

# Korea's First Museum and the Categorization of "Buddhist Statues"

Seunghye Lee

*Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art*

**Abstract:** The establishment of a museum in the precinct of Ch'anggyönggung Palace in 1909 marked an important moment in the historiography of Korean art. Although recent studies have examined the founding, organization, and financing of the first Korean museum, the formation of its Buddhist art collection and its historical implications remain unexamined. Given that not a single Buddhist temple was allowed to exist within the capital city, the entry of these objects into the palace demonstrates a radical paradigm shift in the royal court's relation to Buddhist icons. The museum's Buddhist art collection reveals what was available in the art market of the time and what was considered worthy of being collected in a royal museum. Through close examination of Korea's first museum and its collection, this study traces the recontextualization of religious icons into art objects and the historical implications behind the category of "Buddhist statues."

**Keywords:** Buddhist statues, collecting practices, Korean art historiography, Prince Yi Household Museum, sculpture

The processes involved in creating a museum and its collection are influenced by numerous factors, including political and economic forces, aesthetic standards, taste, and art market developments. Once a museum is established, its presence affects the categorization of art, the canon, the historical identity and cultural heritage of the nation-state, and the art market. The founding, in 1909, of a public museum in the precinct of Ch'anggyönggung Palace 昌慶宮 marked an important moment in the historiography of Korean art in this regard.<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have expounded on the founding, organization, and financing of the Prince Yi Household Museum (Yi Wangga Pangmulgwan, J. Ri Ōke Hakubutsukan 李王家博物館), from 1909 to 1938, when it was moved to Töksugung Palace 德壽宮 (formerly Kyöngun'gung Palace 慶運宮).<sup>2</sup> Some have noted the museum's establishment as resulting from Imperial Japan's colonization of Korea (Mok 2000a, 2000b; Yi I. 2002; Pak S. 2004; Yi Söngsi 2004; Aso 2014; S. Kim 2018). Others have noted that Emperor Sunjong 純宗 (r. 1907–10) and his Korean ministers may have acted autonomously in founding the museum and opening it to the public (Pak K. 2003, 2009). Scholarly efforts to reconsider the contested history of the first Korean museum culminated in the publication of a two-volume book featuring the latest research and archival materials (Han'guk Pangmulgwan 100nyönsa P'yönch'an Wiwönhoe 2009), as well as a centennial exhibition at the National Museum of Korea in 2009 (NMK 2009).

Despite such scholarly efforts to trace the museum's history, its impacts on Korean art and visual culture in subsequent years have yet to be examined. Perhaps it comes as no surprise, then—since it was “a museum privately established by the Yi family” (J. Ri Ōke Sisetsu Hakubutsukan 李王家私設博物館; Komiya 1912)—that the museum played a very limited role in shaping Korean art history and ways of seeing Korea's past during the colonial period. That the museum had no director or adequately trained curators throughout its long history reveals its limits. Still, the early activities of the museum, the first of its kind on Korean soil, hold clues to the many changes that gave rise to the modern category “Korean art” and subcategories such as ceramics (*tojagi*; J. *tōjiki* 陶磁器) and Buddhist statues (*pulsang*; J. *butsuzō* 佛像), which had not previously been considered art by the royal court and intellectuals of premodern Korea. The Prince Yi Household Museum had already affected art markets through acquisitions and the categorization of artifacts as masterpieces prior to the full-fledged intervention of the Government-General of Korea (J. Chōsen Sōtokufu 朝鮮總督府) through the publication of Korean history and the manipulation of visual art.<sup>3</sup> So how was the category of Buddhist statues perceived and presented by the Prince Yi Household Museum? Or, more to the point, how had the museum authorities formed their understanding of Buddhist statues in the years leading up to the museum's founding?

This study reconsiders the role of the Prince Yi Household Museum—however marginalized under colonial rule—in the recontextualization of religious objects as works of art, of artifacts as masterpieces, through the practices of collecting, museum display, and publication during the earliest stages of Korean art historiography. In particular, I trace how Buddhist artifacts were reformulated as Buddhist artworks for the first time in Korean history and examine the birth of a new category, “Buddhist statues,” with particular focus on 1908–15. This time span, which predates the founding of the Government-General Museum of Korea (J. Chōsen Sōtokufu Hakubutsukan 朝鮮總督府博物館) in 1915, allows me to probe the significant role the Prince Yi Household Museum played in Korea's nascent market for ancient art. By focusing on the museum's efforts to recontextualize religious artifacts as masterpieces, my examination deconstructs today's category of Korean Buddhist statues. First, it considers the establishment of the museum and its collecting activities to better understand the modern display of antique objects in public galleries. Next, it probes the formation of Buddhist statues as independent objects of study and their status in the canon of Korean art. The emergence of this new category is examined by distinguishing the crucial forces at play, including the colonial authorities (who were collectors themselves), the collecting and art markets, and early publications. In so doing, this article discusses the selection, codification, and institutionalization of antique objects in the Korean context at the turn of the twentieth century. This line of inquiry sheds new light on Korea's reception of modern notions such as art history (*misulsa*; J. *bijutsushi* 美術史), Buddhist art (*pulgyo misul*; J. *bukkyō bijutsu* 佛教美術), and sculpture (*chogak*; J. *chōkoku* 彫刻) through Japanese intervention on the global stage.<sup>4</sup>

