

# Nuns, Donors, and Sinners: Images of Women in Goryeo Buddhist Paintings

Cheeyun Lilian Kwon

---

Studies in the fields of history and religion presented at the 2004 International Conference “Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions” demonstrated the active role women played as patrons and practitioners of Buddhism in the Goryeo dynasty. Complementing the textual evidence on their activities, this paper seeks to examine the visual representations of Buddhist nuns and laywomen in the Goryeo dynasty. Extant woodblock prints and silk paintings often depict women as recipients, practitioners, and patrons of the Buddhist faith; they appear in the form of taking the tonsure, mingling with monks or nuns, commissioning Buddhist images, or receiving punishment in the underworld after death. Whether on woodblock print or in fine color on silk, images of women are shown with equal prominence as participants in the support and practice of Buddhism, and as subjects to judgment in the underworld bureaucracy under similar conditions as the men. Karmic reward and retribution is portrayed in a perfect meritocracy regardless of gender, whether it be accumulating good karma by offering donations, or receiving punishment for past wrongdoings. Rebirth in the six paths also neither emphasizes one sex over the other, as the two possible gender forms appear with equal consistency. As such, images of the *Goryeo sangha* in Goryeo Buddhist paintings allocate equal emphasis on both the male and the female, possibly reflecting the Goryeo society as described in the texts. What is remarkable, however, is that while the Buddhist *sangha* may be represented by both sexes, they are ultimately framed within a system governed by patriarchy.

*Keywords: Buddhism, women, Goryeo, paintings, nuns*

---

## Introduction

Women as practitioners and patrons of Buddhism in Korea were first highlighted in the 2004 International Conference “Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions” held at Hanmaum Seonweon. Of particular interest were studies on Goryeo history and religion, which demonstrated the important role played by women in the dissemination and proliferation of Buddhism in Goryeo society. Women were responsible not only for the construction of temples, donation of sutras, and religious initiatives such as the reading of sutras and helping the needy, but also in the internationalization of Buddhism through their activities abroad. Queen Mother Inye’s pivotal role in the importation and spread of the Tiantai (Cheontae) Sect from China in the eleventh century (Choi Byung-heon 2004: 1-9), the thriving activities of Goryeo ladies in the Yuan court (Tonino Puggioni 2004: 57-87), and the lives of Buddhist nuns in the Goryeo dynasty (Kim Young Mi 2004: 37-56) were vividly described in the various papers presented at the conference. These no doubt provided a fresh description of Goryeo society in which women thrived in the support and practice of Buddhism.

Complementing the textual evidence describing their activities, this paper seeks to examine the visual representations of Buddhist nuns and laywomen in the Goryeo dynasty. Extant silk paintings often depict women as recipients, practitioners, and patrons of the Buddhist faith; they appear in the form of taking the tonsure, mingling with monks or nuns, commissioning Buddhist images, or receiving punishment in the underworld after death. Most striking about these images is the prevailing equivalence and inclusiveness of the two sexes. Women appear as often as the men, often in perfect symmetry and with equal prominence, as if illustrating the core Buddhist belief that enlightenment can be reached by all creatures. The underworld bureaucracy also appears as a flawless meritocracy, where karmic retribution and reward operate in a most egalitarian principle regardless of gender. Rebirth in the next life neither emphasizes one sex over the other, the two possible gender forms appearing with equal consistency in the six paths of rebirth.

As such, Buddhist paintings from the Goryeo dynasty illustrate a most idealistically equivalent view of the world, adhering closely to the early Buddhist teachings which held that one’s gender or class presented no barrier in attaining enlightenment. When Buddha was using the parts of a chariot to illustrate the components of the Buddhist path, he stated: “And be it woman, or be it man for

whom such chariot doth wait, by that same car into Nirvana's presence shall they come" (Samyutta Nikāya; I.5.6; trans. in Sponberg 1992: 9). What is remarkable, however, is that while the Buddhist *sangha* may be represented by both sexes, they are ultimately framed within a system governed by patriarchy.

## Images of Nuns

Textual sources inform us that Buddhist nuns existed in Korea in the Three Kingdoms period (Kim Young Mi 2004: 38) and many practiced in the Goryeo dynasty (Ibid: 37-56). Studies have revealed the names of several nuns on stelae inscriptions of prominent Seon (Chan) sect monks such as those of the National Preceptor Jingak Hyesim (1178-1234), the Indian monk Jigong (1235-1361), and the Goryeo monks Naong Hyegun (1320-1376) and Taego Bou (1301-1382). Some nuns were identified to be of royal background, such as Wangdoin who was the daughter of King Gangjong and marchioness of the military ruler Choe Chungheon, while two of King Gongmin's queens, Queen Hye and Queen Shin, also became nuns later in life. In the case of Wandoin, her ardent yearning for enlightenment is well conveyed in her letters to Hyesim, who himself held an egalitarian view on women's enlightenment. Myobong, a follower of Naong Hyegun, was said to have headed Jeongeob-won as the highest-ranking nun of the temple in the capital city.

