



The Distinctive Paintings of the Sun God and Moon Goddess in the Ancient Ohoebun Goguryeo Tombs

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Abstract

The murals of Tomb No. 4 of the Ohoebun Goguryeo cemetery, in Ji'an City of present-day People's Republic of China, display the sun god, Haesin, and the moon goddess, Dalsin. They play the role of mediators or intermediate beings, like shamans, connecting humans on earth and the gods in the sky. This study aims to trace the vitality of Haesin and Dalsin, whose faces are painted with extraordinary realism. The vitality of the paintings and their peculiar energy reflect the artist's accomplishment. The murals show that the painter believed in animism and that all things were alive. As the Mongolian and Siberian tribes shared the common belief system of shamanism, the Goguryeo people believed in a mixture of Taoism, Buddhism, and shamanism. In particular, the vitality of the realistic faces combined with symbolism connecting the visible and invisible worlds, are characteristics of the Haesin and Dalsin images. This study suggests that the artist's integrative perception of visual literacy (an ability to see and use images) was a key factor in making the murals look alive, which stemmed from the animistic, shamanistic, and monistic worldviews of the artist, who projected the belief system of the Goguryeo people on to the images.

Keywords: Ohoebun Goguryeo tomb murals, vitality of Haesin and Dalsin, Korean art history, animistic world view, shamanism, visual literacy

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Introduction

During the Goguryeo period (37 BC–AD 668), people believed that in the afterlife their souls and bodies would be separated and transformed into divine spirits, resting and enjoying happiness in the sky. Based on this belief in life-after-death, tombs were constructed for the next life. Accordingly, the Goguryeo people painted splendid funeral murals on the walls of the stone chambers of their tombs, which represent an important historical and artistic legacy of the Goguryeo people. The discovery of the Ohoebun Goguryeo tumuli murals in Ji'an, northeast China, and the publication of photographs of them in newspapers in the 1970s, astonished many Koreans. The images, among them paintings of Haesin and Dalsin, represented a glimpse into an ancient past more than 1500 years ago, and allure with their surprisingly realistic and lively depictions.

In mythology, popular beliefs, and folk tales, the story of Haesin and Dalsin have persisted and survived into present-day Korea. A variety of researchers have studied the tales of the sun and the moon, which are often depicted in constellation scenes in Goguryeo murals in addition to being associated with Haesin and Dalsin (see for example, G. Yi 1972; Jeon 1997; M. Yi 1999; S. Kim 2003; No 2005; Jo 2007; S. Kim 2008; Seong-ae Park 2009; Hong 2009). Moreover, various in-depth studies of the Goguryeo tumulus murals have been conducted, dealing with a wide variety of aspects. These studies have in turn spawned a large number of high-quality scholarly articles, which further advanced our knowledge of Goguryeo mural art. Amid the rising academic interest in Goguryeo's ancient murals, these studies have crossed over to other academic fields, such as the history of religion, intellectual history, art history, mythology, and shamanism, and away from traditional interpretations. The majority of past studies on ancient Goguryeo murals are based on iconography, which uses images as visual records to better understand the history, religion, thought, and art of a society (Shin 2014; Jeon 1992; No 2005; Jo 2007; Seong-ae Park 2009). Regarding the Haesin and Dalsin murals, the study of these has contributed significantly to a wider and deeper understanding of Taoist influences on the Goguryeo people (for example, J. Jeong 2003). This study, however,

will focus on Haesin and Dalsin in connection with shamanism, which represents a lesser explored topic. More specifically, the Haesin and Dalsin murals are analyzed in conjunction with shamanism and art, which offers a fresh perspective on the topic.

Although the Ohoeibun Goguryeo tombs display a great variety of beautiful paintings and artwork with various themes, we were drawn from an artistic viewpoint to a smaller, peripheral painting, namely, the lively images of Haesin and Dalsin.¹ This study has its origins with one of the researcher's personal experience facing the images of the Haesin and Dalsin murals of the Ohoeibun Goguryeo tombs; an act that felt more vivid than encountering a living person. Consequently, this article explores the cause of the vividness and vitality of the Haesin and Dalsin murals and seeks to understand the aesthetic perception of the Goguryeo artist who created the paintings. In association with art, a method suggested in this study is visual literacy, which is distinct from iconography and has been neglected as a methodology. According to John Debes (1970), visual literacy is the ability to see and use an image.² The method of visual literacy is used as a means to decode a painter's vision and degree of visual literacy through the work that the artist created. Specifically, this method is an attempt to read the artist's mind through the painting in order to understand the belief system of the society in which the artist lived in.

