economic and social problems that beset the country in the final years of the Koryŏ dynasty. In contrast to the elegant wares of the earlier period, this last phase in Korean celadon production is characterized by rougher shapes, coarse clays, and impure glazes.

### **Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910)**

The advent of the Chosŏn dynasty in the late fourteenth century brought in its wake major social and cultural changes. In their efforts to augment the power of the royal government and rejuvenate the country, which during the preceding Koryŏ period had suffered almost a century of Mongol domination, the Chosŏn rulers withdrew royal patronage of the Buddhist establishment, then seen as corrupt, and embraced Neo-Confucianism as the official state ideology. Another important development in the Chosŏn period was the growing challenge on the part of Korean intellectuals to the pervasive influence of Chinese thought and culture in Korean society. With the decline and fall of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Koreans became even more interested in promoting their own culture. The art and literature of the period, especially from the eighteenth century on, reflects this greater interest in native Korean traditions and everyday life.

Chosŏn ceramics consist mainly of two types: *punch'ŏng* and white porcelain (*paekcha*). *Punch'ŏng* refers to stoneware made of a grayish blue clay that is covered with white slip and coated with a translucent glaze. The glaze, which contains a small amount of iron, turns a bluish green when fired. The development of this type of ware was the result of early Chosŏn potters' attempts to revitalize what remained of the Koryŏ celadon tradition. *Punch'ŏng* was produced throughout the peninsula until the end of the sixteenth century, when it gradually fell out of favor as porcelain became more widely available. The abduction and forced relocation of thousands of Korean potters, many of whom made *punch'ŏng* ware, to Japan during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (1536–

1598) invasions of the peninsula in 1592 and 1597 contributed to the discontinuation of *punch'ōng* production in Korea. The Japanese enthusiasm for some types of *punch'ōng* ware was strongest among tea ceremony practitioners, who viewed it as the embodiment of the aesthetics of rusticity, awkwardness, and naturalness (see **image 21**).

**Image 21**

Adopting techniques from the Jingdezhen kilns in southeastern China, Korean potters began to produce white porcelain during the early Chosŏn period, in the first half of the fifteenth century, and this ware remained in demand throughout the dynasty. Chosŏn rulers considered white porcelain—in particular, the undecorated monochrome wares—as the embodiment of the austere tastes associated with Neo-Confucianism, the official ideology of the new state (see **images 22, 24**).

**Images 22, 24**

Although plain, white-bodied porcelains were favored throughout the Chosŏn period, decorated versions of the same wares were also produced in large quantities. Blue-and-white ware, a type of porcelain decorated under the glaze with a design painted in cobalt-oxide, began to be manufactured in Korea by the second half of the fifteenth century. The high costs of importing cobalt from China eventually led to the use of a domestically produced pigment. Other developments in the ornamentation of Chosŏn porcelain ware include underglaze iron-brown and copper-red painting (see **image 23**). The wide variety of shapes, designs, and decorative techniques in porcelains produced in Korea beginning in the eighteenth century was spurred, in part, by the weakening influence of Confucian teaching on the arts.

**Image 23**

It is interesting to note that overglaze polychrome-enamel decoration of porcelain, which became popular in China during the Ming dynasty and later in Japan, was never used in Korea. The absence of such colorful wares may be due to the lingering influence of Neo-Confucianism, which shunned ostentatious display. It is also possible that the additional labor involved in producing these wares discouraged their manufacture.

Although officially out of favor, Buddhism remained the chief religious faith among upper-class women and the common people, and continued to be an important cultural force in Korean society. Buddhist images, some cast in bronze but many carved in wood and then gilded or lacquered, were produced for private devotion as well as placement in temples. Buddhist paintings of the period, some of which include depictions of Korean landscape and commoners, consist mainly of murals and large hanging scrolls. In contrast to Koryŏ Buddhist paintings, they tend to be brighter in color and less refined in execution.

Image 29



**Figure 8.** Chŏng Sŏn (1676–1759), *Three Dragon Waterfall at Mount Naeyŏn*. Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), first half of the 18th century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper; 53 × 22½ in. (134.7 × 56.2 cm). Ho-Am Art Museum, Yongin

The use of hemp and linen as a painting medium, in place of the more costly silk used during the Koryŏ, also reflects the change in patronage (see image 29). The growing popularity of the meditative Sŏn (Chn. Chan; Jpn. Zen) Buddhism led to an increase in the production of portraits of Buddhist priests, which were objects of veneration (see image 30).

Because so few of the paintings survive, little is known about secular, or non-Buddhist, painting styles and practices before the fifteenth century. Chosŏn kings employed skilled painters, who were chosen through an examination system and worked under the Bureau of Painting (Tohwawŏn, later renamed Tohwasŏ). Court painters were required to execute a wide variety of paintings, most of which were designed to serve didactic and moralistic purposes. These ranged from works depicting rituals, ceremonies, and gatherings of elder statesmen to portraits and paintings of auspicious symbols.

In the early Chosŏn period, landscape painting, practiced by professional painters as well as the literati, flourished and developed in a new direction. Drawing on the native Koryŏ painting tradition and adapting recently introduced styles and themes from China's Ming dynasty, Chosŏn artists began to produce landscape paintings with more distinctly Korean characteristics. The single most important landscapist of this time was the court painter An Kyŏn (active ca. 1440–70), whose innovative style exerted tremendous influence both during his lifetime and in later generations (see images 25A, B). Ink-monochrome paintings of landscapes and traditional literati subjects such as bamboo, plum, and grapevine remained a favored form of artistic expression throughout the dynasty (see images 26, 28).

The eighteenth century saw the development of two new types of Korean painting: true-view landscape painting and genre painting, both of which were inspired by the new emphasis on Korean cultural and historical identity. True-view landscapes (*chin'gyŏng*, or “real scenery”) represented a trend in painting that advocated the depiction of actual Korean scenery as an alternative to the classical themes of Chinese painting practiced by earlier Korean artists (fig. 8). Genre painting likewise focused attention on the distinctive characteristics of Korean culture and society in its vivid portrayal of the daily life of all social classes — carpenters, woodworkers, and farmers as well as courtesans and *yangban* aristocrats.

### Symbolic Images and Folk Art

Decorative paintings and objects reflecting native beliefs and customs have been appreciated by kings, aristocrats, and scholar-officials as well as commoners throughout Korean history. Whether created for display at court, in gentry or ordinary households, or in religious settings, decorative or folk art is a long-admired tradition in Korea and an integral part of Korean culture. Most surviving folk art was produced during the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Popular customs and beliefs form the core of folk art themes. Motifs found in paintings as well as on ceramics, lacquerware, furniture, and personal ornaments symbolize such concerns as long life, good luck, and protection against evil spirits. Many of these auspicious symbols, including animals, birds, plants and flowers, fantastic rock formations, and mythical creatures, can be traced back to ancient Daoist traditions or to shamanism, the indigenous religion of Korea. Decorative paintings produced for Buddhist temples feature guardian kings and other protective deities. Among the most popular images in Buddhist paintings is the mountain spirit (Sansin), portrayed variously as a Confucian sage, a Buddhist saint, or a Daoist immortal accompanied by a tiger. During the Chosŏn period, court painters employed at the Bureau of Painting produced large, colorful paintings of auspicious motifs, often in the form of a folding screen, for display at palace ceremonies or as gifts to government ministers presented at the new year or on their birthdays.

**Image 32**

In Neo-Confucian society, men and women, from the age of seven, lived in separate quarters in the family compound. Women's quarters were furnished with paintings, textiles, ceramics, and other decorative and utilitarian items featuring brightly colored flowers, animals associated with marital joy, and images symbolic of numerous progeny (see **image 32**). In contrast, the men's quarters might contain a folding screen of calligraphy, with characters representing such Confucian virtues as filial piety, loyalty, and righteousness, or a *ch'aekkŏri* screen depicting scholarly paraphernalia—books, bronzes, ceramics, and the “four treasures” of the scholar's studio (paper, brush, inkstone, and ink stick). Special paintings and objects were also made to celebrate the birth of children, weddings, New Year's Day, and harvest festivals, as well as to commemorate the deceased at funerals and memorial services.

Korean folk or decorative painting is distinguished by its spontaneity, vitality, and bold use of bright, saturated colors. The images are

typically large, covering most of the painting's surface, with little concern for the illusion of receding space or a sense of volume.

#### Notes

1. For a detailed survey of Korean prehistory and history from the Paleolithic period through the Unified Silla dynasty, see Nelson, *The Archaeology of Korea*.
2. In the middle of the eleventh century, during the Song period (960–1279), a Chinese commoner invented a method for movable-type printing using earthenware type. Although revived from time to time in subsequent periods, movable-type printing never took hold in China, as the conventional woodblock printing proved more efficient and economical in producing texts that required the use of vast numbers of characters. One of the earliest recorded Korean works printed in metal movable type is a volume concerning Confucian ritual published in about 1234. A Buddhist text printed in Korea in 1377 and now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, is the oldest extant book printed in this manner. For the development and use of movable-type printing in China and Korea, see Denis Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China* (New York: Frederic C. Beil, 1983), pp. 74–84.
3. Some art historians use the term “folk art” for all colorful, decorative paintings; others prefer to limit the term to items produced for commoners. While the decorative paintings used by the upper classes and commoners share many images and symbols, certain themes such as the Five Peaks and the Sun and Moon were originally reserved for use by the king.

## Artists and Materials

### Artists and Artisans

Beginning in the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) and continuing through the Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), highly talented painters were employed in the court bureau called Ch’aejŏn (literally, “office of coloring”). Although the exact nature of this bureau is unclear, it was headed by an inspector under whom were placed two categories of painters, charged with meeting the official demand for paintings and other decorative items. Exceptionally talented craftsmen were given the title *paksa*, a general term referring to one with expert knowledge of a given field, and apparently had the rank of mid-level officials.

During the early Koryŏ period (918–1392), as a result of a major change in the governmental system, the official status of artisans was downgraded and they were called simply *taegongchang* (master craftsmen). It is during this period that the name Tohwawŏn (Bureau of Painting) first appears in Korean documents. Under the Confucian system promoted by the succeeding Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), artisans were considered to be manual workers, a classification that placed them below intellectuals and farmers but above merchants. Painters, however, were more highly regarded, as calligraphy and painting were viewed as fine arts, in contrast to objects, which served a utilitarian and decorative function. Literati painting, practiced and appreciated by members of the *yangban* class, was also highly valued. An indication of the high status of painters and calligraphers among the educated elite, as well as the professional painters in the court Bureau of Painting, in the late Chosŏn period is that they were the only artists who routinely signed their works.

Both the Koryŏ and the Chosŏn governments maintained authority over craftsmen in state-supervised workshops located in the capital and the provinces, thus ensuring an adequate supply of high-quality goods for the royal court. Records tell of thousands of painters, potters, metalsmiths, and lacquermakers being employed and supervised by the court as well as by aristocrats and Buddhist temples to produce fine objects for personal adornment, domestic decoration, religious ceremonies, and political enhancement. The large government work-



shops trained younger members of their staff, who were usually selected through an examination process. Craftsmen of a humbler status worked in hereditary workshops and were trained by their seniors.<sup>1</sup>

### Ceramics

The Korean peninsula is well endowed with the necessary materials to make low- and high-fired ceramics: good-quality clay and kaolin, as well as abundant supplies of wood required to fuel the kilns. While pottery was produced throughout the peninsula, the most productive and technologically advanced kilns were located in the south.

The earliest known pottery in Korea dates to about 7000 B.C. in the Neolithic period (ca. 7000–ca. 10th century B.C.). The earliest pots were handcrafted of sandy clay and fired in open or semi-open kilns at relatively low temperatures of about 700°C. These porous, unglazed wares vary in shape and decoration according to the region from which they come. For example, vessels excavated from dwelling sites north of the Taedong River, in what is now North Korea, typically have a flat bottom and minimal or no decoration, while those unearthed south of the river, commonly known as comb-pattern earthenwares (*chūlmun t'ogi*), have a coniform or round base and are decorated with incised linear patterns (see fig. 1). Comb-pattern wares are considered the most representative type of ceramic from Korea's Neolithic period. Other, less common methods of decoration include stamping, punching, pinching, and applied relief. The advent of the Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.) brought changes in the material, shape, and function of ceramic wares. Vessels from that period include both red and black burnished wares (see image 1) and painted wares, probably produced for ritual purposes.

Image 1

The technique of producing high-fired ceramics is thought to have been introduced to the peninsula from China around the end of the first millennium B.C., possibly through the Chinese commanderies in northern Korea. Within the next few centuries, an improved climbing-kiln technology imported from China made it possible to achieve the higher temperatures (in excess of 1000°C) needed to produce stoneware (*kyōngjil t'ogi*).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Chinese stoneware, the Korean stoneware of the Three Kingdoms period is the earliest known high-fired ware in the world. In contrast to the soft, low-fired earthenware (*wajil t'ogi*) of earlier periods, these wares have a harder and more finely textured clay body. Most of the pottery found in tombs

and residential sites of this period is gray in color, which results from the restriction of the flow of oxygen into the kiln's firing chamber. By the end of the Three Kingdoms period, ash glazes were produced. These initially happened by accident when ash fell onto the pottery during firing and fused with the ceramic surface, leaving a thin, mottled yellowish green glaze. Once glaze became desirable, ceramic wares were intentionally dusted with ash before firing. By the Unified Silla, pottery vessels coated with glaze were made (see **images 3, 6** ).

**Images 3, 6**



**Figure 9.** Celadons were fired in multichamber, tunnel-like kilns built along the side of a hill.

Koryŏ celadon ware, which reached its height of production both artistically and technically in the early twelfth to the early thirteenth century, owes much of its initial inspiration to Chinese ceramic production. Celadon or green-glazed (*ch'ŏngja*) ware is stoneware covered with a glaze containing a slight amount of iron-oxide and fired in a reduced oxygen atmosphere to achieve a grayish blue-green color.<sup>3</sup> Koryŏ potters in time developed a thinner, more translucent glaze than that used in Chinese celadons, which allowed the carved, incised, and inlaid designs to be seen clearly. Studies of more than 200 kiln sites, most of which are located in southwestern Korea, indicate that celadons were fired in multichamber, tunnel-like kilns built along the side of a hill. At one of the largest kiln sites excavated in Korea (Yun'in-gun, Sŏ-ri, in Kyŏnggi-do Province), the primary wood-burning ovens were located at the base, but smaller fires situated along the length of the kiln supplied additional heat (fig. 9).

