



# Review: Exhibition and Research on Korean Buddhist Sculpture Since 2000

## Introduction

The number of studies on Korean sculpture in the last 20 years has been ratcheted up as dozens of publications in Korean have been produced each year.<sup>1</sup> The general evaluation on these studies is that the scope and diversity of the research have expanded, and the quality has improved as well. Such quantitative and qualitative growth in this field since 2000 was grounded on the continuous increase in the number of researchers since the 1990s and the launch of academic associations and journals with clear identity and objectives. For instance, *Art History and Visual Culture* was launched in 2002, *The Association of Korean Buddhist Art History* in 2003, and *Dongak Art History* in 2005. Furthermore, the basic research projects, data archiving, and its disclosure conducted by the cultural heritage agencies also played an important role. The exemplary cases include the Comprehensive Research Project of the Buddhist Relics conducted from 2002 to 2016 by the Jogyejong Cultural Heritage Investigation Team (renamed as the Research Institute of Buddhist Cultural Heritage in 2007) and the report series as a result of the Comprehensive Academic Research on the Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty from 2006 to 2015 conducted by the Cultural Heritage Administration's National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage.

Along with the development in the academia, systems and platforms to introduce the contents to the general public have also matured. The National Museum of Korea's relocation to Yongsan in 2005 has significance as a major turning point in cultural heritage exhibitions. In addition, museums for Buddhist art were established in major temples across the country, including the Tongdosa Museum launched in 1999 and the Central Buddhist Museum in

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1. In the last century, approximately 900 publications on the history of Korean sculpture were produced both domestically and internationally. They include exhibition catalogues, research reports, basic introductory texts, etc. For more information, see Kim 2001.

2007. Museum exhibitions contribute to popularization by presenting academic achievements easily, while exhibition catalogues stimulate the academia to promote new studies. The mutually beneficial relationship between research and exhibition has been evolving since the 2000s.

In this review essay, I will discuss the major achievements of Korean sculpture history since 2000 in connection with museum exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> Pre-modern Korean sculptures are mostly Buddhist sculptures, so they occupy the mainstream of the sculpture history. Meanwhile, a tradition of non-Buddhist sculptures, such as the stone sculptures in mausoleums, have persisted as well, so in terms of a comprehensive overview, it is necessary to cover both Buddhist sculptures and general sculptures.<sup>3</sup> However, due to the limited space, only the Buddhist sculptures are examined in chronological order in this text.

### Three Kingdoms Period

Since 2000, studies on Buddhist sculpture in the Three Kingdoms period have not been as vigorous as they used to be, but they have been carried out in the direction of macroscopic comparison among East Asian countries or in-depth analysis on its significance. In particular, the casting method of the small gilt bronze Buddha statues has been exhaustively studied to present the differences from that of China and Japan (Park 2014; Gwak 2016).

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2. For more information on the domestic and international academic achievements in Korean sculpture history since 2000, see relevant articles under the category of “Retrospects and Prospects of Korean Art History” in *The Korean Historical Review*. The articles on the anthology for Korean art history from 2000 to 2018 are listed in Lee Soomi’s text in this volume of *The Review of Korean Studies*. See for instance, Park 2007.

3. General sculptures include prehistoric reliefs such as the Bangudae Petroglyphs in Ulju-gun county of Gyeongsangbuk-do province and clay dolls excavated from the Silla tombs of the Three Kingdoms period, hieroglyphic earthen-wares, hieroglyphic celadons from the Goryeo dynasty period, stone structures of palaces, stone zodiac statues of mausoleums, stone animal statues, etc. In particular, the Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. The stone objects here belong to the category of Confucius sculptures. Associated literature sources have been handed down for hundreds of years, thereby allowing further studies on the creation process and chronological transformations. Meanwhile, the Seated King Taejo Wang Geon Statue of the Goryeo Dynasty period at the Korean Central History Museum in Pyongyang is also very critical as a life-size figure. In 2006, the National Museum of Korea hosted an exhibition *Treasures from the Korean Central History Museum*, Pyongyang where this statue was exhibited. For the associated publication, see Noh 2012.