Although such records lead us to imagine that probably some of these nuns may have been painted in one form or another, no specific portrait of a nun survives from this period. Several portraits survive from China, however, from which we may deduce that perhaps similar traditions may have existed in Korea as well. The Avalokiteśvara painting in the Stein Collection (Fig. 1), for example, shows a shaven-headed bhiksuni identified as



**Figure 1.**

Avalokiteśvara, Tunhuang Cave 17, AD 910.

Ink and colors on silk, 77 x 48.9 cm, Stein Collection

the “deceased Very Reverend nun Yanhui,” “elder sister and teacher, admitter to the Dharma and Vinaya in the monastery of Universal Light.” She stands gracefully next to Avalokiteśvara, holding an incense burner in her hands and clad in a multi-layered monk’s robe. The young man holding a plate of flowers on the right is identified as the deceased probationary Chamberlain Zhang Youcheng who was the younger brother of the writer of the inscriptions. The large inscription above Yanhui dates the painting to the year 910, and the green cartouche on the right states:

“Praise to the great merciful, great compassionate savior from hardship Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, in perpetual offering. Offered in the hope that the Empire may be peaceful and that the Wheel of the Law may continually turn therein. Secondly, on behalf of my elder sister and teacher, on behalf of the souls of my deceased parents, that they may be born again in the Pure Land, I reverently made this great Holy One and with whole heart dedicated.” (Whitfield and Farrer 1990: 34-38)

One learns from the circumstances described in the inscriptions that a family of social standing commissioned this painting on the sister’s behalf, a nun who had held a respectable position at a temple. One is also reminded here of Miriam Levering’s study on the many motives for an elite Chinese family to encourage a daughter become a nun, such as the tax-free privileges for land given to a nunnery with family cloisters (Levering 2004: 238). Avalokiteśvara, on the other hand, was often associated in China as savior of women’s suffering, and was a popular object of devotion for Chinese women throughout its history (Reed 1992: 159-180).

Two more paintings of Avalokiteśvara include portraits of nuns, namely the *Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara* (Fig. 2) and *Avalokiteśvara* (Fig. 3) in the collection of the Musée Guimet. The inscription in the *Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara* painting states that Cheng Enxin, a magistrate functionary near the regional court, commissioned the painting in dedication to his deceased older sister, a superior nun of the Temple of the Great Wheel. The latter painting was offered by functionary Yin Yuanchang for his deceased daughter nun Xinqing. Both of these paintings depict a nun kneeling at the bottom of the picture, wearing a multi-layered robe and holding an incense burner.

These three documented paintings of nuns offer clues as to what may distin-

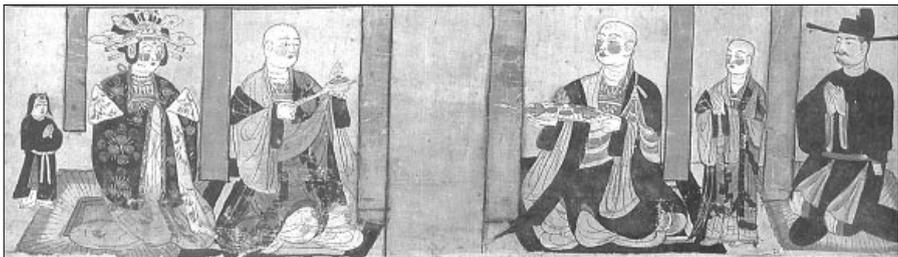


**Figure 2.**  
Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, detail, Dunhuang, ca. 920-936.  
Musée Guimet, 101.5 x 60.7 cm



**Figure 3.**  
Avalokiteśvara, detail,  
Dunhuang, 10<sup>th</sup> century.  
Musée Guimet, 84.1 x 61.2 cm

guish the robe of a nun from that of a monk. While the indiscriminate shaven-head look and the patternless robe has heretofore made it difficult to distinguish the image of a nun from that of a monk, a close look at these figures reveals a colorful inner sash tied above the skirt, some imprinted with flowers and beautiful designs. This sash above the skirt is not found in the robes of monks, and they characterize tenth-century Chinese aristocratic dress, as evident in the lady donor figures from the period. As such, these images offer rare glimpses of early portraiture of nuns in China, providing grounds on which to identify other nun portraits. The undocumented Dizang painting at the Musée Guimet (Fig. 4), for example, shows three shaven-headed figures with similar characteristics, leading us to conclude that they most certainly represent images of nuns instead of



**Figure 4.**  
Dizang and the Six Paths of Rebirth, detail, second half of 10<sup>th</sup> century, Dunhuang, color on silk, 76 x 59 cm,  
Pelliot Collection (Jacques Giés, p. 337).

monks.