**Images 10, 12**

Korean potters produced celadon wares in a variety of shapes, and employed several techniques in decorating these objects. Early celadons were left unornamented or were decorated with designs that were incised, carved, or mold-impressed (see **images 10, 12** ). Koryŏ potters are renowned for their use of inlay (*sanggam*) in the decoration of ceramics. The inlay technique, possibly derived from Korean metal inlay and inlaid lacquerware, consists of incising or carving a design into the unbaked, leather-hard clay body and filling in the resulting depressions with a white or black substance to highlight the design (see **images 11, 13, 14** ). Figural celadons—in the form of human figures, birds and animals (such as waterfowl, monkeys, lions, and turtles), fruits, and imaginary beasts—represent some of the finest wares dating from the peak period of Koryŏ celadon production.

**Images 11, 13, 14**

*Punch'ŏng* ware, initially inspired by the Koryŏ celadon tradition, was made in the early Chosŏn dynasty, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The term *punch'ŏng* refers to a stoneware made of a grayish blue clay that is covered with white slip and then coated with

**Image 21**

a transparent glaze. The glaze contains a slight amount of iron, which when fired results in a bluish green color. *Punch'ŏng* decorated under the glaze with inlaid and stamped designs was popular through the fifteenth century. Sgraffito-decorated ware was produced from around the middle of the fifteenth century (see **image 21** ), followed by incised as well as iron-brown painted designs

White porcelain (*paekcha*) is primarily made of kaolin, a clay containing quartz, feldspar, and limestone. It is covered with a clear glaze and fired at a temperature in excess of 1200°C. The ware is nonporous, and has a metallic ring when struck. The color of white porcelain may vary depending upon the date and place of production as well as the composition of the clay and glaze.

**Image 24**

Plain white porcelain was preferred during the beginning of the Chosŏn era, in keeping with the austere tastes and sensibilities associated with Neo-Confucianism, which was promoted by the government as the official state ideology. The best grade of porcelain, reserved for the use of the royal court and aristocracy, was manufactured primarily at the official kilns in Kwangju-gun, Kyŏnggi Province, near modern-day Seoul. The glaze color of early Chosŏn porcelain is snowy white or slightly grayish; white ware made toward the end of the dynasty has a bluer or milkier cast (see **image 24** ).

**Image 23**

Chosŏn potters also produced porcelain wares decorated with designs painted under the glaze in cobalt-blue, iron-brown, and copper-red. Cobalt, which produces a rich blue color after firing, was used in Korea in the decoration of porcelain by the mid-fifteenth century. Blue-and-white porcelain was initially restricted to use by the royal household and the aristocracy, and made in official kilns under government supervision. Partly because of the high cost of cobalt-oxide pigment, which was imported from China before the development of domestic sources, the decoration of many of these wares was executed not by potters but by professional court painters, who visited the kilns twice a year. Underglaze copper-red decorated porcelain, produced at provincial kilns, reached its peak of popularity in the eighteenth century (see **image 23** ). Painting in underglaze copper-red was more difficult to accomplish than its counterpart decorative medium, underglaze cobalt-blue, because copper readily oxidizes and turns to shades of gray or black during firing, or even disappears entirely.<sup>4</sup>

## Lacquer

Lacquer objects, which incorporate a labor-intensive yet surprisingly adaptable and flexible method of decoration, were among the most prized articles in ancient East Asia. Because of their fragility, however, very few Korean lacquer objects from before the Chosŏn period have survived. The earliest extant Korean pieces, a holder for a writing brush and undecorated black lacquer vessels, were unearthed from a Bronze Age burial site dated to the first century B.C. Some of the most exquisite examples of inlaid lacquerware were produced in the Koryŏ period (see **image 9**).

### Image 9

East Asian lacquer is made from the sap of the lacquer tree (*rhus verniciflua*), which is native to central and southern China and possibly to Japan. The essential component of lacquer sap is called urushiol after the Japanese term *urushi*, meaning “lacquer.” Urushiol polymerizes when exposed to oxygen. Once dried, it is remarkably resistant to water, acid, and, to a certain extent, heat. Therefore, it is ideal for use as an adhesive and binding agent and as a protective coating on all kinds of materials, especially wood, bamboo, textiles, and leather.

For lacquer to set or “dry,” it must be exposed to high humidity (75 to 85 percent) and a temperature between 70° and 80° Fahrenheit. Although raw lacquer is a highly toxic substance that in most people induces an allergic reaction similar to that caused by poison ivy, it becomes inert once it is dry. The very property that makes lacquer such a fine coating material also necessitates application of the raw lacquer in very thin layers so that it can dry properly. If the lacquer layer is thick, as soon as its surface dries, the lacquer beneath is cut off from contact with the humid air and will remain forever liquid.

Lacquer sap is gray in color when first tapped from the tree, but on exposure to light and heat it turns dark brown — the color of raw lacquer — and ultimately a dull brownish black. The color can be altered by the addition of pigments while the lacquer is still liquid. The most commonly used pigments are the mineral cinnabar for red, carbon ink or an iron compound for black, and orpiment for yellow. Not all mineral pigments mix well with lacquer, however.

A distinction can be made between two broad classes of lacquer objects. In the first category, lacquer is applied purely for the purposes of protection and decoration and does not change the form of the decorated object beneath; examples are wooden chairs and leather armor decorated with lacquer. An object in the second category is made mostly of lacquer, supported by a nonlacquer core or substrate. Typical of this

Images 9, 20

type are lacquer boxes and containers, of which the core can be almost any material—perhaps hemp cloth, wood, or metal—encased in a lacquer coating so thick that it modifies the object’s form, giving it a plump, fleshy shape that can be decorated by carving in addition to the usual techniques of inlay and painting (see **images 9, 20** ). In the first category, the strength of the object depends on its material and method of construction, and the lacquer serves to protect its surface. Objects in the second category are essentially fragile, because the thick layers of lacquer lack tensile strength and are liable to crack and flake off the core surface.<sup>5</sup>

### Painting

Bronze Age depictions of humans and animals, in the form of petroglyphs, offer the earliest extant evidence of painting in the Korean peninsula. But it is in the wall paintings of tombs of the late Koguryō period (37 B.C.–668 A.D.) that we find the true beginnings of Korean painting. The wall murals, painted in the tombs’ interior chambers, depict hunting scenes and a variety of illustrations of daily life, showing both the nobility and commoners.

Images 15–18

Although few paintings survive from the Three Kingdoms period or the subsequent Unified Silla dynasty, Buddhist devotional works produced during the Koryō dynasty include lavishly detailed paintings of Buddhist deities and illuminated transcriptions of canonical texts (see **images 15–18** ). Evidence of painting in Korea is more complete for the Chosŏn dynasty. Early Chosŏn painting is represented by the landscapes of the preeminent painter An Kyŏn (active ca. 1440–70), who drew upon Chinese themes, techniques, and critical traditions (see **images 25 A, B**). From his innovative interpretations of these sources, An Kyŏn developed a distinctively Korean landscape idiom that was continued by his many followers.

Images 25 A, B

Works that can be confidently assigned to individual artists become more numerous in the middle and late Chosŏn period. Among the most important of these painters is Chŏng Sŏn (1676–1759), traditionally acknowledged as the leading exponent of true-view landscape, a new trend in Korean painting in the eighteenth century that advocated the depiction of actual Korean scenery as an alternative to the classical themes of Chinese painting (see fig. 8, p. 61). Other subjects favored by Chosŏn painters include scholarly themes, such as plum and bamboo, and portraits. Genre painting, one of whose master practitioners was Kim Hong-do (1745–1806), portrayed the daily life of the Korean people in all its variety and liveliness.<sup>6</sup>

Images 15, 16, 18,  
25, 26, 28, 29

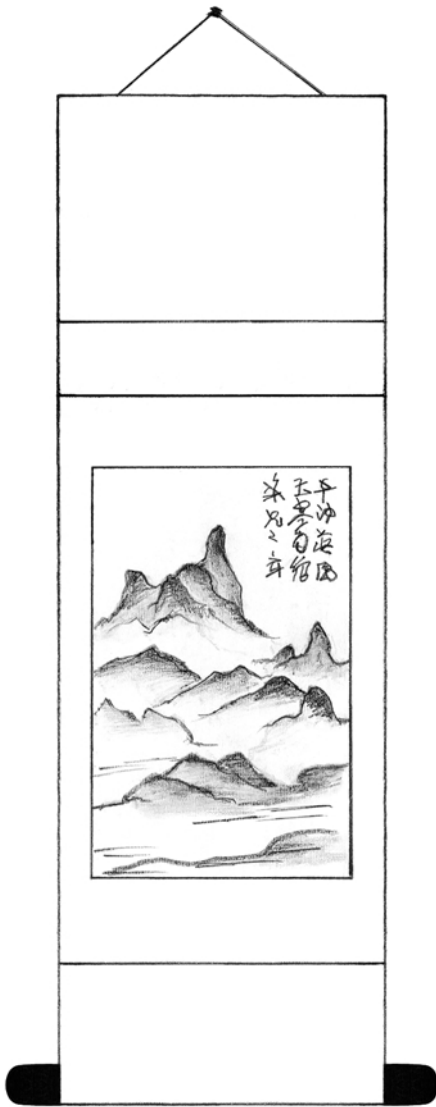


Figure 10. Illustration of a hanging scroll and mounting

Image 28

Portable Korean paintings were produced as hanging scrolls (vertical compositions; see images 15, 16, 18, 25A, B, 26, 28, 29), handscrolls (horizontal paintings), fans, or album leaves mounted in a book. Paintings could also be attached to folding screens. These works were executed on silk or paper using an animal-hair brush. The image itself was made with black ink or pigments. Once the painting was created, usually on a flat, horizontal surface, a mounter would strengthen it by attaching several sheets of paper (applied with water-soluble rice glue that can be removed to allow future remountings) and secure it to a mounting finished with silk borders. East Asian paintings are sensitive to light and, thus, generally displayed for limited periods of time (fig. 10).<sup>7</sup>

Following the Chinese landscape tradition of the Northern Song period (960–1127), Korean painters typically employed three basic schemata in their landscape paintings: a scene dominated by vertical elements, a panoramic view filled by a series of horizontal elements, and a composition combining the two (see images 25A, B). In these paintings, the impression of recession is achieved simply by shifts in the scale of landscape elements, from the foreground to the middle ground to the far distance. Instead of modeling forms as if illuminated by a consistent light source, as in Western art, painters built up forms using contrasts of light and dark inkwash and texturing. Rather than presenting a scene with a single vanishing point, as in Western one-point perspective, artists visualized each composition from several vantage points. This constantly shifting perspective allows viewers to imagine themselves traveling through the picture space.

During the Song dynasty, the Chinese educated elite who painted and practiced calligraphy for their own enjoyment advocated that artists pursue not merely “form likeness”—that is, formal resemblance to what the eye sees in reality—but the inner spirit of their subject. By the succeeding Yuan dynasty (1272–1368), this ideal was firmly entrenched among both Chinese and Korean scholar-artists. Such artists subordinated representational goals in favor of self-expression through the use of calligraphic brushwork. By reducing painting to a set of brush conventions that could be varied and inflected in the same manner as an individual’s handwriting, they transformed the act of painting into a highly personal vehicle for expressing emotions. Painting, like writing, became a “heart print” of the artist (see image 28).<sup>8</sup> The Korean educated elite of the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods considered painting and calligraphy as two of the Four Accomplishments (in addition to music and a board game of strategy called *paduk*) that were

expected of a learned man. Favorite painting themes included landscapes and the group of plants known as the Four Gentlemen — bamboo, orchid, plum blossom, and chrysanthemum.

**Brush.** East Asian painting and calligraphy brushes are made of a variety of animal hairs such as horse, fox, weasel, and rabbit. Long hairs form a flexible point that can produce a fine or thick line. Beneath the long external hairs is a tuft of shorter hairs that serve to hold the ink or pigment. The brushes are fitted with a cylindrical handle, often made of wood or bamboo.

**Ink.** Traditionally ink was made of a carbon-based material, often pine soot, that was then mixed with an adhesive and other substances. The ink was dried and pressed into a cake or stick, which was rubbed against a very fine surface such as an inkstone, while mixing with water to produce liquid ink for painting or writing.

Images 17, 29

**Paper.** Although the technology came to the peninsula from China, Koreans developed the ability to make superior paper that was highly regarded throughout East Asia. Most paper was made of mulberry pulp, although hemp and rice straw were also used (see images 17, 29 ). The establishment of the Office of Papermaking (Chiso) by the Koryŏ government played an important role in the development of the high-quality thick, hard, and smooth paper for which Korean papermakers became renowned.

Images 15, 16, 18, 29, 30

**Pigments.** Most pigments used for paintings were made by grinding minerals into a powder and then combining them with glue and other materials. Like ink, mineral pigments were dried and compressed into cakes, which were then ground while mixing with water to produce a form usable for painting. Frequently used pigments were cinnabar red, lead white, and malachite green (see images 15, 16, 18, 29, 30 ). Colored pigments were also derived from plants: for example, lotus (light green), rattan (yellow), and indigo (blue). After the mid-nineteenth century, imported artificial pigments were also used.

**Seals.** An artist might apply one or more personal seals to a painting in place of or in addition to his or her signature. Seals are made from a variety of materials (stone being the most common), carved in relief or intaglio, and impressed on the painting with a viscous, oil-based cinnabar-red seal paste. Seal legends might consist of the artist's sobriquet, a studio name, or a phrase. Similarly, collectors often impressed their seals on paintings to indicate their ownership and appreciation, thereby marking the painting's provenance and passage through time.

Images 15, 16, 18,  
25, 26, 28, 30

Poems, historical notes, or dedications might also be written on the painting itself or the mounting by the artist, a collector, or a connoisseur. **Silk.** Silkworms are native to northern China, as are the mulberry trees that provide their food source. The cocoons made by silkworms consist of one long silk filament, which can be spun into a fabric that is extremely fine, elastic, and smooth (see images 15, 16, 18, 25 A, B, 26, 28, 30 ). Silk cloth, silkworms, and the technique of producing silk cloth were most likely introduced into Korea from China during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.). The oldest surviving piece of Korean silk dates to the sixth century.