Museum exhibitions continued to cover the ancient times from the Three Kingdoms period to the Unified Silla period. One reason might be attributed to many of the representative works of extant Buddhist sculptures in the collection of museums belonging to those time periods. However, the quality of exhibitions has been improved by reflecting new research outcomes. For instance, *Gilt Bronze Sculptures of the Silla Dynasty* held at the Gyeongju National Museum in 2002 and *Transmitting, the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan* held at the Japan Society in New York in the same year focused on the Three Kingdoms period and the Unified Silla period. In particular, the latter compared ancient Korean and Japanese Buddhist sculptures and showed commonalities and differences, contributing to the understanding of those who unacquainted with East Asian Buddhist sculptures.

Two Gilt Bronze Pensive Bodhisattvas of the National Museum of Korea, assumed to be dating from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, are the illustrative examples of the Buddhist sculptures from the Three Kingdoms period. They are the National Treasure No. 78 and No. 83. These two statues are the largest and most complete in terms of their form among all extant same kinds; No. 78 is 81.5 cm tall and weighs 37.6 kg, and No. 83 is 90.8 cm tall and weighs 112.2 kg. Due to their importance and symbolic significance, they have been exhibited frequently in both domestic and international exhibitions. In the meantime, the National Museum of Korea, before its relocation from Gyeongbokgung Palace to Yongsan in 2004, exhibited two statues in one place



**Figure 1.** Gilt-bronze Pensive Bodhisattvas (National Museum of Korea, July 2004): National Treasure No. 83 (left), No. 78 (right)

(Figure 1). The two statues were also exhibited at the exhibition, *Masterpieces of Early Buddhist Sculpture* at the National Museum of Korea in 2015. This exhibition, which featured a number of prominent works, was a large-scale exhibition testifying the birth of Buddhist sculptures and the development of Buddhism in East Asia. The two National Treasures were placed side by side at the finale of the exhibition, thereby confirming their status as a monumental piece that marks the peak of the East Asian Buddhist sculpture at that time, not only representing the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Three Kingdoms period. The high-quality catalogue of this exhibition serves as a good reference for the study of Buddhist sculptures in the Three Kingdoms period.

In 2016, the National Museum of Korea exhibited only two statues, the National Treasure No. 78 statue and a wooden Pensive Bodhisattva from the 7<sup>th</sup> century Asuka period, which is the National Treasure of the Japan and belongs to the Chuguji temple in Nara. The title of this exhibition was *Pensive Bodhisattvas: National Treasure of Korea and Japan*. They were exhibited at the Tokyo National Museum in the same year with the different title, *Smiling in Contemplation: Two Buddhas from Japan and Korea*. In virtue of these exhibitions, the representative large-scale Pensive Bodhisattvas of two countries could be compared at once.

These exhibitions brought back attention to the issue of the country of origin. That which of the three countries, especially Baekje and Silla, made these statues has been one of the abiding issues of the study on these gilt bronze Pensive Bodhisattvas (Lim 2015; Kim 2016). In 2013, the National Treasure No. 83 was displayed as a main exhibit at the special exhibition *Silla* at the Metropolitan Museum of New York in the United States, and in 2015, it was exhibited in *Arts of Silla* at the Gyeongju National Museum. Therefore, its origin was presumed to be Silla. However, it is difficult to confirm that this issue has been truly concluded; therefore, it is desirable to continue in-depth research and discussion for confirmation.

The National Museum of Korea secured basic data, including the material of the statue or the casting technique, through applying scientific methods such as XRF. In addition, a corresponding report was published in collaboration with Japan from 2009 to 2012 on the scientific investigations of the pensive

Bodhisattvas.<sup>4</sup> It explains that the two pensive Bodhisattvas were cast and plated with a bronze alloy with a tin content of 5%, and the thickness was 4mm on the No. 78 and 10mm on the No. 83. However, in terms of the casting method, the latter was made with a much more advanced technology. As a new breakthrough in the study of Buddhist sculpture in the Three Kingdoms period, this achievement proved that the close relationship between exhibitions and researches is critical.