### Establishment of Korea's First Museum

Koreans first encountered museums and exhibitions through the intermediary of Japan shortly after Korea's forced opening to the world in 1876 during the reign of Kojong 高宗, who ruled Korea as the last king of Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1910) from 1864 to 1897 and the first monarch of the Great Han Empire (Taehan Cheguk 大韓帝國) from 1897 to 1907. The Korean government dispatched three delegations to Japan between 1876 and 1882 to observe institutions of modernity and products of Western civilization. Pak Chŏngyang 朴定陽 (1842–1905), a member of the second Korean delegation (Chosa sich'altan 朝士視察團) to Japan in 1881, reported, "As for the Bureau of Museums, it administers affairs related to museums and collects objects—natural and manmade, past and present—in order to extend knowledge. That is why this bureau was called 'general knowledge.'" He further remarked that the first Japanese museum established in 1872 "displayed everything from domestic collections that had been gathered from temples, shrines, and government storehouses to collections of foreign products, and utilized them as resources for teaching the people" (Pak C. 1881; Mok 2000a: 10; Jang 2015: 18). Although Pak Chŏngyang's remarks show that he understood the social and educational function of museums, his understanding was not well received, even among his fellow envoys. For instance, Min Chongmuk 閔種默 (1835–1901) stated, "I cannot understand whether these objects [displayed in the museum] could be helpful, even if they are said to broaden knowledge" (Min 1881; Mok 2000a: 10). Awareness about the museum was limited to a small group of reformists, as represented by Pak Yŏnghyo's 朴泳孝 (1861–1939) memorial, addressed to the throne in 1888, and was insufficient to resonate with Korean society. In a similar vein, Kojong's interest in modern systems and institutions appears not to have included the museum's construction, though the Korean government participated in the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, as well as the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900 (Kim Y. 2000).

The founding of a museum may not have seemed so gravely important in contrast to the frequent political upheavals that consumed much of the short-lived Great Han Empire. The Japanese Empire made Korea a protectorate in 1905 and established the Office of the Residency-General (T'onggambu 統監府) in February 1906, paving the way for Japan's eventual annexation of Korea in 1910. In 1907, Emperor Kojong was forced to abdicate the throne to the crown prince, who became Emperor Sunjong.<sup>5</sup> Sunjong, who had resided at Töksugung Palace during his years as crown prince, was forced to relocate to Ch'angdökkung Palace 昌德宮 in November 1907.<sup>6</sup> The plan to build a museum together with an arboretum and zoo under the Ministry of the Imperial Household (Kungnaebu 宮內府) arose around this time as measures were being taken by the residency-general office to intervene more systematically in Korea's internal affairs.<sup>7</sup> In January 1908, the establishment of the "Imperial Household Museum" (Chesil Pangmulgwan 帝室博物館), zoo, and arboretum was reported in Korean newspapers.<sup>8</sup> The next month, newspapers announced the museum's aim to collect and display "old books and artworks of Korea," as well as "rare objects of civilization from the contemporary world," to cultivate public knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Organization of the museum progressed rapidly. The Ministry of the Imperial Household appointed four staff members—

three Japanese and one Korean—to establish the museum,<sup>10</sup> amassed a collection of 8,600 works of art, and displayed them in chronological order. Next, the museum began collecting paintings and crafts from the Chosŏn period, as well as Buddhist statues from the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods. The museum, which was still under preparation, was first shown to Sunjong around September 1908 (Riōshoku 1938: 1–2). Although the museum first announced in May 1909 that it would open to the public soon,<sup>11</sup> the public had to wait six more months to visit the new institution.<sup>12</sup> It finally opened on November 1, 1909, one day after the grand inauguration, in which the emperor and empress of Korea participated with some one thousand guests.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, the royal palace opened its doors to the public for the first time. Transformed into three modern facilities for public amusement, the palace was renamed Ch'anggyōngwŏn Park 昌慶苑.<sup>14</sup> This was part of the Japanese colonists' efforts to convert Hwangšōng 皇城 (literally, “Imperial City”) of the Great Han Empire into the capital of colonized Korea, Keijō 京城 (Henry 2008).

