

*International Seminar on the Korean Culture and the Silk Roads, 23-25 February 1991.*

*Kyongju and Pusan, Republic of Korea.*

## **International Elements in Korean Buddhist Sculptures**

*Lena Kim*

*Professor of Art History*

*Hongik University*

The question of the international elements in Korean art and mutual exchanges between East and West can be discussed from various perspectives. One can begin with the 'animal style art' of the nomadic Scythian tribes who traversed the Eurasian steppes to Mongolia, the Ordos bronzes and the Bronze Age objects of prehistoric Korea. In the historic period one can discuss international elements with the burial objects of the Silla tombs such as the stylized tree-shapes and antler horns on the gold crowns, stoneware drinking cups reminiscent of Iranian rhytons, and glass objects imported from the Near East.

We have only vague knowledge, however, about these regions and the routes by which contacts took place in pre-historic times. Few historical records mention contacts during the Three Kingdoms period in Korea. But extant artistic imports from as far as the Near East indicate that there was actually direct or indirect contact through trades or official exchange.

Besides the northern steppe route, there was the Silk Road which was opened in 138 B.C. when the former Han Dynasty envoy Chang-chien was sent to Scythian Yueh-chi on a diplomatic mission against the Huns. During the Kushan Dynasty both this Silk Road and the sea route, also known as the 'spice road' had been already established and connected the Roman world on the west, Persia and India along the way, and China in the east. As history unfolded, Sasanian Iran and later Arabs also joined to play an important role in the cultural exchanges further enriching the international art forms in Asia.

Most of what I have stated resulted, more or less, from a broad eastward movement of cultural transmission with Korea located at the far receiving end and the introduction of Buddhism to Korea further stimulated Koreans to participate more actively in embracing new Buddhist teachings, building Buddhist temples and making Buddha images for worship.

Buddhist art is a major field in Asian art which one can closely follow its beginning in India, modifications in the Central Asian or Southeast Asian regions, and some contributions from China before it finally reached Korea. Therefore, a discussion of foreign elements in Korean Buddhist art, in a way, means a discussion of internationalism in the eastward propagation of Buddhist art. Today, I will concentrate on Korean Buddhist sculpture. Then, I will try to place Korea in a broader development of Asian Buddhist culture and find some common stylistic and iconographic features shared with other Asian Buddhist art and some modifications which Koreans developed to form its own distinctive Buddhist art tradition.

Buddhist knowledge in Korea was mostly transmitted through the Chinese Buddhist communities. The new religion was first introduced to the Koguryo Kingdom in 372 by an official envoy Sunde sent by King Pu-chien of the Earlier Tsin Dynasty.

As for the Paekche Kingdom, the new religion was introduced by a foreign monk named Marananta who probably was of Indian or Central Asian origin. He came from the southern Kingdom of the Eastern Chin Dynasty, and probably took the sea route crossing the Yellow Sea to reach Paekche.

Buddhism was not officially recognized in Silla until the early sixth century but it had been introduced to Silla people in the fourth century by Mukhoja together with the Koguryo monk Ado. Mukhoja was probably a foreign monk with a dark face, for his name literally means 'a black foreign person'.

Although, it was mostly through China that Koreans learned about Buddhism, the ultimate source of Buddhist teachings and art forms can be traced back to India where it originated. For this reason many Chinese and Korean pilgrims took difficult trips to India to visit holy places and learn the true meaning of the Buddha's teaching and acquire Buddhist texts and images. At the same time, Indian and Central Asian monks ventured to China and some even to Korea, where they translated Buddhist texts, propagated Buddhism and perhaps initiated new types of Buddha images.

In the early formative stage of Indian Buddhist art, we can see not only the Indian artistic tradition but also the influences of Hellenistic and Near Eastern art especially in the Gandharan regions during the Kushan Dynasty. When such Indian art travelled through Central Asia, the area became a melting pot of the different cultural traditions of India, Iran,

the Turks and China. These modified versions of Central Asian Buddhist art, developed and reached throughout China and finally were introduced to Korea and Japan.