Moreover, this article attempts to determine the world view of the Goguryeo people by interpreting the vitality of the painting related to ancient ritualistic, animistic, and shamanistic beliefs that held that "even an image...created on walls is alive" (Shin 2004, 131). The human mind and consciousness is projected through a work of art, which shows the belief system of the society to which the painter belonged. Even a single stroke can point to the artist's feelings and emotions at the time of the creation, or the artist's way of seeing and thinking, which the artist has also shared with

1. Haesin and Dalsin are in fact referred to by various terms in Korean mythological tales, such as Sun God and Moon Goddess, Bokhui and Yeowa, or Yeonorang and Saeonyeo. However, this study prefers to use the terms, Haesin and Dalsin, though it may on occasion refer to the alternative terms, for instance when quoting other authors.

2. At present, the concept of visual literacy is mainly used to explore media and cultural literacy.

society.³ Through these murals, the artist projected not only internal ideals into the Haesin (or sun) and Dalsin (or moon) paintings, but the belief system of the Goguryeo people (S. Yi 2004, 165).⁴

This study will initially describe the location and outline of the specific Goguryeo tumulus featuring the images of Haesin and Dalsin, which is the focus of this study. Subsequently, this article will discuss the place of Haesin and Dalsin in Korean mythology by analyzing the legend in connection to other dominating belief systems and world views of the Goguryeo people. Subsequently, the discussion focuses on the realism and vitality of the Haesin and Dalsin images, and their hidden symbolism in connection with visual literacy. Lastly, the realistic style of the paintings will be compared to prehistoric art in the context of animism, shamanism, and visual literacy.

The Tumulus No. 4 of the Ohoebun Goguryeo Cemetery in Ji'an, China

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in northeast China “archeological remains of three cities and 40 tombs” have been identified as belonging to the Goguryeo period.⁵ Correspondingly, these sites were designated as World Heritage Sites in July, 2004. One of these locations is in the vicinity of Ji'an City, which is part of Jilin Province in the present-day People's Republic of China. In modern times, Ji'an City incorporates Guonei City 國內城 (Gungnaeseong in Korean), which used to be the second capital of the Goguryeo kingdom from 3 BC to AD 427, before the relocation of the capital to Pyongyang. The Ji'an area occupies a basin surrounded on

3. The efficacy of using pictures to evaluate the human mind has been verified in the field of art therapy.

4. For example, a costume of a Yakut shaman is decorated with many celestial bodies, such as the shapes of the sun, moon, and stars. In the Onyang Folk Museum (Ansan City, Chungcheongnam-do), shamanic pieces representing the sun and moon are displayed, and, in the image of the ten traditional symbols of longevity (*ilwolbyeongpungdo*), the sun and moon are always found (S. Yi 2004, 170).

5. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom,” accessed May 16, 2020, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1135>.

three sides by mountains and the Yalu River, which marks the present-day border between China and North Korea. That said, the distinctive style of the Goguryeo tombs concluded with Goguryeo's fall to a Silla-Tang (China) alliance in 668.

In the greater Ji'an area, a total of seven tumuli have been found featuring the themes of the Sun God and Moon Goddess, but only three of them display paintings of Haesin and Dalsin in their interior tombs. Of the three tombs featuring the Haesin and Dalsin paintings, two are located in the ancient Ohoebun Goguryeo burial mounds (Hwang 2007, 47; W. Kim 1974, 100; Jeon 1994, 156–157), officially called by the Chinese, the “Ji'an Tonggou ancient tombs No. 2104”⁶ (集安 通溝古墳群 禹山墓區 第 2104). The Ohoebun (literally, “Five Helmet Tombs”) cemetery consists of five burial mounds, shaped like helmets, hence its name, with the images of Haesin and Dalsin displayed in tumuli No. 4 and No. 5 (Jeon 1992, 45). Among them, the No. 4 burial mound consists of a single chamber, called the *dansilbun* (single-chamber tomb), which is the focus of this study.

Bak et al. (1997) divided the building style of Goguryeo tombs into three distinct periods, according to architectural structure as well as thematics of the tomb murals.⁷ Accordingly, the *dansilbun* of Ohoebun's Tumulus No. 4, is assumed to have been built in the style of the third period (6th–7th centuries). Actually, the few images of Haesin and Dalsin discovered in Goguryeo tombs all originate from this period (Jeon 1992, 45).