Scholarly consensus has not been reached regarding the main force behind the museum's founding or, put differently, whether Sunjong ever intended to build a public museum in the modern sense of the term before Japanese intervention. This is partly because the official historical documents, such as *Sunjong sillok* 純宗實錄 (*Annals of Sunjong*) and *Sūngjōngwŏn ilgi* 承政院日記 (*Daily Record of the Grand Secretariat*), are reticent regarding how the museum came into being, aside from a few remarks on the appointment of staff members for the museum's inauguration. Most scholars see Japanese colonial officials, particularly Komiya Mihomatsu 小宮三保松 (1859–1935), as having orchestrated the establishment of the museum and its opening to the public. This is partly based on a preface, written by Komiya himself, to the catalog of the Prince Yi Household Museum's collection (Komiya 1912).<sup>15</sup> Komiya, a close associate of Resident-General Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841–1909), served as vice minister to the Ministry of the Imperial Household from 1907 to 1911 and as vice minister to the Prince Yi Household (Yiwangjik, J. Riōshoku 李王職), which was established in February 1911 to oversee affairs related to Chosŏn's former royal family, until 1917.<sup>16</sup> As the royal garden fell within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Imperial Household and later the Prince Yi Household, Komiya engineered Itō's vision of establishing the modern institutions inside the palace as the resident-general had done in Japan a few decades prior. One of the museum's early staff members, Shimokōriyama Seiichi 下郡山誠一 (b. 1883), cited Itō as the driving force behind the museum's founding and Komiya as the spearhead of the project.<sup>17</sup> Gondō Shirōsuke 權藤四郎介 (b. 1875), a Japanese official at the Ministry of the Imperial Household, left a similar remark in his memoir (Gondō 1926: 22–23; Chŏn T. 2017: 190–92).

Itō, who had observed museums as a member of the Japanese delegation to the West in the early Meiji period, proposed establishing a national museum of art on a grand scale and in 1886 entrusted Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) and Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覺三 (aka Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心, 1862–1913) to draw up a plan for a more effective museum of art, as well as the development of the arts and crafts of Japan. The project was realized as the Imperial Museum in Tokyo's Ueno Park when Kuki Ryūichi 九鬼隆一 (1852–1931), the Japanese minister to the United States, returned to Japan (Takaki 1997: 286–87; Tōkyō Kokuritsu

Hakubutsukan 1973: 246–48; Kaneko 2001: 25).<sup>18</sup> Since the museum, zoo, and arboretum of the imperial household were considered by the Japanese colonial authorities to be one of the chief accomplishments of the resident-general, it is surmised that the resident-general took the lead in situating these modern institutions inside Ch'anggyönggung Palace (Yi Söngsi 2004: 275–76).

### **The Museum's Collecting Practices, Architecture, and Display**

The collecting practices of the Chosön court differed starkly from those of contemporary scholar-officials who collected antiques and curios or the Qing court, who collected craftworks of various forms and materials, as well as Buddhist icons. Since the notion of “religious art” did not exist in premodern Korea, there was simply no place for curios or antiquities such as Buddhist statues and paintings, ceramics, or crafts within the palace precinct. Furthermore, Buddhist icons were not allowed in palace precincts beginning in the mid-Chosön under the strong influence of Neo-Confucianism, whereas ceramics and craftworks were considered not objects of artistic appreciation but utilitarian objects for daily use (Hwang 2018: 338). Although the very name of the Prince Yi Household Museum may evoke royal treasures in the minds of viewers, the museum collection was primarily built by Komiya and the staff, incorporating relatively few items from the traditional court collection of paintings and calligraphy (Mok 2000b: 87; S. Kim 2018: 198). Rather than being preserved or acquired by the Prince Yi Household Museum, many works of art and books that had been kept in royal libraries and storehouses in the palace precincts were scattered and lost (Hwang 2008: 99; 2012: 706–13). A revealing account of the Chosön court collection can be found in a memoir left by an early staff member of the museum. Shimoköriyama, who had begun employment at the museum in March 1908, together with the chief manager, Suematsu Kumahiko 末松熊彦 (1870–1935), collected exhibits under the supervision of Komiya. As he recalled, Komiya had to make acquisitions at antique shops almost daily, since the royal court had few “treasures” (Pak K. 2009: 55–56). Similarly, Fujita Ryösaku 藤田亮策 (1892–1960), a leading Japanese archaeologist who conducted fieldwork in Korea, recalled that the Prince Yi Household Museum had not inherited ancient artworks from the traditional royal collection. Only palanquins, arms, and trappings had come from the royal court (Fujita 1963: 69; Mok 2000b: 89).