Before we examine Korean Buddhist images, we must mention a few historical accounts to understand external influences in Korean Buddhist culture. While not much is recorded regarding western contacts in the early stage of Korean Buddhist culture, there were always frequent exchanges with Chinese Buddhist communities. For direct contact with the Indian Buddhist world, we can start a reference to a Paekche monk Kyomik. He is recorded as having studied Sanskrit and Vinaya texts in India and returned to Korea in 526 with an Indian monk named Baedharta. He probably crossed the Yellow Sea to China and took a south sea route or perhaps a land route through Southeast Asia. We have no further information about his activities after his return except that he possibly stayed in a temple of Pulgwang-sa. He probably contributed some international flavor into Paekche Buddhism.

Another more well-known story from Silla Kingdom appears in the Samguk Yusa about the sixteen-foot Buddha image made after the Indian model of a Buddha triad with materials sent by King Asoka of India. During the time of King Chin hung, a ship arrived on the east coast with a message from the Indian King Asoka that he wished a Buddha image to be successfully made with the materials on board in a country with a Buddhist destiny. The image was cast and enshrined in 574 A.D. in the monastery of Hwangyong-sa, which was then the major temple under royal patronage. This auspicious image is recorded to have sweated heavily the following year, as an omen of King Chinhung's death.

This story may be fictitious but it provides us, nonetheless, with some interesting points to consider. First of all, the story reveals the Silla peoples belief that the Silla Kingdom was a land designated for Buddhism with the patronage of King Asoka who was renown in India for his active propagation of Buddhism. Second is that Silla people looked for the model of Buddhist images among Indian examples. Third is that a sea route is suggested for contact between India and Silla in those early days.

Silla was not alone in believing the appearance of this auspicious image promoted by King Asoka. A similar story is also found in several Chinese Buddhist sources of the T'ang period, but the story itself takes place during the fourth century of the Eastern Chin Dynasty.

The depiction of the Buddha image which was made supposedly by King Asoka appears in the wall painting of the Tun-huang cave 323, dating probably from the late seventh

century T'ang Dynasty. The representation corresponds to a story of discovering an image made by King Asoka and enshrining it in the temple of Changhan-ssu, Yang-chou, and then the capital of the Eastern Chin Dynasty.

On the upper part of the south wall in the cave 323, a Buddha image appears above sea level with rays around his head. On its lower right side, the Buddha is carried aboard a boat and is greeted by people and animals by the sea shore. The caption reads that it was the image made by King Asoka which appeared on the eastern coast of Yang-chou. According to the same source, a lotus pedestal was found sometime later on the sea coast by a person who collected pearls, as one can see the same story appearing on the wall painting. The pedestal matched the Buddha image exactly.

On the far right side of the same wall a jewel-shaped halo is depicted with an explanation that it was found near the Harbour of ancient Chiao-chou, present Kwangtung. The halo also matched the image which was enshrined in the capital. From the above story and the pictorial representations we learn that much of the story takes places near the water, so that southern sea route from India was probably taken often.

More frequent contacts were made during the seventh century when Central Asian trading routes were under the T'ang control, and Buddhist culture both in T'ang China and Gupta India was in its height. Most famous of all the Chinese pilgrims who went to India was Hsuan-tsang in the second quarter of the seventh century. His travel record about the Western regions is a valuable source of information about the Buddhist culture in Central Asia and India. He recorded that he brought back to China replicas of seven famous Indian images together with many Buddhist texts on his return in 645. One can be certain that these models had added to the T'ang repertoire of new Buddhist images actively made from the late seventh century.