Images 15, 16, 18, 29

### **Buddhist Paintings**

Buddhist images were painted on silk during the Koryŏ period, and more commonly on hemp, linen, or heavy paper during the Chosŏn period (see images 15, 16, 18, 29 ). The silk used for Koryŏ Buddhist paintings (*hwagyon*, or “picture silk”) was specially woven, with the warp and weft well spaced so that the resulting weave was more transparent than ordinary silk cloth and allowed the pigments to permeate evenly throughout. It is believed to have been dyed a pale tea color, obtained by mixing yellow and a small amount of purple. The prepared silk was then framed and sized with a solution of alum and animal glue. From a full-scale cartoon, or drawing, visible through the silk cloth from behind, the outlines were drawn on the picture surface in black ink or red pigment, after which the colors were applied.

Colored pigments were first painted on the back of the silk — cinnabar red and malachite green on the garment areas, lead white and ocher on the flesh and other remaining areas— and subsequently to the picture surface. The application of pigments on the back of the silk served to fix the pigments on the front and thereby enhanced the intensity and volume of the colors. In addition, the alkalinity of the ocher aided in conservation. (This technique of painting color on both sides of the picture surface was invented in China, and both Korean and Japanese painters adopted it for religious paintings that required opaque and intense colors.) Finally, when all the other colors had been applied and contour and drapery lines completed, gold was used. When a painting was finished, an “eye-dotting ceremony” was held to give life to the images.



## Calligraphy

The Chinese written language and the art of calligraphy were introduced into Korea through the military commanderies established in the northern part of the peninsula during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), at the end of the second century B.C. Koreans used five primary script types. Standard script (*haesŏ*; Chn. *kaishu*), in which each stroke is separately executed and clearly defined, was used for documents and texts that demanded clarity and legibility. Running (*haengsŏ*; Chn. *xingshu*) and cursive (*ch'osŏ*; Chn. *caoshu*) scripts, in which characters are abbreviated and strokes linked in continuous motions of the brush, allowed greater freedom for artistic expression and was used for personal communications and other nonofficial purposes. The earlier script styles known as small seal (*sojŏn*; Chn. *xiao zhuan*) and clerical (*yesŏ*; Chn. *lishu*) were usually reserved for special purposes, such as commemorative plaques or personal seals. The Neo-Confucian scholar-officials who dominated the Chosŏn period prized the ability to express themselves eloquently in classical literary Chinese written in a refined hand. Although initially inspired by the work of their Chinese counterparts, the Korean educated elite developed numerous variations and styles that elevated calligraphy to a fine art in their country.

### Notes

1. See the essays on “Status of the Artist” and “Patronage” by Hong Sŏn P'yo and Kim Kumja Paik, respectively, in Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 18, pp. 258–59. See also Yi Sŏng-mi, “Art Training and Education,” *ibid.*, pp. 380–81.
2. In East Asia “low-fired ware” customarily refers to earthenware and “high-fired ware” to stoneware and porcelain.
3. “Celadon” is the term generally used in the West for green-glazed ceramic wares. This term is derived from the color of a shepherd’s costume in a popular play written by Honoré d’Urfé (1567–1625).
4. For a detailed description of the shapes, designs, and decorative techniques in Koryŏ and Chosŏn ceramics, see Itoh, *Korean Ceramics from The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka*.
5. For an excellent and authoritative study of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean lacquer objects, see Watt and Ford, *East Asian Lacquer: The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection*.
6. For examples of paintings by Chŏng Sŏn and Kim Hong-do, see *Arts of Korea*, pp. 202–5, 211–13, and the Metropolitan Museum’s Web site <http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/Korea/koreaonline/index.html>.

7. More information about the formats, materials, and display methods of East Asian paintings may be found in the online feature *A Look at Chinese Painting in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* ([www.metmuseum.org/explore/Chinese/html\\_pages/index.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/Chinese/html_pages/index.htm)).
8. For a full description and history of painting styles associated with China's scholar-officials, see Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

## Korean Traditional Music

Although music making in Korea is as old as the presence of people on the peninsula, the earliest evidence of the practice is provided in Chinese historical records, which tell of merry farmers' songs and dances, and in tomb furnishings and wall paintings from the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.). Korean music includes three-quarter time, in contrast to the duple rhythms preferred in China and Japan. Until at least the fifteenth century, music notation consisted of a page of grids with performance notes written in Chinese characters.

Korean traditional music can be divided into two broad categories: court music and folk music. (Music played to accompany Buddhist and shamanistic ceremonies forms a third category.) Music performed at court and for the aristocracy accompanied Confucian rituals, banquets, or military events and tended to be stately and slow, in keeping with the solemnity of the occasions. Singing and dancing often accompanied court music, which derived from both native and Chinese sources. The term *tang-ak*, referring to China's Tang dynasty (618–907), is usually used for foreign court music, while the term *hyang-ak* refers to court music that has native Korean origins.

Folk music, including songs and instrumental compositions for farmers' festivals and popular enjoyment, is generally freer in mood and style than court music. Two of the most widely enjoyed types of folk music are the dramatic operalike *p'ansori* and *sanjo*, which are a form of chamber music played by a small ensemble. Folk music is often accompanied by dance performances or other types of entertainment such as games and storytelling and typically varies by region.

Korean music employs approximately sixty different kinds of instruments, including flutes, drums, gongs, bells, and plucked and bowed stringed instruments. Although a few musicians crafted their own instruments, they were usually made by highly skilled specialists. East Asian musical instruments are traditionally categorized according to the primary material used in their manufacture: stone, skin, metal, silk, earth (pottery), bamboo, and wood. The three illustrations of musical instruments included in this resource (see **images 33–35**) show traditional instruments in the silk (*kayagŭm*), wood (*taep'yŏngso*

**Images 33–35**

and *pak*), skin (*changgo*), stone (*teukgyeong*), and metal (*ching* and *kkwaenggwari*) categories.

The Metropolitan Museum has a diverse selection of Korean musical instruments, including those used in court, military, and shamanistic religious ceremonies. These are on view in the Musical Instruments galleries, along with photographs of musicians dressed in traditional attire and playing the instruments displayed.

**For further information on Korean music and musical instruments, see:**

Korea Foundation. *Korean Cultural Heritage: Performing Arts*. Vol. 3.

Seoul: The Korea Foundation, 1997.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, 20 vols. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1984.

Song Bang-song. *Korean Music and Instruments*. Seoul: National Classical Music Institute.

Song Bang-song and Keith Pratt. "The Unique Flavor of Korean Music." *Korean Culture* 1, no. 3, pp. 4–14.

# Image Descriptions

The images of works of art and sites in this section can be accessed in digital format on the CD-ROM. With the exception of images 14 and 18, which are reproduced as posters, all the images are also provided in slide format. For the List of Images, see p. 161.



1

## 1. Jar

Bronze Age (ca. 10th–ca. 3rd century B.C.), ca. 4th century B.C. Burnished red earthenware; H. 5 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (14.6 cm). Gift of Hongnam Kim to commemorate the opening of the Arts of Korea Gallery, 1998 (1998.212)

Made of an iron-rich clay, this small jar has a bulbous shape and a flared rim typical of vessels of this type. The red color and lustrous surface were achieved by applying an iron-rich pigment called *sökkanju* to the surface of the vessel and then burnishing, or rubbing, the surface with a stone or other hard, smooth object before firing. Until recently, burnished red wares had been found only in stone cist or dolmen tombs (see fig. 3, p. 52). The latest excavations of residential sites have uncovered red burnished wares in such utilitarian forms as bowls and footed cups. Like the small globular jars found in tombs, these are made

of fine clay and have thin walls, suggesting that they were intended for ritual use. Burnished black wares in various shapes have also been found in tombs dating from the fourth to the third century B.C., but in fewer numbers than red wares.

Jars such as this were hand-crafted, with coils of clay laid in a spiral to form the walls of the vessel, and then smoothed using hands, a paddle, and a scraping tool. They were fired in an open or a semi-open kiln.

**Notice:** The smooth surface of the vessel and its bulbous form  
**Consider:** The assumption that ceramics made of finer materials and requiring more labor were reserved for ceremonial use

## 2. Bird-Shaped Vessel

Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), ca. late 2nd–3rd century. Earthenware; H. 12 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (32.7 cm), L. 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (35.2 cm). Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1997 (1997.34.1)

This stately bird-shaped vessel is among the earliest extant sculptural objects made in Korea. Such footed vessels may have derived their form from earlier Chinese bronzes. In Chinese funerary art of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–9 A.D.), birds with fantastic tails and heads served as vehicles that carried souls from the earthly realm to that of the immortals. Korean bird-shaped vessels, most of which have been found at burial sites in the southern part of the peninsula in the area once controlled by the small group of city-states known as the Kaya Federation (42–562 A.D.), were probably intended for use in ritual ceremonies



2

The vessel would have been filled with liquid through the opening in the back, and the tail served as the spout. The low-fired grayish white body clearly distinguishes these vessels from ceramic objects intended for everyday use. This example illustrates the sophisticated blending of the naturalistic and the formal that characterizes Korea's ceramic tradition. The bird's curvaceous body provides a striking contrast to the prominent, angular crest, protruding ears, and long, narrow beak.

Kaya tombs have yielded a wide array of sculpted pottery objects, including vessels in the shapes of birds and animals, mounted warriors, and chariots. These objects, along with other types of pottery vessels, jewelry, weapons, and ceremonial regalia, were placed in the tombs to serve the deceased in the afterlife. While animal- or bird-shaped vessels were also produced

in the neighboring kingdoms of Silla (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) and Paekche (18 B.C.–660 A.D.), the largest number were made in the Kaya Federation. The rounded contours and the inward curving foot found on this bird-shaped vessel are distinctive features of Kaya ceramic tomb wares.

**Notice:** The contours of the vessel and the interplay of realism and abstraction

**Consider:** The symbolic role of animals in ritual objects

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 3, pp. 47–48

### 3. Stand

Three Kingdoms period, Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), 5th–6th century. Stoneware with traces of incidental ash glaze; H. 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (37.5 cm). Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1997 (1997.34.23)

This large footed stand is an example of the gray stoneware vessels found in tombs from the fifth to sixth centuries and is the product of important technological advances in Korean ceramic production. With the exception of Chinese stoneware, the Korean stoneware (*kyōngjil t'ogi*) of the Three Kingdoms period is the earliest known high-fired ware in the world, requiring kiln temperatures in excess of 1000°C. These wares were produced in a wood-fired climbing kiln, a tunnel-shaped structure typically built up the side of a hill (see fig. 9, p. 66). This closed-kiln design, in contrast to the earlier



3

open or semi-open kiln, produced intense and steady heat and allowed control of the oxygen flow into the firing chamber. The characteristic gray color of Three Kingdoms stoneware is the result of the reduction of oxygen in the chamber. Unlike the soft, low-fired earthenware (*wajil t'ogi*) of earlier periods, stoneware is hard, dense, and impervious to liquids.

High-fired glazes represent another important development in ceramic technology in this period. At first accidentally produced by wood ash circulating in the kiln during firing, as seen on this stand, eventually these early ash glazes were produced deliberately.

This stand was made to support a round-bottomed bowl or jar used as a container for food or liquid. The base displays alternating rectangular perforations, a decorative scheme generally associated with Silla in contrast to the Kaya prefer-

ence for triangular cutouts. A pattern of wavy lines is incised on the exterior of the deep bowl as well as the base. The stand's large size, erect shape, and well-ordered decoration are evidence of the potter's technical skill.

Although they may have been used in domestic settings, stands with pedestal bases and footed vessels are usually found in tombs and were presumably used in ceremonial presentations of food to the deceased. These new types of ritual vessels are in part the result of changes in mortuary practices. They may also reflect the influence of Chinese material culture transmitted through the Han military commandery of Lelang, in northern Korea, which remained a Chinese colonial bastion on the peninsula for over four hundred years (108 B.C.–313 A.D.).

The vessel forms and the technological advancements in the pro-

duction of stoneware during the Three Kingdoms period were transmitted to Japan most likely through trade and the immigration of Korean craftsmen. The Kaya Federation, which was in close contact with the Japanese islands to the south and southeast by sea, was especially influential in this process.<sup>1</sup>

**Notice:** The balanced proportions of this stand and the well-ordered decoration

**Consider:** The suitability of the form and decoration of this stand to its ritual function

Note

1. The production of gray stoneware in Japan, which dates from the Kofun period (ca. 3rd century – 538), in the mid-fifth century, marked a dramatic change from the low-fired, reddish-colored ware of the previous Jōmon and Yayoi periods. Known as Sueki—*from sueru* (to offer)



#### 4. Pair of Earrings

Three Kingdoms period, Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) or Kaya Federation (42–562 A.D.), 6th century. Gold; H. 4½ in. (10.5 cm). Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1943 (43.49.5,6)

The pair of earrings illustrated here represents the more elaborate style of earring developed in the sixth century from the simple and elegant Kaya type of the late fourth to early fifth century.<sup>2</sup> Its middle section contains a globular bead and three small leaves, similar to the earlier Kaya styles. The bottom section, attached to the middle section by two short chains, has twin pendants of a triangular seed shape, resembling beechnuts, a variety of which is known in Korea. The top section, which is complete, consists of a fat, hollow ring and an interlocking middle ring.

In the Three Kingdoms period, royalty and the aristocracy acquired

luxury goods not only for personal enjoyment but also as symbols of power and political authority. The large quantities of exquisite jewelry and other objects for personal use, as well as weapons and horse trappings, made of precious materials that have been recovered from tombs of this period attest to the elegant taste and impressive wealth of the upper classes. The most sumptuous of these luxury objects are those excavated from fifth- and sixth-century royal tombs in present-day Kyōngju, the site of the capital of Silla, then known as Kūmsōng, or “city of gold.” These tombs have revealed enormous quantities of pure gold objects—personal ornaments such as earrings, bracelets, and finger rings, along with intricately crafted crowns, caps, belts, and shoes, many of which are embellished with jade.<sup>3</sup> These items were worn by both men and women, although it

and *ki* (ware)—this new type of ceramic ware was derived directly from the grayware of the Three Kingdoms period in Korea. Sueki was created in a variety of shapes—for everyday use, for ceremonial functions, and for burial of the dead. A striking example can be found in Miyeko Murase, *Bridge of Dreams: The Mary Griggs Burke Collection of Japanese Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), pp. 14–15, and *The Paths Dreams Take: Japanese Art in the Collections of Mary Griggs Burke and The Metropolitan Museum of Art CD-ROM* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).



is not clear whether they were used by the living or made solely for the adornment of the deceased. The close similarities of earrings found in Japan with those from Kaya and Silla tombs suggest that such articles were imported from the southern Korean kingdoms.