## Unified Silla Period

The Unified Silla period (676-935 CE) is said to be the heyday of the Korean Buddhist sculpture from a classical perspective as many excellent works made at this time were handed down well. Since the 2000s, established scholars have actively published past research achievements on time period, contributing to academic maturity (Kang 2000; Kim 2003; Moon 2003a). Also, budding scholars have dealt with a variety of topics in virtue of an effective utilization of scriptures and literature. In addition to the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues, which were mainly studied, the scope and object of study have been expanded to the reliefs of the divine deities on the Buddhist statues and pagodas of the late Unified Silla period and other minor Buddhist stone structures.

A representative exhibition of the 2000s is the National Museum of Korea's *Echoes of Life: The Enduring Tradition of Unified Silla Sculpture* held from 2008 to 2009. This exhibition was a follow-up to the same museum's previous exhibition, *Buddhism Sculptures of the Three Kingdoms Period* in 1990. However, the difference was that the second exhibition included not only the gilt bronze statues and stone Buddhas, but also stone pagoda reliefs and the sculptures at mausoleums such as the twelve zodiac animal deities, thus reflecting the trend of the academia.

Seven stone Buddha steles were found in Yeongi-gun county, now Sejong City in Chungcheongnam-do province, which was the old Baekje area. Their inscriptions hinted that even though they were in the Three Kingdoms period style, they were actually made in the early Unified Silla period: for instance, in

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4. See Min 2016 and the report published by the National Museum of Korea in 2017.

673 and 689. Therefore, they have been regarded as the important transitional figures. In 2013, the National Cheongju Museum held the exhibition *Korean Buddhist Steles* for the first time amassing these steles in one place. Among them, two steles were replicas. Using the RTI (Reflectance Transformation Imaging) photographing techniques, this exhibition contributed to the new discovery and reinterpretation of the inscriptions. This cutting-edge technology was also used in the studies of the Stone Statue of Bodhisattva Buddha and Stone Standing Amitabha Buddha of Gamsansa temple in Gyeongju city which are currently on display at the National Museum of Korea. These statues were created around 719 by the wish of a high-ranking official, Kim Ji-sung, and have an inscription on the back of the halo, such as their background. They have been considered as a significant reference of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century during the Unified Silla period. By interpreting previously unknown characters of the inscription, it was possible to discover that Kim Ji-sung died at the age of 69 in 720.<sup>5</sup>

It is also remarkable that the systematic collaboration among excavation survey, exhibition, and academic research have produced synergy effects since 2000. The ruins of the Sacheonwangsa temple in Gyeongju city built around 679 in the early Unified Silla period were excavated thoroughly by the Gyeongju branch of the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage from 2006 to 2012. New excavations at the Sacheonwangsa temple site, including Green-glazed Terracotta Guardian tiles 綠釉神將像磚, were displayed in the special exhibitions *From Excavation to Exhibition*, jointly organized by the National Museum of Korea with the Cultural Heritage Administration in 2007, and *Sacheonwangsa Temple* held at the Gyeongju National Museum with the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in 2009. The National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (Gyeongju city) published reports summarizing the investigation and restoration works on those green-glazed tiles in 2012 and 2018. Meanwhile, it was confirmed that the upper body of the