In Ohoebun Tumulus No. 4, a great variety of murals are painted on all the smooth walls of the tomb and all follow the typical style of the third period. The four main walls in the tomb feature four deities in the form of the Blue Dragon (*cheongnyong*), the White Tiger (*baekho*), the Red Phoenix (*jujak*), and the Black Tortoise-Snake (*hyeonmu*), called the “Dark Warrior”

6. Tonggou is the modern name of Guonei City (or Gungnaeseong in Korean).

7. The first period lasts from the end of the 3rd century to the beginning of the 5th century, and is characterized by paintings of peculiar traditions. The middle period lasts from the middle of the 5th century to the beginning of the 6th century, and features paintings of daily activities, decorative patterns, and the four deities. The third and last period ranges from the middle of the 6th century to the middle of the 7th century. The typical features of this period are a single chamber decorated with the four deities, with all of the murals painted directly on the stone walls.

(Gim 2003, 90). They appear to be the protectors of the deceased and symbolize the four directions on earth and the changes of the four seasons (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Four Deities Symbolizing the Four Directions and Change of Seasons

Direction	Celestial animal	Season
East	Blue-green dragon	Spring equinox
South	Red phoenix	Summer solstice
West	White tiger	Autumn equinox
North	Dark warrior	Winter solstice

The center of the ceiling is decorated with the *hwangnyong*, or “Golden Dragon,” who is the focus of the four directions and their deities. The Golden Dragon is painted together with three stars, because the Golden Dragon symbolizes perfection in the systems of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements (Gim 2003, 98).⁸ In addition, the murals show a variety of themes related to Taoism, such as Taoist hermits and sanctuaries. Furthermore, various deities, scholars, ascetics, mythological figures, mythical animals, and images of natural features, such as forests, clouds, and lotus patterns, are portrayed throughout the tomb chamber. Many of the decorative patterns mimic the style of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and the gods, spirits, and natural features characterize Taoist, or Buddhist beliefs, such as the lotus pattern.

The interior structure of the tomb includes a three-corner stone propped into a corner of square walls, and the first and second layer of a stylobate, with a four corner flat stone as ceiling. Haesin and Dalsin are painted on the first layer of the stylobate, and the image, called *sinseon-do* (“Divine spirit painting”), is painted on the second layer of the support

8. The three stars form part of the seven stars, or Big Dipper (*bukdu chilseong* 北斗七星), which according to the Taoist belief system is home to three Taoist gods.

ceiling of the mural (Fig. 1). The *sinseon-do* features a creature with a human face and a dragon body, holding and supporting with both hands the sun and moon (Gim 2003, 108–109).

The tomb is decorated with a great variety of funeral art, but the paintings of the Sun God, Haesin, and the Moon Goddess, Dalsin, display extraordinarily vivid facial expressions. The images of Haesin and Dalsin are located on the north side of the tomb, and they are depicted flying into the sky while facing each other. Dalsin, holding the moon above her head, is depicted in the left corner of the first floor stylobate (Fig. 2), and Haesin, holding the sun above his head, is painted opposite in the right corner (Fig. 3). The moon in Dalsin's hands features a toad in its center, which likewise is a symbol of the moon, while the sun in Haesin's hands displays a three-legged crow, which equally is a symbol of the sun



Figure 1. Mural paintings of one corner of Tomb No. 4 (6th–7th century) of the Ohoebun Goguryeo tombs, Ji'an, China
Source: Open source.



Figure 2. Dalsin (Moon Goddess), Ohoebun Tomb No. 4, Ji'an, China
Source: Open source.



Figure 3. Haesin (Sun God), Ohoebun Tomb No. 4, Ji'an, China
Source: Open source.

in ancient, oriental mythology. This symbolism reflects the importance of nature to the Goguryeo people and, therefore, may also be evidence of the Goguryeo people's belief and practice of shamanism. In addition, the style and character of the Haesin and Dalsin paintings reflects also a strong link to Taoist mythology and tradition (Gim 2003, 108–109). In accordance with these various traditions, the deceased of the tomb is guarded at the base level by four deities from four directions, and led by Haesin and Dalsin through the sky to the Golden Dragon.