While Hsuan-tsang traveled via land routes, another important T'ang monk I-tsing traveled by sea leaving from Kwang-chou in 671. He left us valuable information about the activities of nearly sixty eminent monks who traveled to western regions up to the time of his return in 695. I-tsing mentions eight Korean monks, giving names of five Silla monks, one Koguryo and two unknown Silla monks who died of illness in Srivijaya, the present Island of Sumatra in Indonesia. From the record, we know that Silla monks Aryavarman, Hywngak, and Hyeop left for India already during the Chingguan-era in the second quarter of the

seventh century: which means that they left Silla well before the time of Silla's unification in 660 A.D.

The above story indicates that sea travel was often undertaken during T'ang times. We also know that another famous Silla monk Hyech'o took a sea route on his way to India and returned by land arriving at Ansi near Tun-Huang in 723. One has to take into account that the Central Asian travel routes became dangerous at the end of the seventh century after the Tibetans became dominant. In the mid-eight century the routes fell under the hand of the Muslims.

Many Silla monks such as Wonp'yo and Muru are recorded as having traveled to India in the late Unified Silla period, and foreign monks Mahura and Srivajra came to Koryo in the tenth-century but no more detailed information about their travel routes or their activities are known today.

For a study of Korean Buddha image types, one first looks for models among Chinese examples. But often the earlier models can be traced back to Central Asian variations or to Indian prototypes. One can therefore, establish a stylistic lineage or a certain image type, and then distinguish local variations. Generally, a large time gap is expected in the earlier stage of the transmission of Buddhist art from India to China, then to Korea. But as east-west contacts became more • frequent and as Buddhism flourished in most Asian regions, this time gap was gradually diminished. The highest flourishing of Buddhist culture corresponds to the Gupta period in India, but in the East Asian countries of China, Korea and Japan, it began from the late seventh century after the activities of Hsuan-tsang and many other missionaries and with the patronage of the royal courts. As a result, active translation of Buddhist texts and their various interpretations led to the establishment of diverse sects. Numerous Buddhist temples were built and various types of images were made to worship. When Buddhist culture prospered and reached its peak in the eight century the stylistic characters -were shared almost contemporaneously among these Asian Buddhist Sculptures.

In the following, I would like to select several image types that were popularly made in Korea during the Three Kingdoms and the Unified Silla period. To establish their stylistic and iconographic lineage, the Korean images will be compared with Chinese and Indian examples, and attention will be given to later Korean modifications.

#### I. Seated Buddha Image with Dhyana Mudra.

The Seated Buddha in Dhyana mudra, or the hand gesture of meditation, is one of the earliest types of Buddha image to appear in Korea, as we see in a small gilt bronze statue found at Ttuksom near the Han River in Seoul. This early type represents a Buddha seated on a square base with two lions at its sides. The garment covers both shoulders and its folds flow down in multiple U-shapes. Many scholars believe, however, that this Ttuksom piece is probably a Chinese statue of the early fifth century.

One can compare the Ttuksom piece with an early Chinese fifth century gilt bronze image. But we know this piece again was derived from such early gilt bronze Chinese piece as found in the Fogg Art Museum which reflects strong Gandharan influence. A more Sinicized version of this type is seen in the gilt bronze statue in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, which is the earliest dated Chinese piece of 338 A.D.

Even, if indeed, the Ttuksom statues of Chinese origin, we can assume that the early type of Buddha image that was first brought to Korea in the late fourth century at the time of the first introduction of Buddhism probably resembled these early Chinese models.

Some of Korea's later modifications of this type can be seen in the gilt bronze statue from Sin-vi, Puyo, or the stone seated image from Kunsuri, Puyo. Much of the Indian elements have disappeared in these Korean pieces. Especially the latter Kunsuri piece can be compared more closely to a later statue at Lung-men caves of the early sixth century.

This modified version of the type was continued in Japan as one can see in the Sakyamuni Buddha triad of 623 A.D. at Horyuji, Nara, which is the earliest dated Japanese sculpture.