Differences between the traditional court collection and the museum's collection already speak to the impact of colonial intervention while reflecting the changing notion of collectibles that occurred in the planning for the Prince Yi Household Museum, which coincides with the emergence of an art market in Korea. As plans for the museum started in January 1908, the museum staff made extensive efforts to acquire exhibits. Between January and August 1908, the museum collected 8,600 items. Although the makeup of the collection in its early years is not entirely clear, by 1911 artifacts from the Koryö 高麗 (918–1392) period, including ceramics and metalwares, appear to have comprised the largest portion of collection highlights. An inventory, titled *Ri Öke Hakubutsukan shozöhin mokuroku köbu* 李王家博物館所藏品目錄甲部, records 2,916 items collected by the museum between 1908 and 1911, providing a partial glimpse of the collection. It

features 1,058 ceramics and 870 metalwares from the Koryŏ, 362 metal and earthenwares from ancient times to the Unified Silla period, 420 paintings and pieces of calligraphy and 104 miscellaneous objects from the Koryŏ period, and 102 Buddhist statues (Song 1999: 179; Pak S. 2006: 14). By the time the museum published the first catalog of its collection in December 1912, it had gathered 12,230 items, including celadons from the Koryŏ, Buddhist statues from the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla, and paintings, craftworks, and historical and folkloric artifacts from the Chosŏn period.<sup>19</sup>

The size, quality, and profile of the collection, built so quickly, were made possible by the unique social climate of the time, as Komiya duly acknowledged in his preface (Komiya 1912). With the illegal digging of Koryŏ tombs near Kaesŏng 開成, the kingdom's capital, many celadons and metal craftworks spilled into the nascent art market in Seoul (Komiya 1912; Riŏshoku 1938: 1; Moon 2010: 70–73; Horlyck 2013; Chŏn T. 2017: 150–54, 207–9). Also, it was around this time that auctions began of Koryŏ celadons, retrieved from tombs through unlawful excavations. “Old ceramics put in baskets made of bushclover stalks,” according to the Japanese antique dealer Sasaki Chōji 佐佐木兆治 (1894–1970), who owned the Keijō Art Club (J. Keijō Bijutsu Kurabu 京城美術俱樂部, operated from 1922 to 1941), “were sent from Kaesŏng to Keijō without ceasing and five such baskets as one lot came under the hammer” (Sasaki 1942: 11–12). By the early 1900s a guidebook to Korea, for instance, even advised the Japanese that “Koryŏ celadon worth hundreds of yen can be obtained . . . for no more than 10. If you want to buy even cheaper, it is possible to excavate old tombs. Land is also cheap” (Yoshikura 1904: 136–37; Moon 2010: 71; C. Kim 2017: 609–10). As the unparalleled growth of the collection already implies, the Prince Yi Household Museum was the biggest player in the art market of the time; its purchases of items, illegally excavated by Japanese settlers who in turn had hired Koreans for aid, sanctioned and even exacerbated such plunder. With public authority and buying power, the museum's almost predatory collecting seems to have perpetuated grave robbing and illicit sales, which had been commonplace already, while affecting the structure of the art market. The antique market was monopolized by Japanese dealers who had settled on the peninsula and maintained close ties with Japanese colonial officials, a practice that drove the prices of celadons even higher (Son 2018: 283–86).

The museum's focus on celadons is far from surprising, especially given that both Komiya and Itō were avid collectors of such items from Koryŏ (Himaraya sannin 1909: 69; Pak S. 2006: 16–18, 22–30). Koryŏ celadons were, to borrow Komiya's words, the “quintessence of Korean art” (Komiya 1909: 30). Although the museum authorities actively pursued celadons from the very beginning, their interest in Buddhist statues appears to have developed somewhat later. Suematsu, in a newspaper article published in February 1911, announced the museum's hopes to acquire a considerable amount of Buddhist statues and artifacts, new and old, from monasteries in the countryside for display in the museum.<sup>20</sup> The article seemingly indicates the museum's failure to acquire Buddhist statues “possessed of a long history and incomparable excellence” despite their yearlong effort.<sup>21</sup> Two years later, Suematsu published a short magazine piece in which he recalled the

museum's collecting process while evaluating Korean artifacts representative of each genre, presenting the museum as protector of the nation's most ancient arts. Having accounted for the museum's collecting of celadons, paintings, and calligraphy, he attributed the gradual decline of Korean Buddhist statues to that of Korean Buddhism itself. Suematsu noted that the museum hoped to collect stone sculptures with characteristically Korean traits in the future, though he refrained from delineating exactly how and where the museum had acquired its collection of Buddhist statues so far (Suematsu 1913: 126). Such lack of textual accounts suggests either relatively low levels of interest or the subsidiary position of Buddhist statues in the art market of the time. Likewise, the inventory cards for Buddhist statues in the former collection of the Yi Royal Household Museum, indicated by the accession numbers beginning with "Töksu" 덕수 (shorthand for "Töksugung Palace," where the museum collection was relocated in 1938), typically include information such as dates of purchase, sale prices, and names of antique dealers, revealing little regarding provenance.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, the dealers include those who sold the most ceramics to the museum, including Shimaoka Tamakichi 島岡玉吉 (NMK 2014a: 110), Yanai Seichirō 矢内瀨一郎 (NMK 2016: 14, 246), Eguchi Torajirō 江口虎次郎 (NMK 2018: 186, 228), Gondō Sagorō 近藤佐五郎 (b. 1867; NMK 2014a: 300; 2016: 14), Yoshimura Inokichi 吉村亥之吉 (NMK 2014a: 264), and Aoki Bunshichi 青木文七 (NMK 2014a: 12; 2018: 98).<sup>23</sup> The list will certainly grow as the National Museum of Korea continues its survey of Buddhist statues in its collection. This suggests that the museum's acquisition of Buddhist statues took place through preestablished networks of Japanese staff and antique dealers specializing in Koryō celadons.