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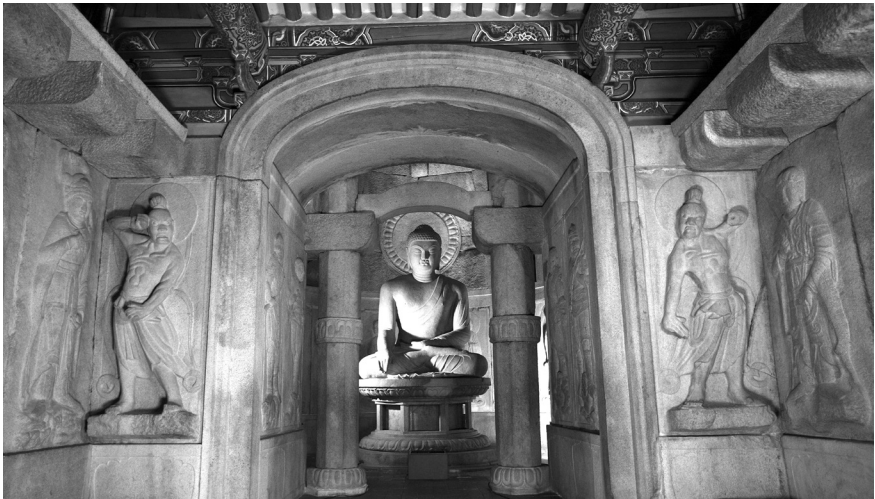
5. See Shin and Kim 2013. It has been difficult to identify the exact production date of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist sculpture of the Unified Silla. Therefore, the importance of the statues with inscriptions and the securing of new materials cannot be overemphasized. For instance, an inscription was found on the pedestal of the Seated Stone Buddha Statue in the Gwallyongsa temple in Changnyeong-gun county. It says “開元十...,” which implies the year 10 to 19 (722-731 CE) in the era reign used by the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. Therefore, it was confirmed that this statue was made in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, not after the late 8<sup>th</sup> century as predicted before. There are both pros and cons to this prediction. For more information, see Choe 2009; Lim 2016.



green-glazed tile newly discovered by the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and the lower body previously stored in the Gyeongju National Museum were originally parts of one tile. The two parts were combined and restored to a complete form to be exhibited at the Gyeongju National Museum's exhibition, *Reunited after 100 Years: Story of Green-glazed Terracotta Guardians in Sacheonwangsa Temple* in 2018.

Through the excavations and exhibitions, it was confirmed that a total of 24 pieces of green-glazed terracotta guardian tiles, 6 pieces per each side, were installed on the outer walls of the wooden square pagoda's stylobate. This pagoda was originally a twin-tower oriented east-west, and the tiles were in three different types. Since it was a twin tower, it was estimated that a total of 48 pieces were originally installed. Based on this finding, a new argument on the identification of those guardians was raised. Previously, they were either thought as the four heavenly kings of Buddhism or the eight devas, but the new argument suggested that they symbolize numerous divine spirits and kings who appeared in the *Abhisheka Sutra* 灌頂經.<sup>6</sup>

The Seokguram Grotto, located in Tohamsan mountain of Gyeongju city, is an artificial grotto temple created in 751 by Kim Dae-sung who was



**Figure 2.** Seokguram Grotto, Tohamsan Mountain, Gyeongju City

6. See Lim 2008. For more information on the suggestion of the eight devas, see Moon 2012.

a high-rank official. It has a seated Buddha statue and about 40 stone reliefs surrounding the main statue (Figure 2). Its composition and quality of the statue, reliefs, and overall space are exceptional as those can be seen in the Pantheon, and it is considered as a masterpiece of Buddhist sculpture from the Unified Silla period. Therefore, although this grotto is not large in size, a number of studies have been conducted. Previous studies focused on the ideological and religious grounds that could be found in *āśraya* scriptures, the main statue, and its architectural archetype; however, since the 2000s, the research topics have been diversified to include various topics, such as the symbolism of the surrounding statues and reliefs, the comparison study with grotto temples in India, Central Asia, and China, and the grotto's history and transformation during the Joseon dynasty period interpreted through literary sources (Moon 2000; Lee 2006; Heo 2011; Han 2014). In particular, it is notable that scholars began to identify the outsider's perspective on the Seokguram Grotto formed during the Japanese colonization period and its overemphasis on the modern way of recognizing the grotto's significance. As a result, they opened up a new chapter of discourses which bring up the Orientalism theories by arguing the need for meta-critical self-reflection (Kim 2006; Kang 2007; Kang 2012). Although the targeted theme was different, the Central Buddhist Museum reflected on similar perceptions in the exhibition *Seokguram Grotto, the Light of One Hundred Years* from 2009 to 2010 where the documentary photography was displayed (Sung 2009). In 2014, an anthology of photographs and historical references of the Seokguram Grotto was published.<sup>7</sup>