The inscriptions on the paintings also offer clues about the social standing and the circumstances in which these portraits were commissioned. One learns that the portraits were dedicated by the family members of the conventual who held a respectable position in the temple, in her memory after death. They are thus posthumous portraiture offered to the temple in her remembrance, perhaps for usage in her funeral and the mourning period thereafter. Given the existence of many renunciants of aristocratic background in the Goryeo period (Kim Young Mi 1999: 49-74) and the many similarities of Buddhist traditions to Tang, it may be possible that comparable portrait traditions existed in Goryeo. The late Goryeo period especially saw an increase in the number of renunciants (Kim Young Mi 1999: 50; 2001: 68), and two temples in the capital city, Jeongeop-won and Anil-weon, were believed to have been representative nunneries for the royalty and aristocracy (Kim Young Mi 2001: 81). Lady Ban during King Chung Suk's reign (1313-1330, 1332-1339) who was forced to become a nun stayed at Jeongeop-won, while Myobong is believed to have headed Jeongeop-won during Naong Hyegun's time (1320-1376). King U (r. 1374 -1388) is also recorded to have paid a visit to Anil-weon in the third year of his reign (Goryeosa 135: 48). Two queens of King Gongmin (r. 1351-1374), Queen Hye and Queen Shin, became nuns after the King's death, while maintaining their social standing and wealth (Kim Young Mi 2004: 41). While the historical circumstances would amply suggest the existence of portraits of nuns, perhaps in a similar tradition to those of the Tang posthumously commissioned by their wealthy family members, the lack of surviving materials make it difficult to ascertain for sure, leaving us to only imagine of the possibility.

Two *Illustrations to the Maitreya Sūtra* from the Goryeo dynasty, on the other hand, in the collections of Chion-in, Kyoto (Fig. 5), and Shinno-in, Koyachō, dated 1350 (Fig. 6), show royal women taking the tonsure. Effected by the newly descended Buddha Maitreya, the paintings show conversions of women and men in perfectly mirroring images at the center of the painting. Opposite the male counterpart, a lady on the left is in the midst of taking the tonsure, her long hair undone and reverentially kneeling with joined hands. Five court ladies accompany the ceremony, the closest holding a plate for depositing cut hair and others holding a water ewer and a box of folded textile. The water ewer may have been used for washing after the ritual, and the folded cloth may represent a towel or a robe.

As in many other Goryeo paintings, the general iconography of this scene fol-



**Figure 5.**  
Illustration to the Maitreya Sūtra, detail, Goryeo, 14<sup>th</sup> century.  
Chion-in, Kyoto.

lows very closely that of the *Paradise of Maitreya* painting from Dunhuang from the tenth century (Whitfield 1985: pl. 12). However, some differences in descriptive detail appear in the Goryeo version. The box of cloth, for example, is a new item visible in the Goryeo painting, and the men and women are dressed in sumptuous clothes decorated with gold patterns. Goryeo people reputedly enjoyed wearing textiles embroidered with gold, whose extensive use led to their prohibition in the fourteenth century (Goryeo-sa 16:33:11). Surviving textile materials from the fourteenth century with imprinted or woven gold patterns of encircled dots and geometric shapes, birds, flowers, and dragons show the lavish textiles relished by the Goryeo people (Jang Gyeong-hi 1991: 58-67). The long-spouted ewer held by the man and woman, which distinguishes itself from the round water jar depicted in the Dunhuang painting, can also be identified in actual surviving artifacts from the Goryeo dynasty (See Ho-Am 1995: 222).



**Figure 6.**  
Illustration of Maitreya-vyākaraṇa  
Sūtra, Goryeo, 1350.  
By Hoejeon, Shinno-in, Koya-cho.

While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these images may represent actual Goryeo society, one cannot rule out the possibility of them being infused with details characteristic of Goryeo aristocracy. The Shinno-in painting includes an inscription in gold which states that the painting was commissioned by Priest Hyeoncheol and was funded by 20 ordained and lay people, thus appears to have been an undertaking of no small scale. The lavish use of gold and the beautiful quality of both examples suggest they were probably painted for the aristocracy. In the end, whoever was looking at this painting saw in it a

perfectly balanced image of both genders taking their vows, no one above the other and all equal in the face of the *dharmā*.