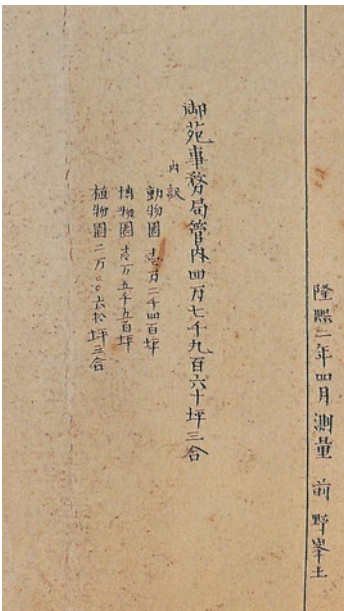
The collection expanded rapidly. As noted above, it grew from 8,600 items in September 1908 to around 12,000 by December 1912. Where were these items displayed? Although a conservatory was newly built of glass in the north of Ch'anggyōnggung Palace and several enclosures in the south, no new buildings were built in the initial stages of museum planning. Instead, "ancient buildings that should be preserved" were converted into public galleries (Ishihara 1915: 14). Construction of the new park meant demolition of the old palatial buildings, which were seen by the colonial authorities as worthless (Komiya 1913: 46; Chōn T. 2017: 203–4). The decision regarding which buildings to demolish or transform into exhibition halls may have been based on the architectural historian and archaeologist Sekino Tadashi's 關野貞 (1868–1935) assessment of Seoul's palace architecture. Myōngjōngjōn Hall 明政殿, the main hall of Ch'anggyōnggung Palace, and buildings nearby were thought to have been built prior to the seventeenth century and thus were considered worth protecting for their greater historical and architectural value (Sekino 1904: 123–24; 1910: 2, 32; U 2009: 221–22).

A ground plan of Ch'anggyōnggung Palace and Piwōn Garden 秘苑, made in April 1908, reveals the spatial disposition of palace buildings during planning (fig. 1). This sketch of the ground plan shows only where the three modern facilities were to be constructed (Kim Ch'ansong 2018: 95–96). The legend in the lower right reveals the area allotted to each institution in the palace precinct: a zoo of 40,661 m<sup>2</sup> (marked

as 12,300 *p'yŏng* 坪), a museum of 51,239 m<sup>2</sup> (15,500 *p'yŏng*), and an arboretum of 66,314 m<sup>2</sup> (20,060 *p'yŏng*), for a total of 158,214 m<sup>2</sup> (47,860 *p'yŏng*) under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Bureau of the Royal Garden (Ōwŏn Samuguk 御苑事務局; see Chŏn K. 2009, 1: 154–55, 2: 76; fig. 2). According to Inoue Masaji 井上正治 (1877–1947), secretary of the Ministry of the Imperial Household, Ch'anggyŏnggung Palace was chosen over plans for a Western-style masonry building under construction at Töksugung Palace for the museum's location. This was primarily because “as buildings withstand the test of time for so long, then they—unlike ordinary buildings—came to hold antique beauty to the extent of being appreciated as a huge

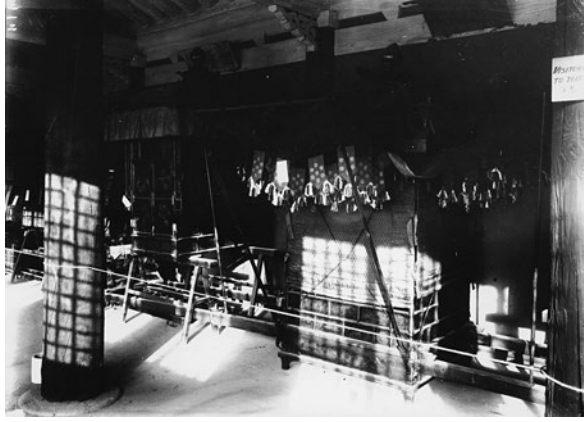


**Figure 1.** Ground plan of Ch'anggyŏnggung Palace and Piwŏn Garden, 1908. Paper, 46.0 × 82.9 cm. Scale 1/2000. Courtesy of Jangseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies (RD04548).