Using, at least in part, domestic supplies of gold ore, Korean goldsmiths employed a variety of techniques, some of which originated with the Greek and Etruscan goldsmiths of southern Europe and western Asia. For example, the technique of granulation (forming and attaching grains of gold to a base to create a decorative relief pattern) is thought to have been transmitted to northern China in the first millennium B.C. and later to the Korean peninsula.<sup>4</sup> In the earrings illustrated here, granulation was applied to the surface of the middle and bottom sections to create decorative patterns.

**Notice:** The variety of techniques — such as hammering (to produce a flat sheet of gold), granulation, and double-looped wires — used to produce these earrings

**Consider :** The visual and aural impression of someone wearing these long, elegant earrings; the transmission of artistic techniques over long distances (typically, production methods move with the people who practice them, while foreign decorative motifs are transmitted by the movement of objects); how the importation of new technologies stimulates advancement and innovation in the production of material goods

#### Notes

2. See *Arts of Korea*, pl. 44A, p. 110.

3. The contents of Silla tombs have remained largely intact owing to the relatively impenetrable tomb structure, which was constructed of wood, sealed with clay, and covered with mounds of

stone and earth. The tombs of Koguryō and Paekche, which were based on a Chinese-style tomb design, had more accessible entrances and were thus more susceptible to plunder.

4. For recent studies of the transmission of sophisticated metalworking techniques over long distances, see Joan Aruz et al., eds., *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes* (New York and New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2000); Emma Bunker, “Gold Wire in Ancient China,” *Orientalions* (March 1997), pp. 94–95; and Pak, “The Origins of Silla Metalwork.”

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 44C, pp. 108, 110



5

### 5. Standing Buddha

Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), 8th century. Gilt bronze; H. 5½ in. (14 cm). Rogers Fund, 1912 (12.37.136)

This small gilt-bronze statue of a standing Buddha is typical of the numerous images made for private devotion during the Unified Silla period, a high point in the production of Buddhist sculpture in Korea. The figure's lowered eyes express a contemplative attitude, and the peaceful countenance a feeling of serenity. The right hand displays the gesture of reassurance (Skt. *abhayamudra*), while the left hand makes the sign of fulfilling wishes (Skt. *varadamudra*)—gestures that indicate that this Buddha might be Amitabha, who gained popularity in the Unified Silla period with the rise of Pure Land Buddhism. The enlightened status of the Buddha is indicated by the standard attributes (Skt.

*lakshana*) established in India a millennium earlier: the protuberance on the top of the head (Skt. *ushnisha*) demonstrates wisdom, the elongated earlobes represent nobility, and the neck folds symbolize auspiciousness (see fig. 1, p. 43).

Comparisons with other examples of the period suggest that this statue probably originally stood on a lotus-petal base and was backed by a mandorla (aureole). The figure was meant to be seen only from the front, as the back of the head and body is hollowed out, a feature often seen in small gilt-bronze images of the late Unified Silla.

Buddhism, supported by Korea's rulers during the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.) as part of a program to consolidate the power of their respective states, became the official religion throughout the Korean peninsula in the sixth century under the Unified Silla dynasty. Buddhism was lavishly

patronized by the court and aristocracy, and the increasingly close association of Buddhism and the state was marked by the construction of temples and the production of icons at royal expense.

**Notice:** The contrasts between the aspects of the statue's appearance that convey a sense of spirituality versus elegance

**Consider :** How this sculpture, given its size, facial characteristics, and frontal presentation, would function as an image for private meditation and prayer; how it would look standing on a base, backed by a mandorla, and surrounded by other ritual objects on an altar

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 68, pp. 150, 152



6

### 6. Bottle with Flattened Side

Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), 8th–10th century. Stoneware; H. 9 in. (22.9 cm). Purchase, Judith G. and F. Randall Smith Gift, 1994 (1994.226)

The early rulers of Unified Silla, enjoying the peace and stability that accompanied their unification of the Korean peninsula, pursued extensive contacts with Japan as well as with the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907). In addition, the numerous Buddhist pilgrims who, seeking greater understanding of their faith, traveled by land and sea from Korea to China and India also brought a greater awareness of other cultures to the peninsula.

The response of Unified Silla potters to foreign influences can be seen in this flat-sided stoneware bottle of the eighth to tenth century. The vessel's form probably derives from the leather flasks used by nomadic tribes in the northern

regions of the mainland; these flasks had slightly flared lips and flattened sides that facilitated their suspension from saddles. The surface of this vessel is unadorned, a characteristic of utilitarian stoneware containers in the Unified Silla and Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasties. The accidental splashes of ash glaze are the result of wood ash falling on the vessel during firing

**Notice:** The shape of this bottle; the striking variations in color caused by the accidental occurrence of the ash glaze

**Consider :** The adoption and adaptation of foreign vessel shapes

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 10, pp. 58–59

### 7A, 7B. Rafter Finial in the Shape of a Dragon Head and Wind Chime

Late Unified Silla (668–935)–early Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasty, 10th century. Gilt bronze; finial: L. 15½ in. (39.4 cm); chime: H. 15¼ in. (38.7 cm). Purchase, The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1999 Benefit Fund, and The Rosenkranz Foundation Inc. Gift, 1999 (1999.263.a,b)

This expertly cast, lavishly gilt bronze finial in the shape of a dragon's head and the accompanying bell are among the finest pieces of metalwork of the late Unified Silla and early Koryŏ dynasties, when Korean art had digested Chinese influence and developed a mature native style characterized by refinement and sumptuousness. The imposing dragon's head originally graced one of the corner rafters of a Buddhist temple or a royal hall. The bell, which



7A



7B

functioned as a wind chime, would have been suspended by an S-shaped iron hook from the iron loop at the dragon's mouth, which is corroded but intact (fig. 11). In contrast to larger bells, which were sounded by striking the surface with a wooden mallet or stake, this small bell had a metal-plate clapper (now lost) attached to its interior.

An auspicious symbol as well as a decorative motif, the dragon is one of the most popular images in Korean art and culture. It is viewed as a guardian figure that protects humans and wards off evil spirits. The dramatic features of this example — large staring eyes, flaring nostrils, wide-open mouth with protruding sharp fangs, and single horn — convey a fierceness and invincibility in keeping with such apotropaic functions. The theme of protectiveness is echoed in the decoration on the bell, which features a *svastika*, a Buddhist symbol of safety and peace.

**Notice:** The powerful appearance of the dragon head; the elegant shape and decoration of the bell

**Consider:** The visual effect of buildings ornamented with such elaborate gilt-bronze rafter finials and bells; the combination of Buddhist religious symbols with images of mythical creatures



**Figure 11.** The wind chime would have been suspended from the rafter finial in the manner suggested here.

#### 8. Mirror with Decoration of Figures in a Landscape

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). Bronze; Diam. 7 in. (17.8 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1925 (25.219.4)

Bronze technology was introduced into the Korean peninsula in about the tenth century B.C., most likely from the northern regions of the mainland. Among the most frequently found bronze artifacts excavated from Bronze Age sites in Korea are mirrors, the oldest of which date to the sixth to fourth century B.C. The early examples are decorated on the back (or non-reflective surface) with geometric patterns and are believed to have been employed in shamanistic rituals. The use and production of bronze mirrors were transmitted to Japan from Korea.

By the Koryŏ dynasty, mirrors became an item of daily use among the upper class. The geometric



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designs of ancient times were abandoned in favor of decorative motifs such as floral and plant scrolls, auspicious birds (crane and phoenix), dragon and clouds, and narrative themes in landscape settings. While there are only a few surviving examples of secular painting from the Koryŏ period, secondary evidence, such as the decoration of celadon ware (see [image 10](#)) and the ornamentation of this mirror, indicates that there was a sophisticated pictorial tradition.

Koryŏ bronze mirrors are found in tombs as funerary objects for the deceased, in Buddhist pagodas as ritual objects used in ceremonies to quell earth spirits, and as part of the luxurious household furnishings of the wealthy. This example, which has an elegant scalloped edge with pointed lobes, was probably made for the latter setting. It was fashionable to present mirrors of this type as wedding gifts and

to place them on elaborately decorated stands.

Bronze mirrors are made of copper, tin, and zinc—all of which are found in abundance in Korea. One side of this mirror (the reverse of that illustrated here) is polished to a high sheen to serve as the reflective surface. The other side, decorated with a narrative scene in a garden setting, has a knob in the center through which a cord could be looped to suspend the mirror. The scene depicts a figure, identified by his hat as a government official, crossing a bridge. On the opposite side of the bridge, a monk (with shaven head and carrying a staff) points the way. In the background beyond the bridge is a tree, probably a cypress, bearing distinctive clumps of leaves. On the right is a palace gate, in front of which is a seated figure flanked by two attendants. Another figure emerges from the half-opened gate.

Variations of this narrative scene are found on other mirrors made in China and Korea. The story depicted might be that of the legendary visit to the moon by the Tang dynasty (618–907) emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–56). According to this story, a bridge to the moon was created when two magicians who were entertaining the emperor threw a stick into the air. After the three men crossed to the moon, the moon princess came out of her palace to greet the emperor and ordered her servants to sing and dance for him.

**Notice:** The numerous elements of the narrative scene; the decorative features of the mirror

**Consider :** The function of this mirror as an illustration of a popular tale and as a luxury object



9

### 9. Incense Container

Koryō dynasty (918–1392), 10th–12th century. Lacquer with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell inlay (over pigment) and brass wires; H. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. (4.1 cm), L. 4 in. (10.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1925 (25.215.41a,b)

During the Koryō period, lacquerware with mother-of-pearl inlay reached a high point of technical and aesthetic achievement and was widely used by members of the aristocracy for Buddhist ritual implements and vessels, as well as horse saddles and royal carriages. Inlaid lacquers combine texture, color, and shape to produce a dazzling effect in both large and small objects. Although Korean lacquerware of the Koryō period was highly prized throughout East Asia, fewer than fifteen examples are known to have survived, one of which is this exquisite box in the Metropolitan Museum's collection.

This paucity of material is largely attributable to the fragility of lacquer objects and, to a certain extent, to wars and raids by foreign powers, notably those launched from Japan by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) in the late sixteenth century.

This three-tiered box is inlaid with mother-of-pearl and painted tortoiseshell on a black lacquer ground to produce a dense pattern of chrysanthemum flowers and foliate scrolls. The edges of the box are reinforced with twisted brass wire. The thin pieces of translucent tortoiseshell were painted on the reverse with red and yellow pigments, and the pieces then applied to the object with the painted side face down. The combined use of mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell is apparently peculiar to Korean lacquer, although it must be pointed out that the same combination inlaid into hardwood is seen on a

number of musical instruments, all probably of Chinese origin and dating from about the eighth century, in the Shōsō-in in Japan.

Extant contemporaneous objects in both celadon and lacquer suggest that this box was one of four that fit around a central round box. These objects have traditionally been identified as “cosmetic boxes,” though it is unlikely that all of them were used for this purpose. The presence of Buddhist imagery on related examples may indicate that boxes of this kind were part of a set of incense containers that encircled a box in which a Buddhist rosary might have been kept.

**Notice:** The visual effect of the different surface materials; how the black lacquer sets off the inlay materials; how the floral patterns cover the box

**Consider :** The time and care needed to prepare small pieces of tortoise-



10

shell and mother-of-pearl, then inlay them onto a lacquer ground; the relationship between inlaid lacquerwares and inlaid celadons (see images 11, 13, and 14), both hallmarks of Koryŏ art

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 55, pp. 128–29

#### 10. Wine Ewer

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), early 12th century. Stoneware with incised and carved design of geese, waterbirds, and reeds under celadon glaze; H. 10½ in. (26.6 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1927 (27.119.2)

Celadon wares are among the most widely admired of Korean ceramics. Produced in Korea during the Koryŏ dynasty, they reached the height of perfection in technology, form, and decoration between the early twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Around the ninth or tenth century, with the adoption of celadon production techniques used at the Yue kiln complex in modern Zhejiang Province in southeastern China, Koryŏ potters took the first step toward the manufacture of celadon ware.

Initially influenced by Chinese techniques and designs, the Korean celadon industry, centered in the

southwestern part of the peninsula, soon asserted its independence. By the beginning of the twelfth century, Korean potters had developed the refined forms, naturalistic designs, highly transparent glazes, and distinctive grayish blue-green color that won high praise from visiting Chinese, one of whom pronounced Korean celadons as “first under Heaven.”<sup>5</sup> The color of Koryŏ celadon ware is derived from the presence of small amounts of iron oxide in the glaze, which was fired in a reducing atmosphere.

Koryŏ potters initially decorated their celadon wares with incised or carved designs, as seen on this wine container. Carved decoration was executed using one of two methods. In the first method, a needle was employed to incise the design in the leather-hard clay, after which a sharp tool was pressed against the lines at an angle to emphasize the design. In the second method, the



11

clay around the edges of the design was carved away, causing the design to stand out in relief.

The popular motif of waterfowl among reeds combines Korean aesthetic sensibilities and a strong interest in naturalistic imagery. Scenes of this type also appear in Chinese paintings of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), with which the Koryŏ court maintained cultural and diplomatic ties.<sup>6</sup>

**Notice:** The tonal differences in the celadon glaze; the liveliness and naturalism of the plants and birds

**Consider:** The relationship between the ewer's form and the organization of the decoration; how the ewer's design would look as a painting on silk or paper

Notes

5. Xu Jing, *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* (Illustrated Record of the Chinese Embassy to the Koryŏ Court during the

Xuanhe Era), ed. and comp. by Imanishi Ryū (Gifu, Japan: Imanishi Shunjū, 1932). This text, written by the Chinese scholar-official Xu Jing (1091–1153), who visited the Koryŏ capital in 1123 as a member of a diplomatic mission from the court of the Northern Song emperor Huizong (r. 1101–25), is the oldest and most informative commentary on Koryŏ celadon ware. See Itoh, *Korean Ceramics from The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka*, pp. 9–13. For additional information on Koryŏ celadon ware, see *Arts of Korea*, pp. 233–415, and McKillop, *Korean Art and Design*, pp. 36–58. 6. An example of a Southern Song painting in the Metropolitan Museum's collection with a similar theme is *Egrets in Water Reeds* of the late twelfth century (47.18.77); published in Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York and New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 1992), pl. 46, p. 261.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 11, pp. 60–61

### 11. Oil Bottle

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), late 12th century. Stoneware with reverse inlaid design of peonies under celadon glaze; H. 2¼ in. (5.7 cm). Rogers Fund, 1917 (17.175.9)

The decoration of this small bottle is a rare example of the technique of reverse inlay. (For a description of the inlay technique in Koryŏ celadon ware, see [image 13](#).) The area around the design was carved away and the background then inlaid with a white substance, which, when the piece was glazed and fired, produced a green pattern against a cream-colored ground.