Haesin and Dalsin in Korean Mythology

A Review of Philosophies and Mythologies Associated with Haesin and Dalsin: Unification of Buddhism, Taoism, and Shamanism

In ancient mythologies, the sun often appears as a king who controls the cosmic principles, carrying symbolic meaning. Likewise, in many Korean legends an earthly king is also a god in the sky, which is a symbolic attribute of immortality. In accordance, Haesin and Dalsin were the progenitors of mankind. The concept of the Sun God is evidence of the progress of a civilization, but originates from an animistic worldview and the shamanistic belief that all creations have their own inner spirits. In this mythical belief system, gods, humans, and nature exist as one, and humans are part of nature in a monistic world. Moreover, the images of Haesin and Dalsin express the Goguryeo people's view on the afterlife. The principles of Yin and Yang are reflected in the Moon Goddess and the Sun God. The general structure of Goguryeo tombs reflects an understanding of the Yin and Yang doctrine and the Five Elements theory of Confucianism, as well as a belief in the divine spirits of Taoism.⁹

9. The Gakjeo tombs (early-style tombs) display the sun, moon, and nebula together with a *samjoko* and a toad. In the Sasinmyo 四神墓 (Four-deities tomb), and the No.4 tomb of the Ohobun (late-style), images display scenes of divine spirits, depicted as heavenly hosts, and paintings of the transformation into divine spirits, depicted as the sun, moon, and nebula.

Overall, most studies have concentrated on demonstrating that the people who built the Goguryeo tombs practiced Buddhism and Taoism. Woo Sil-ha (1997) did emphasize the shamanistic worldview of the Goguryeo people by focusing on the three-legged crow (*samjoko*). By doing so, Woo developed the so-called “Three Principles theory,” or “Theocosmoanthric theory” (also called “Trichotomy theory”) as a basis for traditional Korean culture. The theory was inspired by the images of Haesin, who holds the sun that bears a three-legged crow (a symbol of the sun), and Dalsin, who holds the moon with a toad in its center (a symbol of the moon), in ancient oriental mythology.

The mural paintings of Haesin and Dalsin represent the Goguryeo people’s vision of the afterlife, combining the philosophies of Buddhism, the Yin and Yang doctrine, the Five Elements theory, and the concepts of divine spirits of Taoism and shamanism (J. Jeong 2006, 178). The Goguryeo people perceived the afterlife as part of a monistic worldview, and the mural paintings illustrate that monistic worldview and an integrative open-minded approach to religion (Shin 2014; Y. Park 1975).

The Transformation of the Identities of Haesin and Dalsin in a Shamanistic Universe

Distinct from other archaic religious beliefs, Haesin and Dalsin feature clear gender identities. Some researchers of the ancient Goguryeo murals have interpreted the sun as Bokhui (Fuxi in Chinese), and the moon as Yeowa (Nuwa in Chinese) (Y. Park 1975, 23). Kim Seon-ja (2003, 443–467) interpreted Bokhui and Yeowa (alternative names for Haesin and Dalsin) in connection with a relief sculpture of the Han Dynasty (206 BC– AD 220) found in Sichuan, which displays a human face and a flying body with wings, in comparison to a painting of Bokhui and Yeowa in Gochang, present-day South Korea. Bokhui and Yeowa are described as a male god and a female goddess. Likewise, Jeon (2007) interpreted the painting of Bokhui and Yeowa as representing deities—a god controlling the sky and a goddess controlling the earth, respectively.

However, records of Yeowa predate those of Bokhui and the pair

was never depicted together before the Han Dynasty. Very early records describe Yeowa as a great goddess who created humans out of red clay (S. Kim 2003). According to this tale, Bokhui and Yeowa are siblings, but their daughter Bokbi is evidence of their marriage. In essence, the Chinese tale of Bokhui and Yeowa and the legend of Haesin and Dalsin are similar in structure; after a crisis the siblings transform into a god and goddess. Other similar tales in Korean mythology related to Bokhui and Yeowa are that of a legend of a marriage between a surviving brother and sister, Yeonorang and Seonyeo, after a flood during the Han Dynasty. The Bokhui and Yeowa, and the Yeonorang and Seonyeo legends have comparable characteristics and consider the sun and moon gods as male and female (M. Yi 1999; Si-in Park 1996, 133; Song 2003, 290).

According to Kim Jin Soon (2009), there exist great similarities in the ancient mythologies of China and Korea. Bokhui is regarded as a sort of monk, who practices Taoism, *hado* 河圖 (“Yellow River map,” “scheme,” or “diagram”; with variations on the second character), and the “Eight Elements,” or *palgwae* 八卦 (*Bagua* in Chinese), which may be the basic principles of Korean Buddhism. Moreover, Bokhui is considered the founder of the Chinese science of *xiangshu* 象數 (“the natural course of things”), and the Eight Elements and *hado* represent the basic fundamentals of *xiangshu*. However, Bokhui is also described as a Korean spiritual practitioner, or monk, and the Eight Elements and *hado* are pre-existing theories of Korean *seondo* 仙道 (“the way of the divine spirit”) (see G. Jeong 2007).