**Figure 2.** Detail of figure 1. Courtesy of Jangseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies (RD04548).





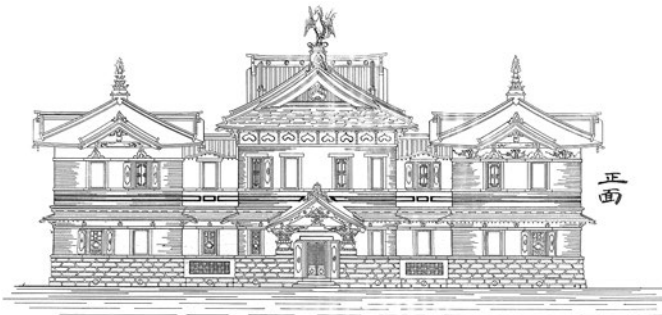
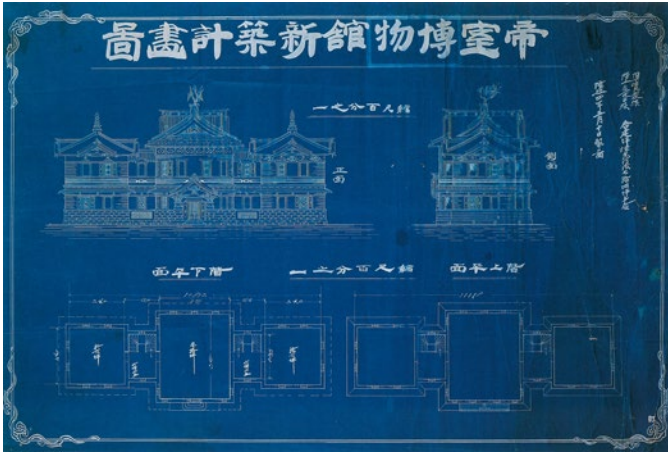
**Figure 3.** Display of an Avalokiteśvara statue (Tōksu 801), circa 1909, location unknown, Ch'anggyōnggung Palace. Print from dry plate. Könp'an 000240. Courtesy of the National Museum of Korea.

**Figure 4.** Display of palanquins in a roofed corridor connecting to Myōngjōngjōn Hall, circa 1909. Print from dry plate. Könp'an 000233. Courtesy of the National Museum of Korea.

antique object.” He further stated that “it must have been beneficial to the buildings themselves to be used in this noble business of civilization” and that “the museum, resonating with the elegant beauty of buildings with a long history, seems to have infinite tastefulness” (Inoue 1908: 68–69). One of the main motives for establishing this museum was, according to art historian Pak Sohyōn, to recontextualize the royal palace, a political arena, into an antique object of aesthetic appreciation, thereby detaching it from the realm of politics. Through this process, the royal palace itself became another exhibit in the eyes of contemporaries, like “an object put in a clear glass container” (Pak S. 2004: 150–51; Gondō 1926: 54–55).

Several halls of Ch'anggyōnggung Palace, such as Kyōngch'unjōn Hall 景春殿 and Myōngjōngjōn Hall, were initially converted into exhibition halls due to their relatively large space and architectural finesse.<sup>24</sup> Although we still have little sense of how these palatial halls became public galleries, two photographs from 1909 in the archival collection of the National Museum of Korea may provide glimpses of the artifacts that were being shown to the public as works of art for the first time. The first photograph shows an Avalokiteśvara statue, datable to the fourteenth century, against glass cases that line the wall. Inside these cases are statues of seated Buddhist deities (fig. 3). Given that the statue is shown outside of the glass case, it may have been taken out for the photo shoot or was photographed during installation. Exactly where this photo was taken remains unknown due to the lack of supporting evidence, but the second photo, showing a palanquin, seems to have been taken in the southern or northern roofed corridor of Myōngjōngjōn Hall (fig. 4).

The completion of the museum's two-story main building in March 1912 seems to have brought changes to the topography of both Ch'anggyōnggung Palace and the museum's overall display. The construction of the main building began



**Figure 5.** Plan of the newly built Imperial Household Museum, 1910. Blueprint, 61.8×91.0 cm. Scale 1/100. After Chŏn K. 2009, 1: 162, pl. 105. Courtesy of Jangseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies (RD04477).

**Figure 6.** Detail of figure 5. After Chŏn K. 2009, 1: 163. Courtesy of Jangseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies (RD04477).

in September 1911 and was finished in March 1912, with a celebratory ceremony on March 14, 1912.<sup>25</sup> The four-story Changsŏgak Library 藏書閣, constructed in 1915 to store books and archival materials from the former royal collection, further transformed the view of the palace (U 2009: 224–25; Han'guk Pangmulgwan 100nyŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe 2009, 2: 33). As shown in a blueprint dated May 5, 1910, in the collection of the Academy of Korean Studies (Han'gukhak Chungang Yŏn'guwŏn), the planning of the new main building was under way shortly after the museum's opening (fig. 5). Its construction seems to have been driven in part by practical concerns about protecting and managing the exhibits in public galleries across the palace grounds. As the blueprint reveals, each floor consisted of three galleries, with the central one—the biggest of the three—linked to the two subsidiary galleries by staircases (fig. 6). The new building had an exhibition space of 409 m<sup>2</sup> and a basement for museum storage (Pak K. 2009: 49–50). The main