**Notice:** The contrast between the green and white colors; how the design complements the shape of the bottle

**Consider:** The skill and imagination required to reverse the inlay process





12

### 12. Melon-Shaped Wine Ewer

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), 12th century. Stoneware with carved and incised design of bamboo under celadon glaze; H. 8½ in. (21.6 cm). Gift of Mrs. Roger G. Gerry, 1996 (1996.471)

The graceful form, refined decoration, and lustrous blue-green glaze distinguish this ewer as one of the finest products of the Koryŏ celadon kilns at the peak of their production. The carved and incised decoration emulating the natural forms of melon and bamboo exemplifies the Korean practice of drawing on nature for inspiration when working in clay.

This ewer, probably made to hold wine, originally may have been accompanied by a bowl-shaped basin, which, when filled with hot water, would have kept the contents of the ewer warm.<sup>7</sup> Luxurious utilitarian celadon wares such as this example were favored by the

aristocracy. Because they were from aristocratic families and had wealthy patrons, many Buddhist monks in the Koryŏ period also followed the practice of the nobility in using celadon ware.

**Notice:** The parts of this ewer that resemble bamboo or a melon; the lustrous, jadelike color of the celadon glaze

**Consider :** Natural forms as a primary source of artistic inspiration

Note

7. See Itoh, *Korean Ceramics from The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka*, figs. 6, 7, p. 17.

### 13. Bottle

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), 13th century. Stoneware with inlaid design of chrysanthemums under celadon glaze; H. 13⅝ in. (34.6 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1927 (27.119.6)

This bottle, made during the height of celadon production in Korea, attests to the technological and aesthetic achievements of Koryŏ potters in the production of elegantly formed and decorated vessels, as well as to the Korean preference for themes from nature. Inlaid chrysanthemum blossoms are aligned along the bottle's gently curved sides, which have been formed into lobes.

The time-consuming technique of inlay in celadon ware (*sanggam*) involves incising or carving the design into the unbaked, leather-hard clay with a needle or wooden tool and filling in the resulting depressions with a white or black



13

substance.<sup>8</sup> The piece is given a biscuit, or first, firing, then coated with a celadon glaze and fired again at a higher temperature. Although inlaid decoration was used in Chinese ceramics during the Tang (618–907) and Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties, it was not widespread and its application to celadon ware was never fully exploited. Among makers of Koryŏ celadon, however, it became a favored decorative technique, establishing a distinct and important category of Korean ceramics.

Inlaid celadon vessels such as this example epitomize the refined sensibilities of the Koryŏ aristocracy. While ordinary people used simple, undecorated stoneware, royalty and the aristocracy created a demand for large quantities of celadon-glazed objects. The finest vessels were made in official kilns, which worked to government specifications and were supervised by

court officials. The fondness for detail and exquisite materials is also evidenced in the inlaid lacquerware and Buddhist paintings of the Koryŏ period (see images 9 and 15–18).

**Notice:** The way in which the chrysanthemums have been depicted; the bottle's shape; how the scale of the flowers emphasizes the volume of the bottle

**Consider:** Whether the bottle's form and design are more naturalistic or decorative; what messages are conveyed by one's choice of utilitarian wares and domestic furnishings

Note

8. The exact composition of the inlay substances used by Koryŏ potters remains a subject of discussion. According to a recent study by Pamela Vandiver ("The Technology of Korean Celadons," in Itoh and Mino et al., *The Radiance of Jade and*

*the Clarity of Water*, pp. 152–53), the white or black inlays were not made of white kaolinitic or dark ferruginous clays, as is commonly believed, but composed mainly of quartz particles or cubic particles of magnetite. Vandiver's analysis, however, is not accepted by all scholars.



14

14. **Poster A**  
***Maebyoŋg***

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), late 13th–early 14th century. Stoneware with inlaid design of cranes and clouds under celadon glaze; H. 11½ in. (29.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1927 (27.119.11)

A *maebyoŋg* is a vessel with a small mouth, short neck, round shoulder, and constricted waist. The form is derived from the Chinese *meiping*, or “prunus vase.” The Koryŏ *maebyoŋg* is distinguished from its Chinese counterpart by a saucer-shaped mouth and a body that forms a pronounced S-shaped curve, resulting in a slightly flared base. A few of these vessels in China and Korea have retained a cup-shaped cover over the mouth, suggesting that they were used to store wine.

Although inlay was widely employed throughout East Asia in metalwork and lacquerware, the

use of the inlay technique in the decoration of celadon ware, known as *sanggam*, is peculiar to Korea (for a description of this technique, see image 13 ). By the mid-twelfth or early thirteenth century, the inlay technique had become the most frequently used method of decoration in Korean celadon ware. Its successful application to celadons was made possible by the Korean potters’ development of the highly translucent glazes that allowed the decoration underneath to show through clearly.

The body of this *maebyoŋg* is ornamented with inlaid clouds and cranes, symbols of longevity. The design is enhanced by the black outline of the funguslike heads and long trail of the white clouds, and the black curved strokes that define the plumage of the birds. Encircling the mouth and base is a key-fret pattern. This repeated squared spiral derives from the ancient

Chinese “thunder pattern,” and is frequently found on Chinese and Korean decorative objects and architectural ornaments.

**Notice:** The painterly appearance of the crane and clouds; the *maebyoŋg*’s shape

**Consider :** The relationship between the vessel’s design and form; the relatively loose arrangement of the design elements (compare image 10 )

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 18, pp. 70, 74, 417–19



15

15. Unidentified artist (ca. 13th century), *Amitabha Triad* Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk;  $47\frac{7}{8} \times 32\frac{1}{4}$  in. (121.6 × 81.9 cm). Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.76.298)

The Buddha Amitabha (A'mita) was the focal image of worship in Pure Land Buddhism, a devotional sect that enjoyed great popularity in Korea during the Koryŏ dynasty. Devotees were assured personal salvation and rebirth in Amitabha's Western Paradise upon faithful recitation of his name. Here, Amitabha, encircled by a large mandorla and with a golden nimbus surrounding his head, is shown seated on an elaborate lotus throne. He wears a red monastic robe embellished with patterns painted in gold. On his chest is a *svastika*, an auspicious symbol representing Buddhist teaching; on his palms and the sole of his one visible foot

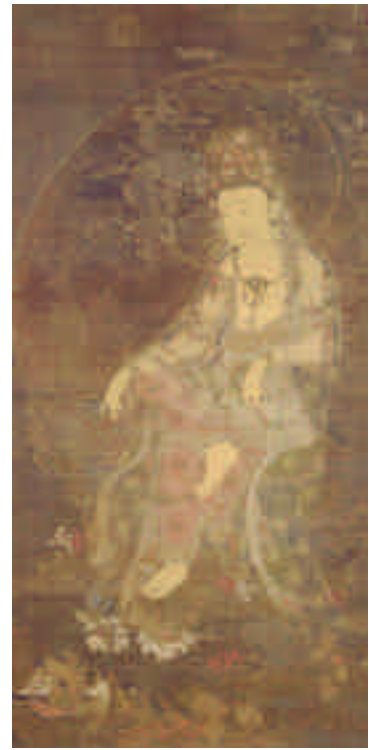
are *chakra* (wheel) motifs, symbolizing the ever-turning *dharmā* (law).

Amitabha's identity is established by his hand gesture, the *dharmachakramudra*, representing the preaching of the Buddhist law, and by the presence of the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara (Kwanŏm), on his left, and Mahasthamaprapta (Tae Seji), on his right. Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion and wisdom, holds a bottle of sacred water in his left hand and a willow branch in his right. In the center of his crown is a tiny image of Amitabha, his spiritual master. Mahasthamaprapta, who symbolizes Amitabha's wisdom and helps people realize the importance of seeking enlightenment, holds in his right hand a rectangular object with a red ribbon; a tiny "precious bottle" appears in his crown.

The three figures are arranged as a triad—a long-established format that can be found in India several

centuries earlier and appears in Korean Buddhist sculpture by at least the sixth century. Amitabha, the most important figure and the subject of veneration and meditation, is depicted larger in size and frontally posed, occupying the apex of the triangle formed by the three deities. The slender, tapered figures of the two attendant bodhisattvas, shown standing on lotus pedestals below him in three-quarter view and in a gentle *tribhanga* (thrice-bent) posture, are in marked contrast to Amitabha's powerful presence.<sup>9</sup>

The figures are fluently drawn in cinnabar red. Their facial features are differentiated: the face of the Buddha is broad, while the youthful faces of the bodhisattvas are elongated. The long, narrow eyes of the Buddha contrast with the almond-shaped eyes of his attendants. On all three figures, the eyebrows, executed meticulously with fine individual brushstrokes, reveal



16A

the hand of a master painter. The figures' sumptuous garments are embellished in gold with motifs of cranes among clouds (on Amitabha's inner garment, visible on the right sleeve), lotus medallions (on his outer robe, covering his shoulders and draped across his left arm), composite chrysanthemum or floral roundels (on the bodhisattvas' translucent robes), and various types of plant scrolls (on the borders of the figures' garments).

**Notice:** The relationship of the three figures and the differences between them; the sumptuous details of the garments; the various parts of Amitabha's throne

**Consider :** How the composition and the decorative elements of this painting functioned to make it an object of religious devotion; how the relative importance of the three figures is indicated by their size, position, and posture

Note

9. The Sanskrit term *tribhanga*, which derives from Indian tradition, refers to the depiction of the body with the head, torso, and hips bent alternatively to the left or right.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 73, pp. 162–63

16A, B, C. Unidentified artist (early 14th century), *Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara*

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; 44 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 21 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (113.7 × 55.3 cm). Charles Stewart Smith Collection, Gift of Mrs. Charles Stewart Smith, Charles Stewart Smith Jr. and Howard Caswell Smith, in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914 (14.76.6)

This superb painting depicts one of the most popular Buddhist deities in East Asia, Avalokiteshvara (Kwanŭm), the bodhisattva of infinite compassion and wisdom. Here he is shown as the Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara (Suwŏl Kwanŭm), one of his numerous guises and one frequently depicted in Koryŏ Buddhist paintings. Chinese records suggest that this manifestation of the bodhisattva originated in China during the Tang dynasty (618–907), in the eighth century.<sup>10</sup>



16B



16C

This representation of the Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara portrays the deity's standard attributes: the image of the Buddha Amitabha in his crown (see detail, image 16B); the willow branch that symbolizes healing, displayed in a *kundika* (a ritual vessel used for sprinkling water) placed in a clear glass bowl to the figure's right; and a full moon at the top of the painting. Depicted in the moon is a hare standing under a cassia tree pounding the elixir of immortality, a theme based on a well-known Chinese legend.

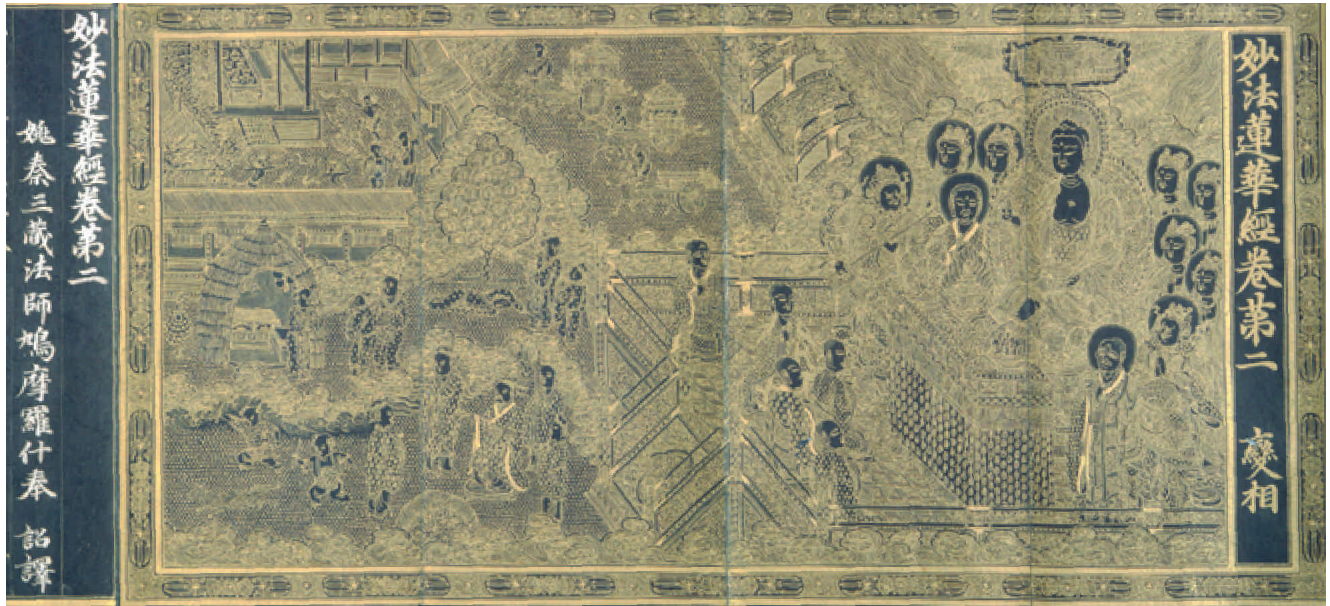
Avalokiteshvara sits on a rocky outcrop surrounded by a sea of swirling waves, representing his island abode of Mount Potalaka (Naksan). In the water are small rocks with protruding stalks of precious coral; barely discernible in the background, to his left, are several large stalks of bamboo. The boy Sudhana, who, according to

scripture, visited Mount Potalaka and the homes of fifty-three other Buddhist saints on a spiritual journey in search of ultimate truth, stands at Avalokiteshvara's feet in a pose of adoration.<sup>11</sup> Opposite the youth, a sumptuously dressed group comprised of the dragon king of the Eastern Sea, his retinue (who might represent the aristocratic donors who commissioned the painting), and sea monsters present offerings of incense, coral, and pearls (see detail, image 16 C).

Avalokiteshvara is attired in beautiful robes and sashes, with intricate gold details on his jewelry and clothing. Holding a crystal rosary in his right hand, he sits with his right leg crossed and his left foot placed on a lotus-flower support. Surrounding his body and symbolizing his divinity is a large luminous mandorla (aureole), while a nimbus (halo) encircles his head.