Studies on the Vairocana Buddha statue, which was popular in the late Unified Silla period, continued as well. The Vairocana Buddha statue, with the wisdom gesture of *bodhaŚrī-mudrā*, drew attention as it could be clearly distinguished from the Bodhisattva-style statue of China and of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. As to its origin, it has been discussed whether it originated from China or was created solely by Korea (Lee 2006; Seo 2006). The 3D scanning was conducted on the iron Buddha statues enshrined in local Zen temples. Among them, in the case of the Iron Seated Buddha of the Silsangsa temple in Namwon city, it was suggested that the statue was a Vairocana Buddha, which debunked the previously established identification of the

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7. See vol. 1 of *Sources for Seokguram: A Comprehensive List* (2014).



Bhaisajyaguru, as known as the Medicine Buddha. As for the time of creation, the theory of an estimation between 828 and 840 and that between 840 and 856 conflicted.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the iron Vairocana Buddha statue of the Borimsa temple in Jangheung county of Jeollanam-do province attracted attention by being digitally reproduced in full-scale at the special exhibition, *Buddha in the Heart*, held at the Gwangju National Museum in 2017.

The wood Vairocana Buddha statue of the Haeinsa temple in Hapcheon county was previously considered to be a 15<sup>th</sup> century work from the early Joseon dynasty. However, a calligraphy statement of 883 was found from inside of the statue; it substantiated that this statue might be the oldest extant wooden Buddha statue of the Unified Silla period. This finding also recalled the significance of literary records in Buddhist sculpture studies (Kim 2006; Son 2011; Seo 2018). As for the gilt bronze Vairocana Buddha and Amitabha Buddha at the Bulguksa temple, their creation periods are still debated between the late 8<sup>th</sup> century and the late 9<sup>th</sup> century. However, some papers supporting the latter based on the analysis of image and beliefs were published.<sup>9</sup> These two statues are regarded as one of the three major gilt bronze Buddha statues of the Unified Silla period, along with the Standing Gilt-bronze Bhaisajyaguru Buddha of the Baekryulsa temple, currently stored at the Gyeongju National Museum (Jung 2017). Hereafter, it is expected that precise measurement and investigation of sculpting techniques will help to identify the time of creation.

## Goryeo Dynasty Period

The Buddhist sculptures of the Goryeo dynasty period (918-1392), when the Buddhism was prevalent throughout the country, sum up in a greater number than the total amount of existing sculptures from the Three Kingdoms period and the Unified Silla period together. Therefore, they are significant in the whole Korean sculpture history. Since the 2000s, studies on the Buddhist sculpture of the Goryeo dynasty period continued to introduce new materials and the production date based on inscriptions, while establishing key issues by

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8. See the report published by the National Museum of Korea in 2011, Kang 2013; Choe 2014; Kang 2017.

9. See Jung 2018; Lim 2019. For the article that introduced this discussion and negated the opinion arguing for the 9<sup>th</sup> century, see Jung 2013.

period as well as enhancing classical themes such as exploration of specific beliefs and icons, patrons, and compositional ideas. For instance, the megalithic and iron Buddha statues and regional pluralism and genealogy were explored for the studies on the early Goryeo dynasty period: the influence of the Khitan people of the Liao dynasty and Han Chinese of the Song dynasty for the studies on the mid-Goryeo dynasty, and the adoption of the Tibetan Buddha style following negotiations with Mongolian Yuan dynasty and votive objects and patrons for the studies on the late Goryeo dynasty period.<sup>10</sup>