### Images of Laywomen as Donors

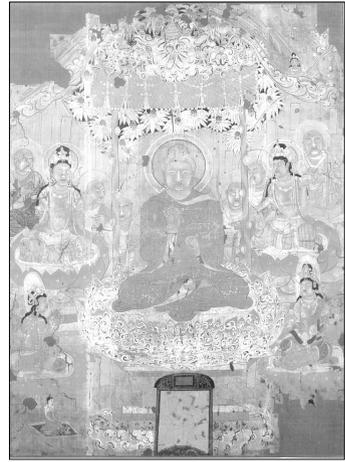
In addition to those who took the full vow to pursue the path, a large body of laywomen formed the Buddhist community in the Goryeo kingdom. As vividly portrayed in the afore-mentioned studies (Choe Byung-heon 2004; Tonino Puggioni 2004; Kim Young Mi 1999, 2001), women were active supporters of the dissemination of Buddhism at home and abroad. They financed the construction of temples, donation of sūtras, religious ceremonies, lighting of lanterns, praying and practicing meditation at temples, and lending a hand in social life. Queen Mother Inye's role in importing the Tiantai Sect into Goryeo, and the many activities of Goryeo ladies in channeling Goryeo Buddhism into the Yuan court were well demonstrated in these studies. Considering the social standing and wealth these women possessed, no doubt many were certainly responsible for commissioning Buddhist paintings as well, far more than is presently known.

In the case of China, images of donors were often included in the dedicatory section at the foot of the painting, giving us a wealth of donor images especially from the Tang and Northern Song periods. An examination of the donor figures from Dunhuang from the eighth to tenth centuries shows a progression of style as well as scale. The early examples display fewer and smaller images of donors, often incorporated into the mainframe of the painting as part of the overall composition, while later paintings show a growing independence and prominence of the donor figures.

The eighth-century *Buddha Preaching the Law* in the Stein Collection (Fig. 7), for example, shows a male and female donor facing toward the center at the bottom of the painting, seated kneeling on a small carpet and facing toward the central Buddha. They appear as if taking part in the happenings in the scene, listening to the Buddha as he delivers his sermon. The diminishing scale of figures from the top to bottom reflects a hierarchical order, from the monk disciples of śakyamuni at the top, to the bodhisattvas in the middle, and then the miniscule lay donors at the bottom. The woman donor holds a stem of flowers in her hands and wears neat hair and a high-waisted dress similar to wall paintings of court ladies in imperial tombs of the early eighth century, such as the Tomb of Princess Yongtai in Qianxian, Shaanxi Province, dated 706 (See Barnhart 1997: 74).

Ninth- and tenth-century representations of donor figures appear most commonly in the form of a separate register at the bottom of the painting, demarcated by a line and thus spatially severed from the rest of the painting. The number of donors also increased, often including monks, nuns, laywomen and men. The *Four Manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, with Samantabhadra, and Mañjuśrī* from 864 (Fig. 8), for example, includes two laywomen, two nuns, one monk, and three men as donors. This is a portrait of all members of a family, as indicated in the inscription at the center. It reads:

“First, on behalf of the present Emperor; second, on behalf of his envoy....Third, on behalf of his departed parents and all his family....May they [escape] both earthly disasters and obstacles to salvation” (Xiantong 5<sup>th</sup> year, AD 864).



**Figure 7.**  
*Buddha Preaching the Law*, Stein Collection, 8<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 8.**  
Donors in *Four Manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, with Samatabhadra and Mañjuśrī*, Dunhuang Cave 17, Tang dynasty, AD 864.

The laywomen have their hair fixed with a single comb at the top of their cranium, while the nuns are wearing a robe typical to that of a nun as discussed previously. The figures are listed in individual spatial registers, one next to the other, facing toward the middle and the viewer.

In the tenth century, the donor figures become even more prominent, occupying a large space below the painting. The *Avalokiteśvara* painting dated to 972 (Fig. 9), for example, allocates almost one third of the space to donors, who stand tall and in repeated numbers. Also a portrait of a family, the man and

woman to the right and left of the central inscription, are identified as the father and mother of Zhang Geqiao who is at the center of the group of three men. The man on the right is his younger brother, and the other two women are referred to as “new wives.” Here, a change in the women’s hairstyle is detectable, wearing elaborate crown-like ornaments and several combs jutting out from the sides. Other tenth-century paintings allocate even half of the space to donors, such as the Avalokiteśvara painting dated 983 which includes two tiers of donor figures totaling sixteen (Fig. 10).