Kim Seon-ja (2008) notes how Bokhui and Yeowa (i.e., Haesin and Dalsin) initially never appeared in any records during the same timeline. In the early stages of the legend of Bokhui and Yeowa, only the goddess Yeowa existed, with Bokhui appearing later chronologically.¹⁰ Moreover, according to the Korean folk tale of Haenim and Dalnim, Dalsin transformed over time, first into a moon goddess in charge of the land, and subsequently into a sun god, controlling the king and the sky.

The existence of Haesin and Dalsin in the Goguryeo tumulus murals

10. See Yi Gyu-bo's (1168–1241), “Goyulsi” 古律詩 (Ancient Poetry), in *Dongguk Yi Sang gukkip* 東國李相國文集 (Dongguk [Joseon] Yi Sang's Korean Literature Collection), volume 3.

indicates Goguryeo society still believed in a shamanic universe but accepted other religions, in spite of its development into a more advanced society. The transformation in the roles of Haesin and Dalsin is related to the historical transformation of culture and society. In the pre-agricultural society of Korea, the roles of males and females were more egalitarian, but this gradually changed into a more male-dominated, patriarchal society after the agricultural revolution and formation of settled tribes.

The Equal Relationship Between and Different Roles of Haesin and Dalsin

In mythology Haesin and Dalsin appear to have an equal relationship. The sun and moon are the most fundamental elements representing light and darkness. They never cease in their creation of day and night. The four deities on the four walls of Ohoebun Tomb No. 4, and the arrangement of the murals, as well as the positioning of Haesin and Dalsin, suggests that the composition was made on the basis of the principles of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements theory.

Park Yong-sook (1975, 23), a Korean art critic and historian, explains Haesin and Dalsin according to their roles in relation to Bokhui and Yeowa in a mythological system from a mythical worldview. In an infinite universe, Haesin is an emperor or sun king, and his task is to control education and to decree, while Dalsin rules the earth. In Korean mythology, Dalsin is described as the *sansin halmeoni* 産神 할머니 (“birth-spirit grandmother”), who then transforms into a “mountain spirit,” or *sansin* 山神.

According to Taoist cosmology, in the Eight Trigrams (*palgwae*), Haesin symbolizes *li* 離, or the symbol of the “tree of the East” (*dongbangmok* 東方木), while Dalsin symbolizes *gam* 坎, or the symbol of the “metal of the West” (*seobanggeum* 西方金) (Y. Park 1975, 16). While Haesin and Dalsin face each other in the image, the sun is on the right, and the moon on the left. The symmetrical composition gives the viewer the impression that the two beings are created from one. The god representing the sky and the goddess representing the earth appear equal, though their roles differ.

The sun and the moon were considered magical, heavenly bodies in the sky, which controlled the amount of light over the passage of time. This

process was regarded as mysterious to the people of that period. The moon held by Dalsin bears a toad, which lives on earth and is a symbol of the moon in ancient, oriental mythology. The sun held by Haesin bears a three-legged crow (*samjoko*), a symbol of the sun in the sky. Dalsin is in charge of the visible world, whereas Haesin is in charge of the invisible world. The murals of Haesin and Dalsin show not only their equal relationship but also their variant roles.

Intermediate Beings as Mediators in a Monistic World

In Ohoebun Tomb No. 4, Haesin and Dalsin take on the role of guides, leading the occupant of the tomb to heaven. Below the natural phenomena of the sun and the moon in the sky, the earth became a shelter where humans may dwell. As for humans, life is dependent on the role of the sun and the moon in nature. The Goguryeo people believed that the mediator deities were guiding the deceased from the earth to the sky.

Regardless of culture and time period, gods are often presented in the form of a bird flying in the sky but with a human face.¹¹ This image of a divine spirit appears often as a crane-like bird. With a bird hovering between the earth and the sky, this kind of image perfectly symbolizes the sun and the moon in the sky. In the case of Haesin and Dalsin, the tips of their dresses branch off into three or four parts, just like a god creating the wheel of a wagon. Haesin and Dalsin are depicted in the form of a human face with a flying body. Bokhui and Yeowa (i.e., Haesin and Dalsin) are typically portrayed in half-human, half-creature form; the upper part of the body being human and the lower part taking the form of a snake or dragon. In both cases, the images represent a unified, living being, a hybrid of human and animal.