Studies on the sculpture history of the Goryeo dynasty period have developed both quantitatively and qualitatively since the 2000s, but there are few exhibitions focusing on the single era of the Goryeo dynasty period and genre of sculpture. On the other hand, the situation was different for Buddhist paintings. A large-scale special exhibition, *Masterpieces of Goryeo Buddhist Painting*, was held in 2010 at the National Museum of Korea. However, the Buddhist sculpture only took a part in the exhibitions such as *Goryeo Dynasty: Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918 to 1392* at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco from 2003 to 2004 and *Goryeo: The Glory of Korea* held at the National Museum of Korea from 2018 to 2019. Especially in the



**Figure 3.** *Goryeo: The Glory of Korea* (National Museum of Korea, December 2018)

10. All individual dissertations cannot be discussed here. For some representative research outcomes, see Jung 2007; Choe 2013. Furthermore, a 10-year dismantling repair work was conducted on the stone pagoda of the Gyeongcheonsa temple established in 1348 in the late Goryeo dynasty period. This pagoda was open to the public in 2005 when the National Museum of Korea was relocated to Yongsan. Its comprehensive academic report was published, and many follow-up studies were conducted. For more information, see National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage 2005-2006.

latter exhibition, many of the major Buddha statues of the Goryeo dynasty were exhibited, and it bolstered comprehensive understanding by comparing them with the Buddha statues in Japan, Yao, Song, and Yuan (Figure 3). This exhibition, which attracted more than 170,000 visitors, contributed to the public awareness of Buddhist art in the Goryeo dynasty period.

Since the Goryeo dynasty period, *bulbokjang* was inserted into the statues together with prayer statements and offerings. *bulbokjang* refers to the acts of conferring religious vitality on the statues by stuffing cremated remains into them with five grains, five-spice powders, five medicines, etc. China and Japan also had a similar tendency to insert models of the human organs in Buddha statues, but *bulbokjang* was different in that it was highly symbolic and based on religious dogma. Also, it was inherited into the Joseon dynasty period and established itself as the main characteristics of Korean medieval Buddhist sculpture. Previously, *bulbokjang* was occasionally studied in the fields of Buddhist folklore studies, bibliographical research, and costume studies, but after the 2000s, it has become one of the major topics of Buddhist sculpture history.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of exhibitions, the Sudeoksa Temple Museum hosted *By Virtue of the Finest Threads* in 2006, and the Central Buddhist Museum hosted *The Avatamska Sutra Enshrined in the Seated Wood Amitabha Buddha of the Gaeunsa Temple and the Buddhist Painting of the Daegoksa Temple* in 2015 and *The Birth of the Buddha, Bulbokjang* in 2018. The National Museum of Korea also published a series of reports on the investigation of Buddhist sculptures in its collection in 2014, 2016, and 2018 and hosted *Devout Patrons of Buddhist Art* in 2015. Based on these publications and the exhibition, The Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art of Smithsonian Institution held the exhibition *Sacred Dedication: A Korean Buddhist Masterpiece* from 2019 to 2020 and introduced *bulbokjang* in detail. Likewise, *bulbokjang* has been one of the primary topics of both domestic and international academic researches, and by virtue of the research outcomes and exhibitions, more active studies are expected in the future.

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11. Major academic researches include Lee 2009; Lee 2015; Jung and Shin 2017. In addition, there was an international academic conference, "Consecrating the Buddha: On the Practice of Interring Objects (bokjang) in Buddhist Statues," held at the Ewha Womans University Museum in August, 2017.

## Joseon Dynasty Period

The most exceptionally growing field in Korean sculpture history in the 2000s would be the Joseon dynasty period (1392-1910), including the Great Han Empire period. The Joseon dynasty promoted Confucianism and rejected Buddhism, so it is often believed that Buddhist art activities were also discouraged. However, the royal family or local communities often worshipped Buddhism and patronized the creation of Buddhist statues. Therefore, there are many studies which focused on the individual cases of this patronage (Choi 2000; Song 2005; Park 2011).