## II. The Hwangyong-sa Buddha and the King Asoka Imagetype

The Buddha image sent by King Asoka in connection with the sixteen foot Buddha at the temple of Hwangyong-sa, Kyongju, and the narrative depiction in Tun-huang cave about the appearance of the King Asoka Buddha image, a lotus pedestal and a halo which all fitted the same image have already been mentioned. The story seems to be made-up but when one sees an actual image in Ch'eng-gu, Ssu-chuan Province, which bears an inscription that it is a copy modeled after the auspicious image made by King Asoka during the Northern Chou Dynasty, then one may accept that the ancient Chinese Buddhists actually believed the story, and made an image after a model which they thought had a link to the story.

The Buddha statue from Ch'eng-tu recalls Mathura Buddhas of the Gupta period and became a model for a type so-called King Asoka Buddha image, based on the inscription on the Ch'eng-tu statue. Among other statues found at Ch'eng-tu, there is a standing Buddha statue of 523 A.D. of the Liang Dynasty which reflects obvious Indian style. Based on these statues southern travel routes have already been suggested by Alexander Soper for Indian and Chinese connections.

We do not know how the Hwangyong-sa Buddha statue of 574 which was cast after the model supposed to be sent by King Asoka looked like. It probably had a foreign, possibly Indian appearance. One can easily imagine that numerous copies were probably made after this famous image and that some characteristics were shared among the late sixth to seventh century Silla images, and those elements may be still retained among the statues extant today. Some of the examples which belong to this type are the central Buddha of the Samch'esokbur, Kyongju and Several gilt bronze standing Buddha images in the National Museum.

### III. Standing Buddha images with Garment Covering One Shoulder

One particular type of seventh century Buddha image is a standing Buddha statue with its garment covering only one shoulder and carrying a jewel-shaped tribute usually identified as a symbol of medicine. Of about fifteen examples of this type extant today, four are known to be from Silla. The statue is of special interest in its standing posture of the exaggerated contrapposto. The twisted body with one hip raised and one leg moving forward recalls the style seen in Gupta Indian statues.

It should be noted that standing Buddha images of this type are rarely found among Chinese images, while it was commonly made in the South India or South Asia. The bronze statue found in Dong Duong from Sri Lanka or stone images from Java are typical southern images of this type.

It is not certain how this particular type became so popular in Silla but again a sea route is suggested for its propagation. One is also tempted to connect its popularity with the activities of three Indian monks who came to Silla with Silla monk Anham in the early seventh century and resided in the monastery of Hwangyong-sa in Kyongju.

### IV. Standing Buddha Images After the Type known as the King Udayana Buddha

While the previous image type of King Asoka Buddha 'suggests a probable southern sea route for its Indian connection', this image type known as the King Udayana Buddha suggests that a northern land route for its eastward transmission.

In the National Museum of Korea, there is a larger than life size standing Buddha in stone brought from the temple site of Kamsan-sa. The inscription incised behind the halo of the Statue indicates that it was carved in 719, together with a Maitreya statue, after the wish of a Silla official Kim Chisong.

We can immediately recognize that the Kamsan-sa statue is a type derived from Central Asian images but that also reflects the influence of Gupta style Mathuran Buddha statues. This is especially true in the treatment of the robe which is characterized by a rounded neckline and by multiple folds falling down over the body and divided by its legs. A very similar example of this type is found in early T'ang figures such as the relief carved in a niche in the cave of Shink'u-ssu, Lungmen of the mid-seventh century of the late seventh century T'ang marble statue from Tingchou which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The same type of Buddha image had already appeared in China in the fifth century in the caves of Pingling-ssu and Yunkang but the type was not produced in the sixth to early seventh century as if it went out of fashion.