The luxuriousness of the painting materials and the bodhisattva's attire and accessories, as well as the numerous delicately rendered details, well expresses the ideal of *chang'om* (Skt. *alamkara*). This idea of conveying a sense of sacred splendor through rich ornamentation and visual glorification was prevalent among the upper classes in the Koryŏ period and part of the belief that one's goals could be achieved through the proper performance of rituals, which necessitated iconographically correct images and suitably furnished settings.

**Notice:** The impressive detail and delicacy of Avalokiteshvara's gauze robes and jewelry; the supplicants' attitude of adoration and veneration; the landscape elements that create an environment for the figures  
**Consider :** The relationship between visual splendor and spiritual power;



17A

the aspects of Avalokiteshvara's appearance that suggest compassion, wisdom, and nobility

#### Notes

10. For a detailed description of the sources of this image, which include Buddhist and Daoist texts, Chinese and Central Asian pictorial conventions, and Korean legends, see Pak, "The Korean Art Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 433–46.

11. Sudhana's travels are described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the influential Buddhist scripture that provided the textual basis for Korean renderings of the Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 75, pp. 166–67

17A, B. Unidentified artist (14th century), **Illustrated Manuscript of the Lotus Sutra** (detail)

Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), ca. 1340. Folding book, gold and silver on indigo-dyed mulberry paper; 106 pages, each 13 × 4½ in. (33 × 11.4 cm).

Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1994 (1994.207)

This lavishly illustrated fourteenth-century manuscript, produced on mulberry paper dyed indigo blue and executed in gold and silver; demonstrates the standards of excellence for which Koryŏ sutras are renowned. Like most Korean illuminated manuscripts of this period, it is presented in a rectangular accordion format that facilitated reading. The text is the second volume of the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential Buddhist texts in East Asia and, along with the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the most frequently copied sutra in Korea

during the Koryŏ period. The *Lotus Sutra* presents in concrete terms the essence of Mahayana Buddhism — namely, the doctrine of universal salvation of all living beings and the attainment of Buddhahood, the ultimate aim of existence.

Read from right to left, the manuscript begins with the title, written in gold, followed by illustrations of episodes described in the inscribed text, executed in minute detail and lavishly embellished in gold. The illustrations are framed by a border of *vajra* (thunderbolt) and *chakra* (wheel) motifs, symbolizing indestructibility and Buddhist teachings, respectively.<sup>12</sup> At the far right, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, shown seated on a dais behind an altar and surrounded by bodhisattvas and guardians, preaches to his disciple Shariputra in the company of other monks (see detail, image 17B). In the upper left of the frontispiece is a scene illustrating

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the parable of the burning house, which relates the story of a wealthy man and his children. The children are playing in the house, unaware that it is plagued by demons, poisonous insects, and snakes and that it is also on fire. Their father, in order to entice his children away from the danger, offers them three carts, drawn by an ox, a deer, or a goat according to each child's preferences and interests. When the children exit the burning house, however, they each receive a cart even more magnificent than they expected. This parable illustrates how "expedient methods" (the modest carts) can lead sentient beings (the children) from the fleeting and perilous world of sensual perception (the house) to a greater goal, the vehicle of Mahayana Buddhism (the resplendent carts).

The second parable, shown in the lower left, concerns an old man

and his son, who in his youth abandons his father and lives for many years in another land. As he grows older, he becomes increasingly poor and seeks employment in prosperous households. After wandering from place to place, he stumbles upon the new residence of his now wealthy and successful father. Not recognizing his father, the son flees in fear that he will be enslaved.

His father, realizing that his son is incapable of living as the sole heir to such a prominent man, disguises himself as a moderately wealthy man and hires his son as a laborer whose job is to clear away excrement. Gradually, he entrusts his son with greater responsibilities, so that the young man grows accustomed to administering his master's affairs and slowly develops self-assurance and generosity. At this time, his father reveals his true identity and bestows upon his son his entire fortune.

In this parable, the father represents the Buddha, and the son symbolizes unenlightened sentient beings. Their master, recognizing that they are unprepared to accept this greater glory, waits until they adapt to their more modest roles before granting them the promise of ultimate enlightenment. At the end of the scripture, devotees are warned that those who disregard the *Lotus Sutra* will be reborn as deformed beings, as reviled as the wild dog being chased by the children in the lower left corner of the sutra's frontispiece.<sup>13</sup> The text that follows the illustration is written in silver in a highly refined standard script (*haesō*).

The copying of sutras, the written texts that transmit the teachings of the Buddha, was widely encouraged in Buddhist practice, and patrons and artisans alike were rewarded with religious merit for their efforts.<sup>14</sup> Every





17B

stage of the production of Buddhist scriptures required great care and spiritual purity. The raw materials—indigo-dyed mulberry paper, ink, pigments (in this case, gold and silver powders mixed with animal glue), and mounting materials—were of the highest quality and were meticulously prepared. Unlike most Buddhist paintings of the period, sutras record the names of the calligraphers, artisans, supervising monks, and lay devotees who participated in or commissioned their production, usually in an inscription at the end of the text. When a sutra was completed, special ceremonies of dedication were held to commemorate the occasion. Sutras produced at the Royal Scriptorium (Sagyōng'wōn) during the Koryŏ period were highly valued by monasteries and temples throughout East Asia.

**Notice:** The sumptuous materials and intricate detail of this manuscript; the devices used to separate and connect the different scenes depicted

**Consider :** The relationship between patronage, religious motivation, and art production; what the materials and appearance of this sutra convey about the aesthetic preferences of the Koryŏ court and aristocracy

#### Notes

12. The prototype for this frontispiece illustration can be traced back to a Song dynasty (960–1279) woodblock print. The arrangement of the narrative scenes of the Metropolitan's sutra is directly borrowed from Song illustration. Images of this kind, together with religious texts, were brought to Korea in large quantities by Korean monks who went to China to study. Upon their return to Korea, these texts and pictures were reproduced in handwritten copies and woodblock prints and made available to other Korean

monks. For the Chinese woodblock print that served as a model for this frontispiece, see Pak, "The Korean Art Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, fig. 25, p. 437.

13. These illustrations are identified by Pak, *ibid.*, pp. 437–38 and p. 477, note 119. For a complete recounting of these tales, see Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

14. This practice is thought to have been introduced into Korea during the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.). Although the earliest dated extant example of a Korean illustrated sutra was made in 1006, most of the surviving illustrated sutras were produced in the fourteenth century. See Pak, "Illuminated Buddhist Manuscripts in Korea." In times of peril, such as the Mongol invasions of Korea in the thirteenth century, sutras were also commissioned in an effort to safeguard the nation.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 78, pp. 171–73



18

#### 18. Poster B

Unidentified artist (late 14th century), *Kshitigarbha (Chijang)* Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). Hanging scroll, gold and color on silk;  $33\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$  in. (84.5 × 36.8 cm). H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.160.32)

The popularity of the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha (Chijang) in Koryŏ Pure Land Buddhism is demonstrated by the frequent depiction of the deity in devotional paintings. Kshitigarbha is most commonly portrayed as a monk holding a mendicant's staff and a wish-fulfilling jewel (Skt. *cintamani*), the light of which could illuminate even the darkest corners of hell.<sup>15</sup> With the growing popularity of the Pure Land school at all levels of Korean society in the thirteenth century, during which time the peninsula suffered six invasions by Mongol armies, the promise of paradise for

the faithful and the threat of hell for evil beings became increasingly attractive concepts. The image of Chijang standing on lotus-flower pedestals and holding his staff and *cintamani* represented to devotees his power over hell, from which he could deliver unfortunate beings and lead them to paradise.

The variety of colors used in this painting—from the malachite green of the gold-edged nimbus and the bright cinnabar red of the underskirt to the bluish gray monk's robe and the dazzling gold of the textile patterns—provides striking contrasts. The rich ornamentation of the decorative motifs on the garment is executed with virtuosity. Despite such technical brilliance, however, the bodhisattva's face is somewhat precious, with narrowly set eyes and very small nose and lips, and the drapery is stiff and flat, with little suggestion of volume. These features, as well as the

schematic curves of the garment and the pointed corners of the hemlines, indicate that this painting was made no earlier than the late fourteenth century.

**Notice:** The delicately rendered details of the painting: the transparent *cintamani*, the medallions on the robe, the jewels that ornament the monk's staff, and the lotus-blossom pedestals

**Consider :** Whether the figure's expression and posture inspire a sense of comfort; the use of line versus volume in this image

Note

15. This iconography derives mainly from Chinese Five Dynasties (907–60) and Northern Song (960–1127) representations of Kshitigarbha in Dunhuang.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 77, pp. 168, 170



19

### 19. Image Hall, Haein-sa Temple

South Kyōngsang Province, October 1997. Photograph by Elizabeth Hammer

Haein-sa was established on Kaya mountain in South Kyōngsang Province in southern Korea in 802 and reached its present size in the mid-tenth century. It is famed as the repository of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, the entire Buddhist canon carved onto just over 80,000 wood-blocks for printing in the thirteenth century. Although parts of the temple compound have been destroyed twice, the *Tripitaka Koreana*, now recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural treasure, miraculously escaped damage.

Like most other Sōn Buddhist temples, Haein-sa is remotely situated in the mountains, which provides a quiet atmosphere conducive to meditation. Because of the uneven ground plane, monasteries

such as Haein-sa do not follow the strict axial arrangement of urban temples. Although the basic layout of entrance gates, stone pagodas, worship halls, and monks' residences interspersed with courtyards, is followed, the buildings are situated along the contours of the mountain. The worship hall pictured here is decorated on the exterior with colorful paintings depicting important events in the lives of the founding monks.

### 20. Stationery Box

Chosōn dynasty (1392–1910), 15th century. Black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay; H. 3½ in. (9 cm), W. 14⅜ in. (36.5 cm). Promised Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving (L. 1992.62.3)

The production of inlaid lacquer in Korea continued in the Chosōn period, during which time the fine detail and mosaiclike patterns of Koryō inlaid lacquers (see image 9) were replaced by larger and more prominent designs. The scrolling floral vine on this fifteenth-century box is formed with thin strips of mother-of-pearl, with larger, cracked pieces depicting the leaves and flowers. It is noteworthy that three different types of flowers grow on the same scrolling vine; that the vine covers the entire surface; and that the larger leaves are of the acanthus type, with its characteristic curled-back ends. The only concurrence of all these elements in



the decorative arts of East Asia took place in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

**Notice:** How the scrolling vine fills the surface of the box; the abstract quality of the leaves combined with the small circles that fill the interstices of the design

**Consider :** The change in the treatment of ornamentation in various media; how the appearance of this scrolling vine suggests the growth of an actual plant

Note

16. See Watt and Ford, *East Asian Lacquer: The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection*, p. 317.

### 21. Flask-Shaped Bottle

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 15th century. Stoneware with sgraffito design of flowers under *punch'ŏng* glaze; H. 8¼ in. (21 cm). Rogers Fund, 1986 (1986.305)

In the early years of the Chosŏn dynasty, Korean potters, working with new energy and confidence, attempted to revitalize what remained of the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) celadon tradition. The result of these efforts was *punch'ŏng* ware.<sup>17</sup> The term is a contraction of *punjang hoech'ŏng sagi*—literally, “ceramic ware of a grayish green clay body covered with white slip and a clear greenish glaze”—and was first used in the twentieth century (the original name of this ware remains unknown). *Punch'ŏng* was manufactured only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Yet during this short time, the industry flourished and potters produced objects

in a variety of shapes and decorated with several methods. Thought of as utilitarian objects in Korea and used by all classes, *punch'ŏng* wares were widely appreciated for their aesthetic appeal in Muromachi (1392–1573) Japan, where the great tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–91) helped to create a taste for their bold rustic forms and vigorous designs.<sup>18</sup>

*Punch'ŏng* represents an important development in the Korean ceramic tradition. Its indebtedness to Koryŏ celadons can be seen in the grayish green glaze, although, because they contain less iron oxide, *punch'ŏng* glazes are not as green in tone as celadon glazes. In addition, the simplified decorative technique of stamped designs used in celadons of the late Koryŏ period, in the second half of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, was adopted by Chosŏn potters in the decoration of early *punch'ŏng* wares.



21

This fifteenth-century bottle was decorated on both sides with a floral design using the sgraffito technique. In this method, white slip is applied to the surface of the clay body, and a design is incised into it. The slip is then scraped away in the areas surrounding the design to expose the grayish blue body beneath. After the piece is coated with a transparent glaze and fired, the white-slip design stands out clearly against the dark background. In this example, the boldly rendered floral decoration complements the thickly potted vessel. The glaze has pooled in places on the surface, producing subtle tonal variations.

**Notice:** How the floral design stands out in relief; the rougher appearance of the object in comparison to Koryŏ celadon wares (images 10–14); the lively and spontaneous appearance of the decoration

**Consider :** The differences between the standards of production techniques and designs developed by Koryŏ and Chosŏn potters

Notes

17. For further information on *punch'ŏng* ware, see Itoh, *Korean Ceramics from The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka*, pp. 36, 40, 81–97, 146–48.

18. The influence of *punch'ŏng* ware techniques and aesthetics can be seen in Japanese ceramics such as a Minoware dish for use in the tea ceremony (1975.268.436), published in the *MMA Bulletin* (Summer 1987), no. 51, p. 44, which reveals the same preference for rusticity and accidental effect.



22

**22. Wine Cup**

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 15th century. White porcelain; H. 1⅞ in. (4.1 cm), Diam. 4½ in. (11.4 cm). Rogers Fund, 1917 (17.175.1)

White-bodied porcelain wares (*paekcha*) were first produced in Korea at the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty, in the first half of the fifteenth century, and continued to be popular throughout the dynasty.<sup>19</sup> The early phase of porcelain manufacture is characterized by undecorated white wares. These wares reflect the austere tastes associated with Neo-Confucianism, which was embraced by the Chosŏn rulers as the official state ideology and advocated by the preeminent social class, the *yangban*. The *yangban*, who held the highest civil and military positions in government, devoted themselves to study and self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition and sought to fashion a

political and social system based on Confucian ideals, principles, and practices. Of paramount importance in *yangban* society were the strict rules governing ancestral worship and mourning rites.

Associated with purity, white porcelain was considered especially suitable for objects used by the court and *yangban* households, in particular, ritual dishes and containers such as this small double-handled cup. Cups of this kind were used for offering wine on special occasions, such as memorial ceremonies performed at an ancestral altar.<sup>20</sup> The cup would have been held with both hands, as is the custom in East Asian ritual and formal settings.