Haesin and Dalsin are mentioned five times by An Jeong-bok in the *Dongsa gangmok* (Classified History of the East, 1756–1778). An Jeong-bok notes a customary ritual performed during his own time on the first day of

11. For example, the phoenix in Miaodigou from the Yangshao culture is a combination of the sun and a swallow, which bears resemblance to Haesin.

every month of praying before the mortuary tablet of the sun and moon. Haesin and Dalsin illustrate the contrast between the sun and moon, day and night, and Yin and Yang. They mediate all living activities on earth. Haesin and Dalsin are *intermediate beings*, connecting the human world, which is the world on earth, and the heavenly one. These characteristics are that of a shaman, who bridges sky and earth in a monistic world. Likewise, the murals of Haesin and Dalsin in the Ohoeibun Tomb No. 4 reveal that they represent mediators, leading the masters of the tomb, that is, the deceased, from earth to heaven, which is the typical role of a shaman.

Shamanistic Art, Realism, and Visual Literacy: Transcendence Throughout Human History

The Realistic Depiction of Haesin and Dalsin and Realism in Oriental Art

The images of Haesin and Dalsin expose their identity as shamanistic mediators. Despite the relatively small size of the images of Haesin and Dalsin, their faces are realistically and vividly illustrated and have the appearance of real human beings. Humans and the god of nature are in harmony in the murals. The natural style in which they are depicted delivers an abstract concept of the Goguryeo artist's internal ideas. The image of god is delivered in a symbolic manner.

In oriental paintings, the shape of nature is often illustrated with simple brushed lines; therefore, these kinds of oriental paintings can be classified into the category of realism. However, this kind of *lively* realism, defined as projecting soul into an artwork and described as *qi* 氣 (“vital energy” or “life force”; *gi* in Korean) in accordance with Chinese art principles, differs from realistically, technically well-depicted paintings, which aim simply to reproduce an image as precisely as possible. Regarding oriental art, Xie He 謝赫 (ca. 459–532), a Chinese writer, art historian, and critic of the Liu, Song, and Southern Qi dynasties, described the role *qi* played in a pictorial space. To Xie, a painting had to look lively according to the “six principles of Chinese painting” (*huihua liufa* 繪畫六法), which he describes in the

preface to his *Gu huapin lu* 古畫品錄 (A Classification of Ancient Painters). In addition, most images created in oriental art contain some symbolic meaning. However, the symbolism contained in such paintings does not differentiate between the invisible mind or spirit of humans, and the visible, materialistic world of nature; rather, such paintings express a monistic worldview.

Even though a painting is a materialistic object, it serves as the vehicle of the artist's intention and symbolic meaning. Oriental paintings connect the visible world of materialistic objects and the invisible spiritual world through a realistic depiction of visible objects in nature. These elements make the Haesin and Dalsin murals appear alive. It can be difficult for modern people to discern the symbolic meaning of the murals, since modern eyes and intellect divide the world into separate spiritual and material spheres. Only a shamanistic and holistic approach, which incorporates the belief that everything is alive, helps to identify the true meaning of the images of Haesin and Dalsin.

Visual Literacy and Art

The vitality of the Haesin and Dalsin murals was achieved by the artist's instinctive intuition of the tacit dimension, and by holistically seeing and sensing the image. This state of mind is difficult to achieve in a dualistic culture that separates mind and body, spirit and matter, and god, humans, and nature. The unifying moment, when an artist is experiencing the process of creating art is the basis for visual literacy.

The idea of visual literacy as a learning aid has been in use since classical times in some way or another. Moreover, modern western education has been using a variety of visual effects for learning, such as tables, graphs, and diagrams, for quite some time. In contrast to *linguistic literacy*, which constitutes meaning acquired through oral and written language, *visual literacy*, defined by New Art Basics (NAB, Visual Cognition, n.d.) as an activity that uses visual cognition to see and understand, has been used in the realm of artistic creativity. When artists create art, they constantly use internal images. This is also the moment for raising one's visual literacy. As

a result, an artist's visual literacy is more developed than in ordinary people (Shin 2014). Visual thinking and visual perception, with mind and body unified, represents a new approach to analyzing art.

