

A Study on Mid-fourteenth-century Gilt-bronze Seated Buddha Statues in North Korean Temples*

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This paper seeks to ascertain the casting dates and stylistic changes over time of gilt-bronze Buddha statues currently enshrined in North Korean temples, particularly those belonging to the mid-fourteenth-century. After examining the appearance of and relevant literature on these statues, the current state of mid- and large-size metal Buddhist statues enshrined in North Korean temples is investigated mainly through the colonial property register and gelatin dry plate negatives from the colonial period. Next, the body proportions, depictions of dress, Buddha robe (*samkaksikā*), and metal ornaments of early and mid-fourteenth-century gilt-bronze seated Buddhas in South and North Korea are compared in order to suggest specific casting dates for extant Koryŏ metal Buddha statues in North Korean temples. Through this analysis, Buddha statues of the 1320s can be distinguished from those of the 1340s based on their body proportions, dress, and metal ornaments. Specifically, I argue that whereas the gilt-bronze Buddha of Wŏlchŏng-sa in Anak was similar to that of Sŏngbul-sa in Sariwŏn made in the 1320s in terms of body proportions and dress, the gilt-bronze Buddha of Pŏphŭng-sa in P'yŏngwŏn and of Yanghwa-sa in T'aech'ŏn were presumably made in the 1340s by the same Buddha statue maker who made the gilt-bronze Buddhas of Munsu-sa in Sŏsan and of Changgok-sa in Ch'ŏngyang, as they have identical body proportions and present specific depictions of the Buddha. Presumably these statues were made in workshops based in the capital Kaegyŏng to be transported to local temples upon completion.

Keywords: Gilt-bronze Buddha statues, Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), North Korea, South Korea, comparative stylistic analysis, fourteenth century, Amitābha

*Research for this article was supported by a Korean Studies Research Cluster Seeding Grant by the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies.

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Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 33, no. 1 (June 2020): 39–78.

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