A significant number of the Buddhist statues in the late Joseon dynasty period were enshrined as objects of worship in the statues or main temple buildings; therefore, the access was limited. However, since 2000, votive objects installed inside Buddhist statues have been vigorously investigated and disclosed (Choi 2000; Moon 2003; Song 2004). It was also discovered that during the process of reconstruction after the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 (1592-1598), monks specialized in sculpture in local temples formed a master-pupil lineage or many cliques collaborated to produce Buddhist statues. Based on this recognition, the existing preconceptions on this period should be reconsidered. In other words, it was previously wide-accepted that the Buddha statues in the late Joseon dynasty were monotonous and dull. However, new researches suggested that the Buddhist community created the Buddha statues to be enshrined on their own and contributed to the inheritance of the tradition, thereby establishing the accomplished form of a Korean Buddhist statue not influenced by foreign style (Choi 2009; Song 2008, 2009, 2014). In the meantime, compared to general paintings or Buddhist paintings, Buddhist sculptures lacked the credible records on the producers, but as the records of the late Joseon dynasty period were thoroughly studied, sculptor monks and cliques became a major topic of this time period.<sup>12</sup>

Exhibitions on Buddhist sculptures from the Joseon dynasty period were mainly organized to introduce individual votive objects installed inside Buddhist statues. Some exhibitions include *Votive Objects Inside the Vairocana Buddha in the Haeinsa Temple* held at the Haeinsa Museum in 2008, *Votive Objects Inside*

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12. A biographical dictionary of Buddhist monks and other books were also published. See Choi 2007, 2011; Song 2013; Lee 2013; Yoo 2017.

*the Seated Wooden Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Statue of the Songgwangsa Temple in Suncheon City* held at the National Palace Museum of Korea in 2011, *Votive Objects Inside the Manjusri Bodhisattva Statue of the Sangwonsa Temple* held at the Woljeongsa Museum from 2014 to 2015, *Bulbokjang, Rituals for Installing Objects Inside the Shakyamuni Buddha Triad from Bosungsunwon Temple in Daegu* in 2016, and *Wooden Seated Amitabha Buddha and Hidden Offerings from Heukseoksa Temple* held at the Daegu National Museum in 2017. Recently, the number of papers with new perspectives and consciousness over the Buddhist sculpture of the Joseon dynasty period has been increasing, but data collection and archiving are still in progress. Therefore, diversity and creativity in research topics and methodologies should still be enhanced. With these efforts and outcomes accumulated, a comprehensive exhibition that displays the Buddhist sculptures of the Joseon dynasty will be able to launch soon.

## Conclusion

In this review, exhibitions and researches of Korean sculptures since 2000 were introduced, with emphasis on the trends and achievements in the field of Buddhist sculptures. This field of Korean sculpture history will continue to develop both quantitatively and qualitatively, and I intend to share my reflective opinions and prospects as a conclusion.

Recently, cutting-edge technologies, such as the computed tomography (CT) and X-Ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis on non-destructive component, are actively applied in the studies of sculptures. It is encouraging to discover new information that is previously unknown through these techniques, and it is expected that scientific research analysis will be utilized even more in future exhibitions and researches. At the same time, for precise interpretation and meaningful outcomes, professionals in sculpture history should closely consult with conservation experts, but a balanced attitude and comprehensive insight in the context of humanities are required to determine proper direction and interpretation.

In order to fully demonstrate Korean sculpture history, it is also essential to conduct research on sculptures of North Korea. In particular, history of the Goryeo dynasty, whose capital was Gaegyeong (Gaeseong), needs to be studied thoroughly as this half is currently missing. The limitation of access to data due to the separation between the two Koreas has become a major obstacle. In this

regard, using photographs in gelatin dry plates in the collection of the National Museum of Korea, from the Japanese colonial period, could be an alternative.<sup>13</sup> Although these glass plates cannot show all the details, they can help to grasp the basic profile of sculptures in North Korea and further enrich the discourses of overall Korean sculpture history.

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13. The National Museum of Korea published a report, *Buddhist Art of North Korea: Documentation in Gelatin Dry Plates* in 2014, and recently launched an online database, including high-quality photos of more than 38,000 photographic glass plates, for researchers.



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