The vitality of a painting derives from an artist's visual literacy. The more an artist develops her/his visual literacy, the more alive a painting appears. This is the reason, as E.H. Gombrich pointed out in his classic *The Story of Art* (1950), that animal paintings created in Paleolithic caves appear so vivid. Likewise, the Goguryeo murals of Haesin and Dalsin exhibit the artist's high level of visual literacy. To the trained eye, the murals provide a glimpse into the Goguryeo artist's way of perception beyond time and space. In this context, the murals are not a lifeless object to the viewer. A viewer's visual literacy provides a way to explore in depth the artist understanding and emotions.

The Vitality of the Realistic Depiction in the Outlines of Haesin and Dalsin's Faces in Comparison to Paleolithic Cave Paintings

The facial expressions of Haesin and Dalsin are remarkably realistic and vivid (see Fig. 4), and an observer can sense their vitality. The formal aspects of the images and, in particular, the lively lines in the faces are striking. Their faces are illustrated by mere simple, formal elements, consisting of drawn lines, such as the eyebrows and noses, and points of color, such as the eyes and lips. The simplicity of the strokes and outlines produced their vital facial expressions.

Indeed, even a line delivers feelings when observed with the inner mind.

Art therapy, for example, uses this technique. The vitality of the faces comes from the painter's ability to draw images *alive*. This unifying moment of *creation*



Figure 4. Faces of Haesin and Dalsin, Ohoebun Tomb No. 4, Ji'an, China

Source: Open access.

constitutes the highest step of visual literacy (Shin 2014, 159–162).

Visual literacy, or the idea that images can be *read*, existed long before written language. Despite the great differences in historical and geographical locations, the artistic renderings of Haesin and Dalsin are comparable to the earliest artistic paintings of human beings, since the state of mind of the artist transcends human history. From a standpoint of visual literacy, these objects of art appear very similar, and in both cases, the role of the artist was that of a shaman externalizing his vision. Moreover, from an artistic, technical perspective, the vitality and simplicity of the lines and the realism displayed in the images of Haesin and Dalsin are very similar to that of Paleolithic cave paintings.

From the Paleolithic period on, shamanistic practices, spiritual transformation, and art has often been associated with animals, such as in the majority of Paleolithic paintings. This association is not only connected to success and good fortune during the hunt as a means of survival, but also as identification and assumed kinship with certain animals and nature by tribes and shamans. Therefore, humans of the Paleolithic period depicted animals in a realistic and vivid fashion, such as the Altamira cave paintings in Spain (around 36,000 years old), the Lascaux cave painting in France



Figure 5. A bison in the Lascaux cave paintings, France, dating to the Paleolithic era

Source: Open source.

(estimated at 17,000 years old) (see Fig. 5), and the animal images at the Ulsan Bangudae Petroglyphs (estimated at between 3500 and 7000 years old). The Ulsan Bangudae Petroglyphs display a variety of animals, such as whales, dogs, wolves, tigers, deer, boars, bears, foxes, tortoises, and fish. The vitality of the images is particularly noticeable in its depiction of a whale.

Humans of the Paleolithic

period created remarkably life-like paintings by presenting nature in the form of animals in a realistic fashion. Animistic and shamanistic worldviews guided their art. Those people preserved a glance into human history through their art. Despite the often immense differences in historical and geographical locations, the simplicity and vitality of the lines in the depiction of Haesin and Dalsin bear great similarities to artworks of humans of much earlier periods, which is the result of a comparable mind frame and role of the artist.

The Creator of the Images and the Role of a Shaman

Haesin and Dalsin's role is principally that of mediators. The role of shamans as mediators between gods and humans has been depicted in cave paintings since the Paleolithic period. For example, an Altamira cave painting (replicated by Henri Breuil, a French Catholic priest and a pioneer in speleology)¹² displays a shaman wearing an animal mask, which represents one of the very few human figures among a great variety of animal images. Another cave painting at Altamira shows a life-sized (160 cm) deceased human figure holding a stick with a bird on top (Beltran 1999, 28). In addition, a Lascaux cave painting shows a human wearing an animal mask. According to Jean Clottes and J. David Lewis-Williams (1998), who studied cave paintings from the Paleolithic period, these humans had the roles of shamans. The images found in the Ulsan Bangudae Petroglyphs bear similarities to mural art of the Paleolithic period. They show a shaman in the form of a human leading a tortoise. It is assumed that these rock and cave paintings were created by shamans for ritualistic purposes. The characteristics of a shaman, bridging sky and earth in a monistic worldview, appear not only in their roles but also in the outlines of the paintings. A shaman was a painter who planted a soul into a painting, and the shaman's

12. In order to understand these paintings, Henri Breuil emphasized the importance of replicating them with special tools. Breuil must have realized that he needed to not only replicate the work but to see and experience the consciousness of the period through the eyes of the period. This process has been considered important in restoring the rapidly deteriorating paintings, especially, since the Altamira cave is open to the public.

holistic, unified consciousness brought the shaman's vitality into the work.