In the case of Goryeo Buddhist paintings, no examples of separate registers allocated to donor figures survive, but instead are found fully incorporated into the scene of the painting, sharing the same spatial ground with the other figures. The *Illustration of Amitāyur-dyāna Sūtra* (Fig. 11) at Chion-in dated to 1323, for example, depicts laywomen and ordained figures seated on either side of the table. They have their hands joined in a devotional gesture, and the considerably



**Figure 9.**  
Avalokiteśvara and Donors, Dunhuang Cave 17,  
Northern Song dynasty, AD 972.  
Ink and colors on silk, 103 x 69 cm

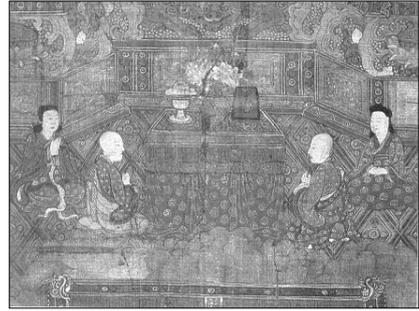


**Figure 10.**  
Avalokiteśvara with Donors, detail, 983, Northern  
Song dynasty.  
Ink and colors on silk, 102 x 75.5 cm, Stein  
Collection.

larger Buddha in front of them delivers his sermon surrounded by monk disciples and bodhisattvas. The relatively miniscule scale of the donor figures and their inclusion within the scene, in fact, remind us of the eighth-century *Buddha Preaching the Law* examined above (Fig. 7). As such, older Chinese painting traditions, instead of the prominent and separate donor images of the tenth-century, appear to persist in Goryeo Buddhist paintings, pointing to the archaic nature in Goryeo Buddhist paintings.

In addition to the dedicatory donor figures, other lay people are presented at the bottom of the *Illustration of Amitāyur* as sentient beings reborn on individual lotus flowers in the pond (Fig. 12). Among the reborn souls are images of women, some wearing fancy

headdress while others are clad in monochrome robes covering their head with a dark scarf. The scarf, left loose at the back, is similar to that of the donor figure in the upper section of the painting (Fig. 11). A female donor in another painting (Fig. 13) shows her hair tied up covered in a similar cloth and clad in a patched monk's robe. Perhaps these images are those of renunciants, as tonsured nuns in Japan were also often depicted wearing similar head cloths in the paintings from the medieval period (see Katsuura 2002: 109-120; Ruch 2002: 537-580). A total of six such figures in addition to the many laywomen within this single painting suggest it may have been sponsored or intended for a community with significant female followers. The repeated perfect symmetry and equivalence in the number of female donors vis-à-vis the male in both the Chinese and Goryeo paintings, on the other hand, makes us wonder whether they were reflecting the actual circumstances. It rather appears to be an effort to fulfill the ideal and the transcendent as expounded in the early Buddhist texts.



**Figure 11.**  
Illustration of Amitāyur-dyāna Sūtra, Goryeo, 1323. By Seolch'ung and Lee ( ), Chion-in.



**Figure 12.**  
Illustration of Amitāyur-dyāna Sūtra, Goryeo, 1323. By Seolchung and Yi ( ), Chion-in.



**Figure 13.**  
Illustration of Amitāyur-dyāna Sūtra, Goryeo dynasty, 1323. Rinsho-ji, Toyota City.

## Images of Women in Purgatory

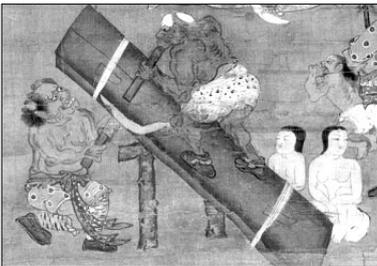
Purgatory was a passage reached after death, believed to last for three years until rebirth in the next life. The Ten Kings including King Yama were believed to rule during this purgatorial period, passing judgment on deceased souls for their actions committed in this life. Women, together with the men, appear in these



**Figure 14.**  
The *Ten Kings*, Goryeo dynasty, 13<sup>th</sup>  
century. Seikadō Library, Tokyo.



**Figure 15.**  
The *Ten Kings*, Goryeo dynasty, 13<sup>th</sup>  
century. Seikadō Library, Tokyo.



**Figure 16.**  
The *Ten Kings*, Goryeo dynasty.  
Honolulu Academy of Arts.

paintings subjected to punishment according to their karma, or engaged in the efforts to alleviate their sins by offering donations. Based on one's past deeds, karmic retribution is shown operating in a most draconian manner that decides the future destiny of all men and women.