This Buddha image type has a connection with the first Buddha image ever made by King Udayana of Kausambi in Buddhist texts. According to the story, Buddha Sakyamuni once left this world to preach to his mother in the heaven of the Deva Kings. King Udayana of Kausambi ordered a Buddha statue made in sandalwood to worship in this human world. Although this story of the making the first Buddha statue seems to have been made-up in later date, it is important to note that early Buddhists actually believed in it and made an actual image to worship. Even Hsuan-tsang relates a miraculous story of how this image moved from India to Khotan He included a sandalwood replica of this King Udayana image among the seven Buddha images he brought back from his trip to China (629-645). Perhaps the reappearance of this type during the T'ang Dynasty may be due to copying this replica.

The actual outlook of this type of the King Udayana image was known when an inscription was found in a wooden statue of Seiryō-ji in Japan brought by a Japanese monk Chonen from China in 985. The inscription says that it was a 2nd copy of the legendary, image made by the King Udayana in a temple Kaiyuan-ssu; China. Hence, Buddha images



following the stylization of the Seiryō-ji Buddha image began to be called the King Udayana Buddha image type.

The stylistic changes in this type of Buddha image parallels the cause of contacts between Korea and other parts of Asia as they developed. The earlier, more original appearance of this Kamsan-sa type Buddha image is rooted in Gupta sculptures of Mathura. When this type made its way through Central Asia, the U-shaped folds of Mathuan statue flowing over the body were divided over the legs. We can clearly see its variations in such stucco statues in the Rawak Stupa in Khotan or the clay statue from Shorchuq. Here we see that a new mode of Buddha type with links to the King Udayana Buddha image appears as one of Central Asian invention.

In Korea, the King Udayana Buddha type, represented by the Kamsan-sa statue, became one of the-most popular forms of standing Buddha images of the Unified Silla. To this group also belong the relief image on the south side of the four-sided stone monument at the Kulbul-sa site, the gilt bronze statues from Sonsan or from Tsushima, and many others. There are also several variations in the mode of wearing the garment. These Silla variations are not easily found in Chinese models, suggesting that Koreans gradually developed and modified the King Udayana image type to their own forms. We also find that this modified appearance of the Kamsan-sa Buddha image type found its way to Japan. One can see its influence in the wooden statues in Toshodai-ji or in Gango-ji of the Tempyo and the early Heian periods.

#### V. Seated Buddha image in Dharmachakra Mudra

Buddha images in Dharmachakra mudra, or the hand gesture of teaching, were not widely known in Korea until the discovery of two sets of bronze plaques in 1975 from the pond of Anap-chi, Kyongju. Among them two plaques show a seated Buddha triad with the central Buddha in the teaching gesture. The modeling of the body of the Buddha and the bodhisattva figures, and the treatment of the naturally flowing folds of the garments and the slightly bent posture of the attendants, all reflect the T'ang sculptural style of the late seventh to early eighth century.

Buddha images in the teaching mudra were very popular in India during the Gupta Dynasty. The Dharmachakra mudra symbolized the Buddha's first sermon at Deer Park after his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. This form appeared in the early T'ang wall paintings

in Tun-huang, gilt bronze images, and among Horyu-ji gilt bronze treasures and wall paintings of the Nara period in Japan.

The discovery of the Anapchi Buddha plaque indicates that sculptures of the Unified Silla closely shared common stylistic and iconographic elements with those of other contemporary Asian Countries during the late seventh and eighth centuries.

#### VI. Seated Buddha Image in Bhumisparśa Mudra

Another type of Silla Buddha image which can be traced back to its origin to India is the representation of seated Buddha statues in Bhumisparśa mudra, the symbolic gesture of subduing the Demon Mara at the time of Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment. The most famous of this type in Korea are the main Buddha in the Sokkuram cave, and the Buddha triad carved in relief at Chilburam, Namsan, Kyongju, all dating from the eighth century.