**Notice:** The simplicity of the cup's form and appearance

**Consider :** The connection between Confucian ideals and white-bodied porcelain

#### Notes

19. White porcelaneous wares were produced in the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) around the same time as celadon wares, but never achieved widespread popularity. Because of their often insufficient firing temperature, which can leave the clay and glaze incompletely vitrified, they are technically excluded from the category of true porcelains. For more information on the production techniques and designs of Chosŏn white porcelain ware, see Itoh, *Korean Ceramics from The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka*, pp. 30–35, 98–107, 149.

20. For a description of ancestral halls and worship practices in the Chosŏn period, see Kim, *Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 84–86.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 28, pp. 84, 86



23

#### 23. Jar

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 18th century. Porcelain with underglaze copper-red decoration of a grapevine; H. 10 in. (25.5 cm). The Harry G. C. Packard Collection of Asian Art, Gift of Harry G. C. Packard, and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick, and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and The Annenberg Fund Inc. Gift, 1975 (1979.413.2)

Painting in underglaze copper-red was more difficult to accomplish than its counterpart decorative medium, underglaze cobalt-blue, because copper readily oxidizes and turns to shades of gray or black during firing, or even disappears entirely. Underglaze copper-red decoration on high-fired ware is most likely an invention of Koryŏ (918–1392) potters, who succeeded in producing this color early in the twelfth century when it was used sparingly in the decoration of



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celadon ware. This type of decoration was revived at provincial kilns in the eighteenth century with the flourishing of the decorative arts.

The jar's uneven profile and bold, quickly painted design impart a sense of vibrancy and naturalism. While Korean craftsmen used many of the same decorative motifs — grapevines, dragons, bamboo, flowers — as their Chinese and Japanese counterparts, they often executed these images with a distinctive dynamic style.

**Notice:** The shape of the jar; the freedom with which the design was painted

**Consider :** Whether this jar appears clumsy or appealing; the aesthetic ideals that motivated the production and appreciation of this jar (compare image 10 )

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 37, pp. 95, 99

#### 24. Large Jar

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century. White porcelain; H. 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (37.5 cm). The Harry G. C. Packard Collection of Asian Art, Gift of Harry G. C. Packard, and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick, and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and The Annenberg Fund Inc. Gift, 1975 (1979.413.1)

Among the most striking of the white porcelain wares produced in the Chosŏn period are large utilitarian jars such as this one, which was made by joining two bowl-shaped forms at their rims. (The seam is partially visible along the jar's midsection.) It would have been especially admired for its irregular shape, a result of slight sagging during the firing.

The porcelain kilns of the Chosŏn period produced objects of varying levels of quality. The best grade of porcelain was made

for the court at the royal kilns in Kwangju, in Kyŏnggi Province, south of the capital Seoul, as well as at the provincial kilns under the auspices of the Saongwŏn, the government bureau in charge of ceramic production. The royal kilns were relocated every ten years or so, in order to ensure a constant supply of firewood, immense amounts of which were consumed to produce the temperatures in excess of 1200°C needed for firing porcelain. Other provincial kilns produced both *punch'ŏng* (see image 21) and porcelain for local use, and occasionally as tribute to the court.

Throughout the history of Korean ceramics, one can see the attempt to combine functionality with forms and designs that possess a natural, spontaneous quality. The Korean potter did not resort to exaggerated forms or unnecessary decoration to achieve a sense of perfection or artificial beauty.

25A, B



Instead, the true beauty of Korean ceramics lies in their pure and modest forms, which are determined by technique and function, and in their minimal decoration.

**Notice:** The unevenness of the glaze and the jar's asymmetrical profile; the visible mark around the mid-section where the two bowl-shaped forms were joined

**Consider :** The qualities of asymmetry and irregularity as expressions of naturalness and spontaneity

25A, B. Unidentified artist (15th century), *Landscapes in the Style of An Kyŏn: Evening Bell from Mist-Shrouded Temple and Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting*

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on silk; Each  $34\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$  in. (88.3 × 45.1 cm). Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and Mr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Rose and John B. Elliott Gifts, 1987 (1987.278a,b)

In the early Chosŏn period, from the founding of the dynasty in 1392 to about 1550, landscape painting flourished and developed in a new direction. Drawing on the native Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) painting tradition and adapting recently introduced styles from China's Míng dynasty (1368–1644), Chosŏn artists began to produce landscape paintings that blended Chinese conventions with more distinctly Korean characteristics. The

preeminent landscapist during this time was the court painter An Kyŏn (active ca. 1440–70). His innovative style, which exerted enormous influence on Korean landscape painting, was inspired by Chinese monumental landscapes, particularly those of the Northern Song (960–1127) master artist Guo Xi (ca. 1000–ca. 1090).<sup>21</sup>

The energetic brushwork and dramatic contrasts of dark and light in these two Chosŏn paintings reflect the dominant influence of An Kyŏn.<sup>22</sup> These stylistic characteristics of the An Kyŏn school of painting were particularly well suited to the depiction of the celebrated theme *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, which was first formalized in China during the eleventh century and became popular in Korea in the fifteenth century (see [image 26](#)). *Eight Views* compositions were based on a set of poems extolling the beauty and melancholy of



the entire landscape of mountains, rivers, and marshes in the Lake Dongting region, in the modern Chinese province of Hunan. The Metropolitan Museum's hanging scrolls depict two of the *Eight Views* scenes and were presumably once part of a set of eight. *Evening Bell from Mist-Shrouded Temple* (image 25 A) is filled with a misty, somewhat melancholy atmosphere. Tiled rooftops visible through the mist suggest the presence of a large monastic complex in the foothills of an imposingly tall mountain range. *Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting* (image 25 B), a rather dark painting which depicts an empty boat moored at the shore in the foreground and a double-storied pavilion dimly visible in the middle ground, gives the impression of a nocturnal scene. Both paintings omit standard details of human interest—figures, boats, a rustic bridge, a bustling mountain market, or even a well-trodden path.

This absence suggests a disinterest on the part of the artist in narrative detail and underscores his concern with capturing the mood of the landscape and a moment in time. In contrast to the horizontal handscroll format favored by Chinese artists, Korean depictions of this *Eight Views* theme are commonly presented in hanging scroll format and often mounted as a folding screen.

**Notice:** The brushwork and convoluted mountain forms; the sharp contrasts between light and dark areas; how wash is used; that silk darkens with age

**Consider :** The treatment of space; the precise manner of painting the architectural elements compared with the more boldly rendered mountain forms; that for Korean artists, the Xiao and Xiang rivers area was completely imaginary and could be glimpsed only through

imported Chinese paintings; the reasons for the lack of color

#### Notes

21. An important handscroll painting by Guo Xi in the Metropolitan Museum's collection is *Old Trees, Level Distance* (1981.276). Guo Xi's best-known work is *Early Spring*, in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, and is published in James C. Y. Watt and Wen C. Fong, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from The National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York and Taipei: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Palace Museum, 1996), pl. 60, p. 129.

22. For a comprehensive study of the Metropolitan Museum's paintings and their connection to An Kyōn, see Hongnam Kim, "An Kyōn and the Eight Views Tradition: An Assessment of Two Landscapes in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 367–401.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 84, pp. 182, 186–87

26A



26B



26A, B. Unidentified artist (late 15th–16th century), *Wild Geese Descending to Sandbar* Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Hanging scroll, ink on silk;  $49\frac{3}{4} \times 29\frac{1}{8}$  in. ( $126.4 \times 48.5$  cm). Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, John M. Crawford Jr. Bequest, and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1992 (1992.337)

Monochrome landscape painting was favored by both literati and professional court painters in Korea in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This painting is an example of Korean artists' interpretation of the landscape painting idiom of China's Northern Song dynasty (960–1127).

The title identifies the work as one of the *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, a poetic theme traditionally associated with the Northern Song painter Song Di (ca. 1015–ca. 1080) that became a favorite subject for painters not

only in China but, from the twelfth century onward, in Korea and Japan (see images 25 A and B). The distant mountains, the low hills accented by trees (see detail, image 26B), and the flat riverbanks—landscape elements that the artist has carefully organized into distinct ground planes—create a peaceful and expansive vista. The geese descending to a broad sandbank at the foot of the mountains in the distance and the returning fishing boat in the foreground, seen through a misty haze, suggest an evening scene. Each of these elements is sensitively rendered in differentiated tones of ink and pale ink washes.

This painting takes as its inspiration a poem, inscribed in Chinese characters in the upper right corner after the four-character title:

*On the frozen frontier is a hail of  
arrows,*

*Along the Golden River [Jinhe] there  
are no rice fields.*

*Brothers one and all, flying down in  
skeins,*

*After ten thousand li,<sup>23</sup> they arrive at  
Xiao and Xiang.*

*The distant waters shine like reels of  
silk,*

*The level sands are white as glinting  
frost.*

*At the ferry quay, no one is about,  
Close to the setting sun, the geese  
descend ever more gracefully.*

(Translation by Roderick Whitfield)

The poem is written in irregular verse, a form popular during the Song dynasty (960–1279). The first two lines refer to a hunt in the cold, bleak steppe along China's northern frontier from which the wild geese migrate south, a reference to the conquest of the Song by the Mongols and their subsequent rule of China under the Yuan dynasty (1272–1368).



**Notice:** The organization of the different landscape elements to create a unified, coherent composition; the use of mist to suggest distance; the contrast between the sharply delineated landscape elements in the foreground and the more softly rendered forms in the background  
**Consider:** The position of man in nature as suggested by this painting; the relationship between the apparent mood of the painting and that of the poem

Note

23. A *li* is equivalent to about one-third of a mile.

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 85, pp. 182, 188

### 27. Mountains in Chirisan National Park

South Kyōngsang Province, October 1997. Photograph by Elizabeth Hammer

Chirisan National Park extends into three provinces in the southern part of the Korean peninsula, North Chōlla, South Chōlla, and South Kyōngsang. Characteristic of Korean mountain ranges, the peaks tend to be close together, with steep and narrow valleys. Mountain references saturate Korean culture. For example, the common phrase *san nōmō san* (“mountains beyond mountains”) describes the appearance of the terrain and also expresses a sense of resignation in the face of frequent troubles. These mountains in the Sobaek range, with their brilliant autumn colors, have inspired painters and poets for millennia. The poet Yang Saōn (1517–1584), for instance, wrote the following:

*Though they say, “The hills are high,”  
 All hills are still below heaven.  
 By climbing, climbing, climbing more,  
 There is no peak that cannot be scaled.  
 But the man who never tried to climb,  
 He says indeed: “The hills are high.”*<sup>24</sup>

Note

24. Richard Rutt, ed. and trans., *The Bamboo Grove: An Introduction to Sijo* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), poem no. 33.



28

28. Unidentified artist (16th century), *Grapevine in the Wind* Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Hanging scroll, ink on silk;  $31\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{3}{4}$  in. (80 × 40 cm). Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift and Friends of Asian Art Gifts, 1994 (1994.439)

A wind-tossed grapevine, heavy with ripening fruit, the rustling of its dessicated leaves almost audible, is rendered with a variety of masterfully handled brush techniques. The sway of the serpentine branch in large arcs is executed with strokes of changing speed and pressure to suggest both contour and volume in a technique known as “flying white” (in which areas of the unpainted silk show through). The contrasting textures of plump fruit—rendered without outlines in the so-called boneless style of brushwork—and brittle leaves are

achieved with carefully modulated tones of wet and dry ink that create a luminosity within the painting. This work is probably a fragment of a larger composition, which may have included a poetic inscription by the artist.

Ink-monochrome compositions executed in a highly calligraphic style such as this example are associated with amateur literati painters. The subject of grapevine rendered in ink, like the Four Gentlemen—plum, orchid, chrysanthemum, and bamboo—was favored by Chinese and Korean literati painters alike. Among the Korean artists who won fame as painters of grapevines were Sin Cham (1491–1554) and Sin Saimdang (1504–51), the first female painter recorded in Korean history. Paintings of this kind were most often viewed in the *sarangbang*, the study and living

quarters of the male heads of *yangban* households. In keeping with Confucian aesthetic sensibilities, these rooms were furnished simply and modestly, with white paper walls, wood furniture, plain white or blue-and-white-decorated porcelain vessels, writing utensils made of natural materials, books, and ink-monochrome paintings and calligraphy.

**Notice:** The different types of brushwork; the expressive quality of the branches

**Consider :** The contrast between the bold and swiftly executed brushstrokes used to depict the grapevine and the theme of autumn fading into winter



29A

29A, B. Unidentified artist (late 16th century), *Brahma* (*Pŏmch'ŏn*)

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Hanging scroll, ink and color on hemp; 84½ × 88½ in. (214.6 × 224.8 cm). Gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harkness, 1921 (21.57)

This monumental painting on hemp depicts the Indian deity Brahma (*Pŏmch'ŏn*)—identifiable by the Sanskrit syllable *om* in a circle above his belly and his towering height—accompanied by his retinue of attendants and musicians. Brahma, a Hindu deity, was incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as a guardian of Buddhist teachings. His heaven is described in Indian mythology not as a place of meditation but as one of pleasure, populated with heroes, entertainers, and musicians like those in this painting.

The central figure of Brahma dominates the composition, which is

filled with three rows of bodhisattvas and heavenly attendants bearing ceremonial objects or musical instruments or with their hands in a gesture of worship. Elaborate jeweled canopies surmount the group. The elongated proportions of the figures and the schematic facial features, hair, and robes are all executed with a heightened sensitivity to color, texture, and detail. The mannered figure style, stylized abstraction of the garments, and composition in which the figures fill almost the entire pictorial space parallels several other Chosŏn Buddhist paintings of the sixteenth century. Such paintings would have been an integral part of Buddhist temple rituals, especially those performed to ensure protection for the country during the many periods in which it suffered frequent foreign invasions.

Although it was the primary impetus for artistic activity during

the Koryŏ period (918–1392), Buddhism suffered an increasing loss of royal and aristocratic patronage during the succeeding Chosŏn dynasty. Owing to these changed conditions, Buddhist paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries underwent significant changes in format, materials, and painting style.

The fabric on which this work is painted also marks a significant departure from that used in Koryŏ paintings. The predominant use of hemp (or sometimes thick paper) in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century monumental Buddhist paintings is undoubtedly due to economic circumstances: silk and gold had become too expensive to use for Buddhist images, especially under the conditions of austerity imposed by the early Chosŏn rulers and as a result of the significant change in patronage, from the court to



29B

wealthy provincial donors and local monasteries. Finally, painting on hemp required less demanding craftsmanship. While paintings on silk required specialists who could apply the colors to both the back and the front of the painting surface, works on the thicker hemp were painted only on the front.

