Book Notes

Efficacious Underworld: The Evolution of Ten Kings Paintings in Medieval China and Korea by Cheeyun Lilian Kwon. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. viii, 211 pp.

Thanks to the efforts of many art historians and conservators, over 160 paintings have now been ascribed to artists from the Koryŏ period (918–1392). Since the 1990s, numerous exhibitions and catalogues—mainly in Korean and Japanese—have helped to introduce them to a wider audience. In English, the pickings are still slim, but at least a number of exhibition catalogues and introductions to Korean art have helped to spread awareness of the artistic brilliance and technical refinement of Koryŏ paintings. In particular, paintings of the Water-moon Avalokiteśvara or Amitabha's welcoming descent are now fairly well known.

Yet so far, almost no one has paid close attention to the set of paintings of the Ten Kings of Hell from the Seikadō Bunko Art Museum in Japan. The set is unique for various reasons. Although individual paintings of Kṣitigarbha flanked by the Ten Kings of Hell exist, this is the only set of individual paintings of each of the ten kings, together with two messengers, from Koryŏ. In fact, this book is the first to firmly establish their Korean provenance. Second, if the author's assessment of the date is correct, they would be the oldest known paintings produced in Korea. And third, the paintings are not only the culmination of a long tradition of the Ten Kings of Hell representations in East Asia, but also a veritable repository of various painting styles of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127).

As the first monograph in English devoted exclusively to the study of Koryŏ

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painting, this book has set an important precedent and model that will hopefully lead to more such studies. It is richly illustrated, containing more than two hundred photographs. These illustrations depict not only the set of twelve paintings (in Chapter 7), but also many other paintings of the Ten Kings from China and Japan, as well as many details of the scenes and objects found in the paintings.

It is this thorough analysis of all the iconographic details that allows us to establish the Korean provenance. Chapter 9 in particular zooms in on the visual representation of the kings, as well as ritual paraphernalia and the clothing of other figures. Comparisons with similar elements in known Koryŏ paintings, with material objects dating to the Koryŏ period, and with the descriptions of Koryŏ material culture in Xu Jing's *Gaoli tujing* (1124), all establish beyond a reasonable doubt that the paintings were produced in Koryŏ. Particularly impressive here is the author's painstaking attention to detail. For example, Xu Jing's description of guards at the palace gates says that some were wearing "narrow purple silk shirts [and holding] long swords in the right hand" while others wore "tight blue shirts with flying falcons embroidered in yellow" (108). The paintings—crowded with more than two hundred figures (258 to be precise, see p. 130)—show some guards in exactly such clothing (see Figs. 9.27, 9.28, p. 109).

Equally impressive is the analysis of the screens behind each of the kings. Although they might easily be overlooked as mere decorative elements, by focusing on these screens in Chapter 10, the author reveals another layer of the rich heritage that these paintings form a part of. Both the landscapes and the flowers on the screens show the influence of Northern Song academic painting traditions. Indeed, since they are mainly attested in literary sources of the Song period, the paintings are a unique visual resource for studying East Asian painting schools of the ninth to twelfth centuries, which were absorbed by Koryŏ artists. Although no firm dating of the paintings is possible, based on their proximity to Northern Song painting schools and the stylistic evolution of the kings themselves, the author cautiously puts forward the thesis that this set may predate the Mongol invasions that started in 1231 (162). A crucial piece of evidence is the 1246 woodblock edition of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, the illustrations of which show a unique and greatly expanded pantheon. Compared with the iconography of Ten Kings paintings of Southern Song China (1127–1279), this shows that by then the Koryŏ iconography had already greatly diverged from China: whereas in China the kings evolved into "light hearted parody" (30), in Koryŏ they became "apotheosized beings worthy of worship" (61).

Somewhat less convincing is Chapter 11, where the author attempts to reconstruct the ritual context in which these paintings originally functioned. It is admittedly not easy to reconstruct the ritual practices of the Koryŏ court, since our main sources, the official histories of the Koryŏ Dynasty, merely give names of rituals, but reveal virtually nothing about their contents. The author here briefly describes the three main avenues of ancestral worship in the royal dynasty: Royal portrait halls (*chinjŏn*) in memorial temples dedicated to a deceased king or queen; the Luminous Spirit Hall (Kyŏngnyŏng-jŏn), holding the portraits of multiple kings; and the Royal Shrine (T'aemyo; not a tomb as stated on p. 156), which held the tablets of important kings.

However, since none of these venues nor any of the manifold Buddhist rituals held in Koryŏ can be explicitly tied to the ritual of the Ten Kings, the author concludes that "the liturgical structure of most Buddhist rituals, which allows for a great deal of flexibility, could invoke images of the Ten Kings during just about any religious service" (158). While this may be the case, given the establishment of a temple dedicated to the Ten Kings described in Chapter 5 (Siwang-sa, 37), and given the fact that hundred-day memorial rites, which would be dedicated to the eighth king, were sometimes held in the palace or in temples (37), it seems far more likely that the paintings were used during such memorial rituals. Especially during the first seven weeks after death, when the deceased would be judged by one of the kings successively every week, the rite would have been important, and may thus even have started when the deceased king's body was still in the mortuary hall in the palace. Beyond the final judgment in front of the tenth king on the third-year anniversary, when the deceased's final destination was determined, it would not have made sense to hold the ritual anymore.

Beyond celadon, the material culture of the Koryŏ dynasty is still poorly understood: especially the décor of daily life, from clothing to daily utensils, is virtually unknown. The wonderful paintings introduced in this book are a veritable encyclopedia of aristocratic life around the Koryŏ royal court, and deserve to be better known; the author is to be commended for finally giving them their due.

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