A typical image of a deceased soul passing through the courts of the Ten Kings is a half-naked sinner cangued around the neck and subjected to whipping, flogging, and to all other imaginable devices of torture. Donors of Buddhist images, on the other hand, pass through unscathed. Women in these paintings are subjected to their fates as are the men, equally sharing the consequences of their karma and through suffering bearing the burden of their actions. The *First King of Chin* (Fig. 14), for example, shows a woman cangued around her neck, her wrists chained, her ankles shackled and dragged by a horse-faced monster together with the other men. A woman in the *Fourth King of the Five Offices* (Fig. 15) has her arms tied up, left totally immobilized and incapacitated. Another painting depicts half-naked women waiting for the grueling fate of being sawed in half (Fig. 16).

Among the many punishments that all sinners receive, however, a few cases seem to solely apply to women, such as being separated from her child or being devoured by a snake. A *Ten Kings* painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 17), for example, shows a baby tugging the jacket of its mother who is being

dragged away by a goblin. She helplessly gazes back, heartbroken to leave her baby without a mother. Intended to warn the viewers not to commit sin, this scene is undoubtedly targeting the female audience through their association with the pain and guilt of separating from their children.

Another punishment associated with women in particular is their being devoured by a snake. Two paintings of the *Second King of the First River* in the Sackler Museum Collection (Fig. 18-19), for example, show a woman entwined by a snake while crossing the River Nai. A passage in the *Collection of Ten Kings Hymns* dated to 1254 states:

“Good people cross over the river on a bridge embellished with gold and enamel, while the bad people cross through the waters of the river. The current of the water is as swift as the arrow and the waves as high as the mountain. A poisonous snake in the waves vociferously devours the sinners. ...When about to sink, a large snake opens its mouth and attacks to swallow up the sinner” (Kim Jeonghui 1992: 90).

Interestingly, while the text does not specify any gender, the snake is always attacking the woman in the painting, as if she deserved such punishment. Here one can clearly detect misogynist sentiments, also present in Buddhist scriptures. An excerpt from the “Tale of King Udayana of Vatsa” in *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra* states:



**Figure 17.**  
The *Ten Kings*, Jin Chushi, Southern Song dynasty, 12th century.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



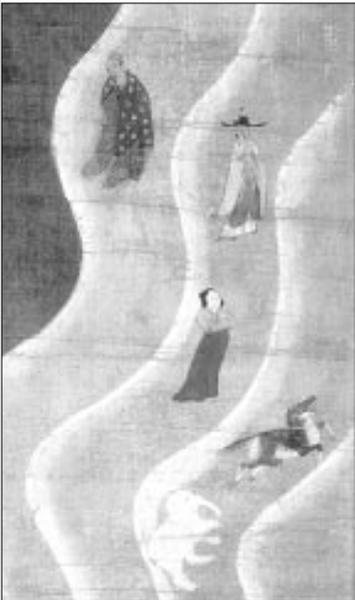
**Figure 18.**  
The *Ten Kings*, detail, late Goryeo or early Joseon dynasty.  
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA.



**Figure 19.**  
The *Ten Kings*, detail, Ming dynasty, ca. 16<sup>th</sup> century.  
Harvard University Art Museum, 1979.406



**Figure 20.**  
The *Ten Kings*, Goryeo dynasty, 13<sup>th</sup>  
century.  
Seikadō Library.



**Figure 21.**  
The Tenth King Who Turns the Five  
Wheels of Rebirth, detail, Goryeo  
dynasty, 14<sup>th</sup> century.  
Joseph Carroll Collection.

“Women can ruin the precepts of purity. They can also ignore honor and virtue... As the filth and decay of a dead dog or dead snake are burned away, so all men should burn filth and detest evil. The dead snake and dog are detestable, but women are even more detestable than they are...” (T 310, XI.543-547; trans. in Paul 1979: 27-50; Sponberg 1992: 21)

The punishment scenes have thus used the occasion to unleash the negative associations towards women, relating her to the snake, the impure, dishonorable, and temptress.

In addition to punishment scenes, the *Ten Kings* paintings abound with donor images, among which women seldom fail to be included. Women are often depicted holding lavish objects such as gilded Buddhist sculptures, miniature pagodas, sūtra boxes, and paintings (Fig. 20). Commissioning Buddhist images and texts is one key to avoid the hardship of punishment, as stated in the *Ten King Sūtra*:

“Commission a scripture or commission an image, and you will emerge from the stream of delusion.” (trans. in Teiser 1994: 215)

In conveying this message through images, women were not forgotten but rather emphasized, as they represented an important portion of the sangha who could contribute in these endeavors.