building, in the eclectic style, synthesized Western architectural technology with Japanese formal features (*J. wayō setchū* 和洋折衷), rising from the former site of Chagyŏngjŏn Hall 慈慶殿 on the northeastern slope of Ch'anggyŏnggung Palace and towering over the palace grounds. The building's design, with its symmetrical wings and phoenix perched centrally on the roof, was based on the overall design of the Phoenix Hall (Hōōdō 鳳凰堂, constructed in 1053) of Byōdōin 平等院, a building iconic of traditional Buddhist temple architecture in Japan (Komiya 1914: 120; Keijō-fu 1934: 72).<sup>26</sup> The Phoenix Hall served as a model for the Japanese exhibition hall, similarly named Phoenix Hall (Hōōden 鳳凰殿), in the World Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893 (Kim Y. 2000: 82).

It is interesting to note the spatial disposition of exhibits throughout the museum complex following the completion of the main building. A flier, titled "Guide to Ch'anggyŏngwŏn Park" ("Shōkeien annai ki" 昌慶苑案内記) and published by the Prince Yi Household in 1915, provides a guide to the public galleries (Kim Ch'ansong 2018: 112–15).<sup>27</sup> The leaflet offers copious information on both sides of the sheet (fig. 7). Above the title, the front cover displays a phoenix in the center with a palace in an inset whose contour recalls a five-petaled plum blossom, one of the national symbols of the Great Han Empire. Centered on the front is a park map, surrounded by seven insets of various shapes with photographs of must-see spots and text introducing the park's history against a pink backdrop dotted with cherry blossoms. In the upper right is a legend with each spot numbered and named first in sinographs and then in English. Although the recto of the leaflet shows a map of the entire garden with inset glimpses of the zoo and botanical garden, the verso is entirely devoted to the major artworks in the public galleries. Notably, only artifacts of antiquarian or artistic values were reproduced on the verso, although the museum also held exhibits of "natural products," such as the animal specimens at the northern corridor connecting to Myŏngjŏngjŏn Hall (no. 25 in fig. 7) and mineral specimens at Yŏnhūidang Hall 延禧堂 (no. 26 in fig. 7). The featured exhibits range widely from stone implements and earthenwares to a Buddhist statue and celadons, covering the vast span of time from the Stone Age to the Chosŏn.

On the recto of the flier, the museum with its main building appears at top center in a rectangle. Most of the buildings inside Myŏngjŏngmun Gate 明正門 (no. 23 in fig. 7, labeled "Entrance to Museum") were used as public galleries (fig. 8).<sup>28</sup> Stone carvings (*J. sekkoku* 石刻) were displayed in Myŏngjŏngjŏn Hall (no. 27 in fig. 7), originally the main hall of the palace, whereas palanquins, earthenwares, and stone coffins were shown inside the southern corridor connecting to the hall (no. 24 in fig. 7, labeled as "Show-room"). Around the time of this leaflet's publication, Myŏngjŏngjŏn Hall held exhibits of a pensive bodhisattva carved from marble during China's Northern Qi dynasty, nine fragments of stone Buddhist steles from the Northern Wei to the Tang dynasties, a plaster model of Sökkuram Grotto 石窟庵 in Kyŏngju 慶州, the base of a stone pagoda with carvings of heavenly beings datable to the Silla period, a bronze bell, and a stone carving of an astronomical chart from Chosŏn (NMK 2014b: 118–43; fig. 9). Within Haminjŏng Pavilion 涵仁亭 (no. 28 in fig. 7) were displays of Buddhist statues. Given the open structure of the pavilion,



**Figure 7.** “Guide to Ch’anggyōngwŏn Park,” 1915. Paper, 59.5×36.5 cm. Photograph by Pak Kihyŏn.

it seems to have held stone Buddhist images, which are more durable than bronze or iron statues. Art objects of the Yi dynasty (J. Richōhin 李朝品) were shown in Hwan’gyōngjŏn Hall 歡慶殿 (no. 29 in fig. 7), while those of the Koryŏ period were displayed in Kyōngch’unjŏn Hall (no. 30 in fig. 7). Paintings were displayed in T’ongmyōngjŏn Hall 通明殿 (no. 31 in fig. 7), whereas replicas of Koguryŏ 高句麗 tomb murals were held in building 32, identifiable as Yanghwadang Hall 養和堂. A comparison of the leaflet published in 1915 and an account of the museum published in *Keijōfu shi* 京城府史 (*History of Keijō Prefecture*, 1934) indicates that the locations



**Figure 8.** (top left) Overview of the Myŏngjŏngjŏn Hall area. After Shihaki, Moriyama, and Murakami 1911. Courtesy of Seoul Museum of History.

**Figure 9.** (right) Interior of Myŏngjŏngjŏn Hall, Ch'anggyŏngwŏn Park. Date and photographer unknown. Print from dry plate. Kŏnp'an 16524. Courtesy of the National Museum of Korea.