The early representation of this enlightenment scene appears in Gandharan reliefs as found in the Freer Gallery of Art. Chinese versions appear in Yunkang Cave of the late fifth century and in the sixth century Tun-huang wall paintings. While these early Chinese examples are narrative versions of the incident in the Buddha's life, a more symbolic form appeared in the Gupta period with the representation of an independently seated Buddha in Bhumisparśa mudra. This new version of the Buddha image became popular from the Gupta period to the Pala Dynasty and found its way to T'ang Dynasty China. Hsuan-tsang describes the miraculous story of the creation of a Buddha in in Bhumisparśa mudra in the Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya. A T'ang emperor's envoy, Wang Hsuan-tse, mentions the same story and informs us that he arranged, for the first time to have a Chinese artist draw the statue with the permission of the Indian monks at Mahabodhi Temple. After his return to the T'ang capital, it is recorded that many copies, even the one in the court, were made after the drawing brought from India.

Monk I-tsing, who voyaged by sea to and from India between 671 and 695, is recorded as having brought back a copy of this image calling it "The true appearance of the Buddha seated in vajrasana, the Diamond Throne". In Eminent Monks who travelled to the Western regions, he remarks that the pilgrims visited the Mahabodhi temple to revere this statue as if they were worshiping the actual Buddha himself.

Early examples of this seated Buddha image after the Gupta style appear in China in the late seventh century T'ang period. They reflect strong Indian stylistic elements as one can

see in a clay plaque of a Buddha triad found from the site of Tayen-ta, changan, finished in 652. Another early representation is found in the rock-cut relief at Kueilin of Kwang-si Province and is inscribed with a date 679. Here again a Gupta style is perceived. This is a significant feature since Kueilin is located along the route to Kwangjou from where many pilgrims, bound for the West, left by boat. In this type of Buddha image, we can see international elements that connect East and West by both land and sea routes. More sinicized versions are also found in the Lungmen caves, in Paoching-ssu relief panels and in T'ienlung-shan cave images.

This image first appeared in Korea in the late seventh century and became common in the eighth century. The Sokkuram Buddha, a representative of this type, has seated in crossed legged posture and is in Bhumisparśa-mudra, all features commonly shared with Indian and Chinese models. The fan-shaped arrangement of the garment folds between the crossed legs suggests that the model for this type was Indian in origin.

Chinese figure comparable to the Sokkuram Buddha is a marble statue of 737, from the temple of Hwata-ssu, Hopei Province. A statue sharing common stylistic element also appears in the upper gallery at Borobudur on Java, although it dates in the early ninth century.

From this Indian inspired type of Buddha image, Silla again developed its own variations, slightly changing the mode of wearing the garment by covering both shoulders and adding an undergarment which is sometimes tied around the waist. In some cases, a medicine jar is placed in one hand identifying the image as the Medicine Buddha. There are also a few examples of this type which represent Buddha Amitabha such as the figures found in Palgong-san cave and in Pusok-sa.

The Buddha in Bhumisparśa motif was iconographically permissible not only for representing Sakyamuni Buddha but also for other Buddhas residing in his own Buddha land since all had passed the stage of enlightenment. The state of enlightenment could only be visualized by the symbolic hand gesture of the Bhumisparśa-mudra. This idea originated in India, probably in the late Gupta or early Pala Dynasty, and spread to China and Korea in the course of promulgating the Buddhist doctrine. Thus the seated Buddha image in Bhumisparśa mudra and its variations is also a good example of cultural exchange between east and west in the development of Buddhist art in Asia.

## VI. Late Koryo Buddhist Images Showing Tibetan Sculptural Style

When the Mongols had close political ties with the Koryo Dynasty, the influence of Lamaist Buddhist art which was introduced to Yuan Court was also felt among the late Koryo Buddhist Sculptures. The most famous among these examples is the fine gilt bronze Budhisatva figure discovered in Haeyang, Diamond Mountains. The elaborate headdress and the jewel decorations on the body indicate obvious Tibetan influence and even suggest some Nepalese elements for its origin. Among other examples which also reflect. The Tibetan influences are the Buddha and Bodhisatva figures in the Tongwon Collection and the Sarira reliquary in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.