At the end of the three-year journey through the ten courts, the Tenth King Who Turns the Five Wheels decides upon the fate of the deceased soul, the options being rebirth as an Asura, a heavenly being, a human being, an animal, a hungry ghost, or being sent to hell. Based upon the decrees issued by the previous kings, the Tenth King makes the final decision, sending the deceased souls off on a trail of clouds to their new destiny (Fig. 21). In the realm of being reborn as a human being, men and women are equally represented as two equal options that are available for a deceased soul, neither one of them emphasized over the other. This appears to reflect an unbiased view of the world, the two genders as equally important and valuable.

## Conclusion

The study above has shown how images of women formed an essential and prominent part of Buddhist paintings in Goryeo as well as in China, appearing in the forms of nuns, donors, sinners, and reborn souls. The documented images of Chinese nuns from the tenth century revealed how family members commemorated their ordained sisters or daughters, often of high positions in the monastery, with a dedicatory image of Avalokiteśvara. These images, probably the earliest of their kind in China, show their features idealistically portrayed and their robes described in detail. The colorful sash worn above the skirt similarly to Tang aristocratic dress was discerned as a common characteristic among the nuns' wear, thus providing us grounds on which to identify other images of nuns. Such details, which are not necessarily mentioned in the texts, enrich our understanding of the superficialities of the Buddhist nuns of the period. The inscriptions on these paintings also inform us that these portraits were commissioned posthumously by family members in their commemoration.

In the case of Goryeo, royal women taking the tonsure appeared in the paintings of the *Paradise of Maitreya*, which followed very closely the iconography formulated in Tang China. Similarly to Chinese paintings, women appeared in an almost symmetrical arrangement with the men, as if reflecting the Buddhist belief that all are equal in the face of the *dharma*. The embellishments evident in the textiles and objects were interpreted as features influenced perhaps by the costumes and artifacts prevalent during the period. In the *Illustration of Amitāyur* at Chion-in, several female renunciants were evident as reborn souls on lotus flowers, wearing a head cloth similar to those found in Japanese paintings. In such fig-

ures we are able to detect images of conventuals in Goryeo paintings.

In addition to ordained nuns, laywomen also frequently appeared in the form of donors in Buddhist paintings. While they manifested first as small motifs integrated within the scene in the eighth century, they soon acquired separate space registers at the bottom of the painting in following centuries in China. By the tenth century, the number of donors as well as their size increased significantly, at the same time showing changes in fashion and hairstyle on the part of the women. Goryeo paintings from the fourteenth century, on the other hand, reflected influence from the earlier tradition, integrating their donor images within the scene. They appear kneeling before the Buddhist deities or being reborn on lotus flowers in the pond. Attire and headdress that may pertain particularly to Goryeo women were evident in Goryeo images of lay and renunciant devotees. Persistent in all of these paintings was again an effort to portray perfect symmetry and balance vis-a-vis images of men.

In the realm of purgatory, women were subjected to punishment and reward according to the law of karma, which applies equally to all human beings. They were seen crushed by rocks, thrown into flames, and cut into pieces, subjected to no less cruelty than the men. While crossing the River Nai, women were voraciously devoured by snakes, and their babies sadly tugged their clothes when they were dragged away by jailers. Such images were intended to warn women from doing wrong, while the equally prominent images of female donors provided the answer to the predicament: to commission an image or a scripture to alleviate sin. The six paths of rebirth also unmistakably represent women as one of the choices, keeping in mind that reality is such in the world of human beings.

Goryeo Buddhist paintings, as in Chinese Buddhist paintings, thus appear to adhere very closely to the egalitarian and inclusive views expounded in early Buddhist teachings. What appears to be a perfectly balanced and satisfying equation, however, is soon compromised by the realization that most paintings are ultimately framed within a system governed by patriarchy, the men being the rulers, teachers, and decision-makers of the sangha. Thus, Goryeo Buddhist paintings seem to be no exception to institutional androcentrism, reflecting the social conventions and standards of male authority. As evident in some paintings, the females were also occasionally the target of evil and spite.