Music is an important part of Korean Buddhist ritual. In this painting, musicians are shown playing drums, flutes, and string instruments (see detail, **image 29 B**, and **images 33, 34** ).

**Notice:** The various elements of Brahma's heaven; the arrangement of the figures; and the use of scale in conveying the relationship between the central figure and his retinue

**Consider :** The different aesthetic revealed in this painting compared with that of Koryŏ Buddhist paintings (see **images 15–18** ); the man-

nered appearance of the figures; the confluence of different religious traditions

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 81, pp. 178–79

**30. Unidentified artist (17th century), Portrait of Sosan Taesa (Ch'ŏnghödang, 1520–1604)**

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; 59% × 30% in. (152.1 × 77.8 cm). Seymour Fund, 1959 (59.19)

This portrait of the eminent Chosŏn monk Hyujŏng, who was more widely known as Sŏsan Taesa, is a rare early example of a depiction of a Korean monk and an important historical and religious document. The figure, who holds a fly whisk in his right hand, is portrayed in three-quarter view seated on a wooden chair, his shoes neatly

arranged below him on a footstool. The careful delineation of the monk's full face, in particular the elongated eyebrows, the broad mustache, and the closely cropped beard, was intended to give the sitter a realistic appearance.

At a time when Buddhism was severely repressed by the Chosŏn government, Hyujŏng restored order to the community of monks and wrote the basic text for Korean monks, *Sŏn'ga kwigam* (Model for Sŏn Students), which is still followed today by members of the Sŏn order.<sup>25</sup> In this text and in his teachings, he attempted to synthesize the doctrines of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. In 1593, when he was seventy-three years old, Hyujŏng, serving the government as Commander of the Eight Provinces and the Sixteen Buddhist Schools, led an army of Buddhist monks against the Japanese invasion forces of Toyotomi



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Hideyoshi (1536–98) and helped to recover the Chosŏn capital, Hanyang (modern Seoul). In recognition of his achievement, he was honored upon his retirement in the following year with the highest title that could be bestowed on a Buddhist monk. In addition to his other abilities, and in keeping with common practice among the upper classes, Hyujōng was also an accomplished calligrapher.

Portrait paintings of eminent monks, particularly those of patriarchs or founders of schools, were enshrined in Buddhist temples to be revered by disciples. Such portraits, whether executed during the subject's lifetime or after his death, were often an idealized image rather than a commemoration of actual physical appearance. The Metropolitan's painting is one of several surviving copies of a now-lost portrait of monk Hyujōng executed during his lifetime.

The painting includes two inscriptions. The first, in the upper left corner, written in silver that has now tarnished, identifies the subject of the portrait as Pujongsu Ch'ōng-hōdang Taesa. The second inscription, written in black ink below the portrait, records the names of the painting's donors and the monks responsible for the ceremony held to celebrate its completion.<sup>26</sup>

**Notice:** The artist's skillful depiction of the subject's hands and face, garments, and the chair in which he is seated

**Consider :** The function of this portrait as a tribute to and reminder of a religious leader; what feelings the portrait of a religious leader might inspire in a disciple or in a casual viewer

Notes

25. For an insightful account of life in a present-day Sōn monastery, see Robert E.

Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

26. A translation of the second inscription and a commentary about its date are provided in Pak, "The Korean Art Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art," in *Arts of Korea*, pp. 444–45.



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### 31. Rank Badge (*Hyungbae*) with Paired “Tiger-Leopards”

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910),  
18th–19th century. Silk and metallic  
thread; 10 × 10½ in. (25.4 × 27 cm).  
Rogers Fund, 1951 (51.40)

In 1454, the Chosŏn court adopted a system of insignia of rank for civil and military officials based on that of the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644), to whom the Chosŏn paid tribute. As in China, square badges, embroidered with images of both real and imaginary birds or animals denoting a specific rank, were worn on the front (*hyung*) and back (*bae*) of court costumes (fig. 12). Regulations governing the hierarchical relationship between the Chosŏn and Ming courts required that the badges worn by Korean officials of the first rank be equivalent to those of Chinese officials of the third rank.

In 1734, after the fall of the

Ming dynasty, the Chosŏn government established a system that, for the first time, assigned insignia to all nine ranks of Korean court officials. Civil officials of the first to third rank were denoted by a pair of cranes, the emblem formerly used by Ming civil officials of the first rank. A single silver pheasant represented officials of the fourth to ninth rank. In 1871, the court enacted changes in the rank-badge system that lasted until the end of the dynasty in 1910. The white crane, symbol of a lofty scholar as well as a Daoist immortal, was used for civil officials (a pair of cranes for the first to third rank and a single crane for the fourth to ninth). The imaginary “tiger-leopard” depicted here, which signified courage and the power to expel evil spirits, was used for military officials (a pair of tiger-leopards for the first to third rank and a single tiger-leopard for the fourth to ninth).

Embroidery has been a highly regarded and well-developed art form in Korea since at least the third century B.C., when Chinese historical records note that Korean ambassadors wore embroidered costumes. Women of all classes practiced this craft, and a lady’s marriage prospects were significantly enhanced if she was skillful with her needle.<sup>27</sup> Rank badges, as well as other embroidered garments and decorative accessories, were usually made by the women of the household and were often given as gifts on special occasions (Embroidered items could also be obtained from workshops.) Among a woman’s most prized possessions were her Seven Friends: needle, scissors, spools (a wedding trousseau could include a hundred spools decorated with auspicious emblems), leather or fabric thimbles, a ruler, thread, and a small iron.





**Figure 12.** Unidentified artist (17th century), *Portrait of an Official* (traditionally identified as Cho Mal-saeng, 1370–1447). Chōson dynasty (1392–1910). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 70½ × 41 in. (178.3 × 104.4 cm). The National Museum of Korea, Seoul

The construction of *hyungbae* began with an underdrawing on the base fabric, usually woven silk. (Sericulture was brought to Korea from China, and even after the domestic production of silk was well established, some high-quality silk was still imported from China.) For the embroidery, silk was carefully twisted and then laboriously stitched using a variety of simple techniques, especially satin stitch, flat stitch, and couching. Some areas, such as the bands of semi-circles that form the mountains in the rank badge illustrated here, were raised by padding, perhaps with strips of paper secured with couching stitches and then covered with satin stitches. The striking eyes of the animals were made by couching into place threads made of thin strips of gold leaf on paper wrapped around a silk core.

**Notice:** The visual impact of the colorful motifs of the badge; the evenness of the needlework

**Consider:** The use of stylization to create a more decorative effect; the status of embroidery, which was practiced by women of all classes; clothing and accessories as an indicator of social status and official position; the association of animals and birds with official office

Note

27. See Amos, “Korean Embroidery,” and Chung, *The Art of Oriental Embroidery: History, Aesthetics and Techniques*.



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### 32. Box

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 19th century. Painted wood with flattened ox-horn inlay; H. 6 in. (15.2 cm). Promised Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving (L. 1999.65)

The ox-horn painting (*hwagak*) technique can be traced back to the fifth century in Korea. In the Chosŏn period, it was commonly used to decorate small containers for personal possessions, sewing equipment, and accessories of well-to-do ladies. In this nineteenth-century box, the ox horn was cut, soaked in water, boiled, and then pressed into thin, flat sheets. The sheets were painted with a design in vibrant colors and attached to the wooden box with the painted surfaces face down. The box was given a protective coat of varnish, which in this example has become somewhat cloudy with age and mellowed the tone of the pigments.

Various auspicious plants and animals decorate this box. The dragon is a powerful creature that controls the clouds and rain; the ram, one of the animals of the East Asian zodiac, suggests life in retirement from society; the crane, a relatively long-lived bird, represents longevity; and the phoenix symbolizes good luck, peace, and harmony. Here, these creatures are surrounded by stylized clouds and flowers, including peonies, the lush blossoms of which represent fertility.

Upper-class men and women traditionally lived in separate areas of the home. Men's quarters, in keeping with Confucian ideals of modesty and restraint, were simply furnished with books and writing utensils. Women's quarters, in contrast, were decorated with brightly colored paintings, embroideries, folding screens, and containers such as this box.<sup>28</sup>

**Notice:** The box's bright colors and lively images; how the sense of energy is created; the segregated composition; the abstracted forms of the images that create a decorative pattern

**Consider :** The austere tastes reflected in the furnishings of a man's living quarters compared with the exuberant tastes expressed in those of a woman's quarters; the messages contained in the choice of auspicious symbols

Note

28. A display featuring typical living quarters of upper-class men and women in the Chosŏn period is on permanent display at the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. See also Laurel Kendall and Mark Peterson, *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room* (New Haven: East Rock Press, Inc., 1983).

Illustrated in *Arts of Korea*, pl. 57, pp. 132–33



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**33. Chŏng-ak Kayagŭm (Plucked Zither), ca. 1980**

Made by Kim Kwang Ju, South Korea. Wood, silk, cotton; L. 65 in. (165 cm). Gift of Korean Cultural Service, 1982 (1982.171.1)

The *kayagŭm* is a twelve-string zither that is plucked with the thumb and first three fingers of the right hand. Performers sit on the floor, in keeping with Korean custom, and rest the lower part of the instrument across their knees. With two or three fingers of the left hand, they simultaneously press down on the strings to produce intermediate pitches and such ornamental effects as vibrato.

As indicated by its name — *kaya* refers to the Kaya Federation (42–562 A.D.) of the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–668 A.D.), while *gŭm* means “stringed instrument” — the *kayagŭm* has been played in Korea for centuries. According a legend

recorded in the *Samguk sagi* (Histories of the Three Kingdoms), King Kasil of Kaya ordered that an instrument be created from a Chinese prototype (*zheng*) and music be composed for it by the master Korean musician U Rŭk. When U Rŭk was forced by warfare to flee to neighboring Silla, he took the *kayagŭm* with him. The excavation from Silla tombs of pottery figurines playing this instrument, as well as the survival of four ninth-century examples in the Japanese imperial treasury Shōsō-in (where they are identified in Japanese as *sirai-goto*, or “koto of Silla”), attest not only to the antiquity of the *kayagŭm* but also to the continuation of its basic structure and appearance.

This *chŏng-ak kayagŭm* is an example of the larger type of plucked zithers used for court music. It is made primarily of paulownia wood mounted with pegs and fixed and

movable bridges, over which are stretched twelve strings of twisted silk. The distinctive ram’s-head shape that decorates the top of the instrument dates to the Three Kingdoms period.



### 34. Group of Musical Instruments

#### From top left:

#### **Changgo (drum)**

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 19th century. Wood, hide, metal, rope; L. 25½ in. (64.7 cm). The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.141)

#### **T'aep'yŏngso (oboe)**

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), 19th century. Wood, metal, reed; L. 16½ in. (41.9 cm). The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.147)

#### **Ching (large gong)**

20th century. Bronze, Diam. 15¼ in. (38.7 cm). Gift of Daewoo Group, 1981 (1981.28.10)

#### **Pak (clapper)**

Ca. 1980. Wood; L. of each slab 14½ in. (36.9 cm). Gift of Daewoo Group, 1981 (1981.28.12)

#### **Sogo (drum)**

Mid-20th century. Wood, hide; L. 13 in. (33.1cm). Gift of Dr. Won Kyung Cho, 1981 (1981.136)

#### **Kkwaenggwari (small gong), with mallet**

20th century. Bronze, Diam. 7¼ in. (19.7 cm). Gift of Daewoo Group, 1981 (1981.28.11a,b)

The metal gongs illustrated here, which derive from Chinese forms, were struck with a wooden mallet. The large gong (*ching*), held suspended from a cord, was originally used by armies to signal retreat from battle (a drum was sounded to instruct the army to advance) and later primarily for military processions. The small gong (*kkwaenggwari*) produces a sharper sound when struck and was used especially for performances at the ancestral shrine of the Yi royal family, rulers of the

Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910).

Holding the top lip of the gong, the musician dampens its sound by touching the center while it is still resonating.

The Great Peace Oboe (*t'aep'yŏngso*) is related to the Chinese *sona* and the Indian *sura*.

It consists of a large metal bell, wooden tube, and metal lip disk fitted with a short double reed.

There are seven finger holes on the top, and one on the back. Because it produces a loud, piercing nasal sound, this instrument is especially suitable for outdoor military processions. In modern times, it has also been adopted for farmers' music and Confucian ancestral rituals.

The small drum with handle (*sogo*), is used, along with a wooden rod, in folk music. The face of this example is decorated with the ancient symbol *taegeuk*, a circle of revolving fields of red and blue that represents the philosophical

concept of yin and yang (*um* and *yang*). This symbol also occupies the center of the Republic of Korea's national flag.

The hourglass-shaped drum (*changgo*) has been in use since at least the Koguryŏ kingdom (37 B.C.–668 A.D.) and is today the most widely used traditional percussion instrument in Korea. Although during the Chosŏn period it was primarily used for court performances, it now accompanies all kinds of Korean music. The *changgo* is related to Chinese and Japanese versions but is larger. Set on the floor in front of the musician, the drum is played by pounding the left side with the palm, creating a soft and low sound, and striking the right side, which is covered by a thinner piece of hide, with a bamboo stick. The pitch can be altered by moving the belts encircling the laces (attached here with dragon-head hooks) that keep the drum

coverings taut. Traditional *changgo* are made from a single piece of paulownia wood, with cow and horse hides on either side, as seen on this example.

The hardwood clapper (*pak*) is another rhythmic instrument that has long been employed in Korea. The six long wooden sticks are loosely bound by a deerskin string at the thinner ends. Used for court and ritual music, the clapper is sounded once to begin the performance, when the rhythm changes, and three times at the conclusion of the composition.

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### 35. *Teukgyeong*

Ca. 1981. Wood, marble, feather, beads, horn; H. 82% in. (210 cm). Gift of Korean Cultural Service, 1982 (1982.171.3a,b,c)

This L-shaped marble slab, suspended in a colorful stand, was sounded at the end of court ceremonial musical performances. The thickness of the slab, which is struck at the end with a horn mallet, determines the pitch; this example sounds approximately middle C. *Teukgyeong* are traditionally decorated, as seen here, with ducks, symbols of joy and fidelity; phoenixes, messengers of peace and prosperity; and pinecones, which represent longevity and good luck.