This kind of realism and vitality is representative of cave paintings of the Paleolithic era. Moreover, it proves the existence of indigenous religion and shamanism during the period of their creation (Shin 2004). These paintings are living and breathing testaments to the artists' shamanistic and animistic perspectives and her/his monistic worldview. Most creators of Paleolithic art were almost certainly shamans.

In a monistic worldview, the perception of an artist does not distinguish between the object and the self. The realistic depiction and vitality in Haesin and Dalsin's faces suggest an institutive, sparkling moment of the artist during its creation. The unifying moment, when the artist created the art, was directly projected into the painting through the artist's hand, brush, and paint. The artist became one with the object, in this case the painting, and the artist's energy was projected into the painting. In the case of the Haesin and Dalsin murals, the animistic and shamanistic beliefs of the artist are reflected in their images. The unifying moment of creation, when the artist forgets her or himself, is called a state of *mua* 無我 ("non-self"). This creative process makes the artwork appear alive, and relays its vitality to viewers beyond the bounds of time and space. The Haesin and Dalsin painting's vitality and peculiar energy reflect the artist's accomplishment of connecting mind and body, spirit and matter.

In oriental cosmology and mythology, the mysterious energy, which transcends time, the artist, the viewer, is described as *qi* 氣 (gi in Korean). Moreover, over time, the belief in this so-called *gi* energy was absorbed by or blended with Buddhist and Taoist practices. These combined ideas have also become a vital aspect of the belief systems of shamanism and animism, which constituted the principal belief systems of the Goguryeo people and the tribes of northeast Asia. Historically, these beliefs have frequently been suppressed and rejected by Neo-Confucian and Christian doctrines. However, shamanism and animism represented the original belief systems or *religion* of the Korean people. These beliefs have been kept alive in the folktales of Haesin and Dalsin, which every Korean has heard since childhood.

Conclusion

The Goguryeo murals of Haesin and Dalsin reflect the Goguryeo people's vision of the afterlife, combining the philosophies and cosmologies of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, shamanism, and animism. In East Asia, these systems have blended over time and all share the common outlook of a monistic universe. The masters or occupants of the Goguryeo tombs assumed that they would live on after their bodily death, and Haesin and Dalsin would lead them to the heavens. Regarding the artistic style of the murals, the Goguryeo people had strong shamanistic and animistic beliefs and their aesthetic awareness originated from a monistic worldview. In contrast to previous studies, which focused mostly on the Taoist aspects in relation to Haesin and Dalsin, this study has emphasized the shamanistic elements of these two mythical figures.

Moreover, this article focused on analyzing the general features of the Haesin and Dalsin murals of the Goguryeo Ohoeibun Tomb No. 4 from an artistic point of view, and in particular the realistic outlines of the faces of these two deities, a realism that gives a remarkable vitality and liveliness to the murals. The placement of the Haesin and Dalsin paintings within the tomb reveals that they are intermediate beings or mediators, connecting the heavens and earth. Moreover, the tomb's depiction of Haesin and Dalsin symbolizes a transformative process of gender identity, wherein the two have equal status but different roles within a monistic world. In accordance, symbolism and vitality were the two significant characteristics found in their realistically painted faces.

The symbolism found in the Haesin and Dalsin paintings of the Ohoeibun Tomb No. 4 plays a strong role in connecting the visible and invisible worlds. The vitality found in the realistic depiction of Haesin and Dalsin's faces bears similarities to much older Paleolithic cave art. This peculiar art style transcends human history. Comparable to commonly depicted Paleolithic art scenes, the paintings of Haesin and Dalsin also represent shamans or mediators between gods and humans.

Finally, the vitality and peculiar energy of the Haesin and Dalsin painting reflects the artist's high level of visual literacy. The artist was able

to perceive holistically, connecting mind and body, and spirit and matter. In this sense, a viewer, who is trained in art has the advantage of more easily connecting to the Goguryeo people through these images. The vitality and symbolic significance of their realistic rendering are the two main characteristics of the Haesin and Dalsin murals of Ohoebun Tomb No. 4. In order to truly understand the images, the viewer must leave behind the modern, dualistic way of perceiving the world. Moreover, a certain level of visual literacy is necessary to truly appreciate this mural art.

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