## Glossary of Names

Anil-weon	安逸院
Choe Chungheon	崔忠獻
Dunhuang	敦煌
Gaegyeong	開京
Goryeo	高麗
Hyeoncheol	玄哲
Jeongeop-weon	淨業院
Jingak Hyesim	眞覺慧諶
Jigong	指空
King Chungsuk	忠肅王
King Gangjong	康宗
King Gongmin	恭愍王
King U	禑王
Naong Hyegun	懶翁惠勤
Queen Hye	惠妃
Queen Shin	愼妃
Queen Mother Inye	仁睿太后
Shinno-in	親王院
Taego Bou	太古普愚
Tiantai Sect	天台宗
Wangdoin	王道人
Xinqing	信清
Yin Yuanchang	陰願昌
Yongtai	永泰
Yuan	元
Zhang Youcheng	張有成

## References

- Asia Munhwa Yeonguso. 1993. *Goryeo Myoji-myeong Jipseong* (Collection of Goryeo Stelae Inscriptions). Chuncheon: Hanlim University.
- Barnhart, Richard, et al. 1997. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Choi Byung-heon. 2004. "Women of Royal Families and Buddhism in Goryeo:

- Focusing on Queen Mother Inye and the Establishment of the Chontae Sect.” Pp. 1-9 in *Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. Anyang: Hanmaum Seonweon.
- Galleries Nationales du Grand Palais. 1995. *Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha: Dix siècles d'art sur la Route de la Soie*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.
- Heo Hung-sik. 1986. *Goryeo bulgyeo-sa yeongu* (Studies on Goryeo Buddhism). Seoul: Iljogak.
- Ho-am Art Gallery. 1995. *The Great Goryeo Exhibition*. Seoul: Ho-am Art Gallery.
- Jang Gyeong-hi. 1991. “Sipsa segi ui Goryeo yeomjik yeongu” (Studies on Fourteenth-Century Textiles from Goryeo) *Misulsa-hak yeongu*, 190-191: 58-67.
- Jeong In-ji, and Kim Jong-seo et al. *Goryeo-sa* (History of Goryeo). 139 volumes. Reprint. Seoul: Donga University.
- Katsuura Noriko. 2002. “Tonsure Forms for Nuns: Classification of Nuns according to Hairstyle.” Pp. 109-129 in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Kim Jeonghui. 1996. *Joseon sidae Jijang siwang-do yeongu* (Studies on Joseon Dynasty Paintings of Ksitigarbha and the Ten Kings). Seoul: Ilchi-sa.
- Kim Young Mi. 2004. “National Preceptor Jingak’s Theory of Women’s Enlightenment and the Life of Buddhist Nuns in the Goryeo Period.” Pp. 37-56 in *Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. Anyang: Hanmaum Seonweon.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. “Goryeo sidae yeoseong ui chulga” (Female Renunciants of Goryeo Dynasty). *Ewha sahak yeongu* 25-26: 49-74.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. “Goryeo sidae biguni ui hwaldong gwa sahoejeok jiwi” (The Activities and Social Status of Goryeo *bhiksunis*). Pp. 67-96 in *Hanguk munhwa yeongu* 1. Seoul: Ewha University Research Center for Korean Culture.
- Kikutake Junichi and Chung Woothak. 1997. *The Buddhist Paintings of the Goryeo Dynasty*. Vol. 1, 2. Seoul: Sigongsa.
- Kwon, Cheeyun. 1999. *The ‘Ten Kings’ from the Seikadō Library*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University.
- Levering, Miriam. 2004. “Nuns in the history of Chinese Buddhism.” Pp. 225-243 in *Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhism*. Anyang: Hanmaum Seonweon.
- Pak Min-seon. 1997. *Goryeo sidae yeoseong ui saenghwal gwa bulgyo* (Life

- and Buddhism of Goryeo Women). M.A. thesis. Ewha Women's University.
- Paul, Diana. 1979. *Women in Buddhism*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
- Puggioni, Tonino. 2004. "On the Buddhist Activities of Goryeo Ladies in Yuan China." Pp. 57-87 in *Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. Anyang: Hanmaum Seonweon.
- Reed, Barbara E. 1992. "The Gender Symbolism of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva." Pp. 159-180 in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Jose Ignacio Cabezón. Albany: State University of New York.
- Ruch, Barbara. 2002. "Woman to Woman: Kumamo bikuni Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan." Pp. 537-580 in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Sponberg, Alan. 1992. "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." Pp. 3-36 in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Jose Ignacio Cabezón. Albany: State University of New York.
- Teiser, Stephen. 1994. *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Whitfield, Roderick and Anne Farrer. 1990. *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas*, pp. 34-38. London: British Museum.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. *The Arts of Central Asia*, Vol. 1, 2. Tokyo: Kodansha.

---

**Cheeyun Lilian Kwon** received her Ph.D. in East Asian art history from Princeton University in 1999. Her dissertation was on "The 'Ten Kings' from the Seikadō Library." She is presently a lecturer of East Asian Art at Seoul National University and Korea University.

к с і