**Figure 10.** (bottom left) “The main building of the museum (Ch'anggyŏngwŏn Park),” after 1912. Photographer unknown. After the *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō*. Courtesy of Seoul Museum of History.

of exhibits were not fixed but changed somewhat (Kim Ch'ansong 2018: 112–13; Keijō-fu 1934: 72). The most valuable items from the collection—which included Buddhist statues, ceramics, metal craftworks, and jades—were displayed in the new museum (building 35 in fig. 7, also called “Hakubutsu shinkan” 博物新館 and labeled as “Showroom for High-Class Objects of Art”; fig. 10). The new museum building, which required separate admission, was situated atop a hill, looking down on the old palatial buildings and exhibits of lower standing (Ishihara 1915: 14).

### Early Publications and the Category of “Buddhist Statues”

The collecting of objects necessitated documentation, both textual and visual. Along with displays of collected objects in public galleries, the collection of the Prince Yi Household Museum was announced nationally and internationally through a variety of early publications starting in 1911. Two of the earliest sources,



**Figure 11.** Cover of the *Chōsen kokuhō taikan*, 1911. Courtesy of Seoul National University Library.

though not published by the museum, that offer a glimpse of the collection are *Chōsen kokuhō taikan* 朝鮮國寶大觀 (*Overview of Korean National Treasures*), published in 1911, and *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō* 昌德宮昌慶苑寫真帖 (*Photo Album of Ch'angdōkkung Palace and Ch'anggyōngwŏn Park*), published sometime after 1912. The former, printed in Tokyo and published by Dōbunkan 同文館, was published in Korea by Nikkan Shōbo 日韓書房, a bookstore and publishing company located at Honmachi 本町 (today's Ch'ungmu-ro) of Keijō (fig. 11). The company was founded in 1906 by Moriyama Yoshio 森山美夫 (b. 1881), a younger brother of the founder of Dōbunkan. This bookstore seems to have affected discourse on Korea in the community of Japanese settlers through its extensive publication, distribution, and sales of books and magazines on subjects related to Korea. Art was one of its specialties in the 1910s and 1920s (Sin 2011: 324–26, 330), and the *Chōsen kokuhō taikan* had a wide enough readership to necessitate printing a second edition in 1915. The stated aim of the *Chōsen kokuhō taikan*, according to the preface by Sugihara Sadakichi 杉原定吉 (dates unknown), was to introduce ancient artworks of Korea and to collect and make public the many cultural properties scattered across Korea. Apparently the publication was made possible through the cooperation of the museum staff, as the author acknowledged at the end of the preface. Komiya, introduced as the “former president of the Administrative Bureau of the Royal Garden under the Ministry of the Imperial Household,” and Suematsu gave Sugihara permission to photograph artworks in the museum’s collection, while Sugihara Chūkichi 杉原忠吉 (dates unknown), a technician (J. *gishu* 技手) newly appointed in September 1911, aided in the book’s editing (Sugihara 1911: 1–2).

While praising the size and artistic caliber of the Prince Yi Household Museum collection, Sugihara mentioned that the museum had helped him over-

come the difficulty of tracing the objects' provenance but that there had been insufficient time for research, as limited materials were available during the writing. Given the museum's wholehearted support for the publication, this book represents the museum authorities' rationale for the selection and appraisal of objects and hints at the rudimentary state of research on cultural properties even before the Government-General of Korea began its nationwide survey of ancient monuments and important cultural properties. The fifty objects are arranged in chronological order, each preceded by a block of descriptive text. It lists a wide diversity of artifacts, including a Buddhist statue, metalwares (e.g., bronze mirror, temple bell, incense burner), earthenwares, ceramics, crafts, and paintings, in chronological order. The most represented of the art genres are paintings and calligraphy, totaling twenty-two. Publication of this book seems to have served as a test case for Komiya, considering that the three museum personnel whom Sugihara thanked in his preface also helped publish the first edition of the official catalog the next year.

Compared to *Chōsen kokuhō taikan*, *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō* retains little information about its authorship and intended readership. The latter, whose photographer and publisher remain unknown, now resides in the Seoul Museum of History (Sōul Yōksa Pangmulgwan).<sup>29</sup> The album, with its yellow textile cover, contains forty-eight photographs on dark paper with labels. After twenty-two photographs of major buildings and vistas in Ch'angdōkkung Palace, the album then shifts to images of more modern facilities and related exhibits in Ch'anggyōngwōn Park, introducing the arboretum, zoo, and museum one by one. After a brief overview of each section, it then delves into the major exhibits. The museum architecture, represented by Myōngjōngjōn Hall and the main building, is introduced first, followed by twelve plates of exhibits in the public galleries. The twelve artifacts are shown in chronological order and by material rather than by genre. The album introduces two gilt-bronze statues of bodhisattvas from the Three Kingdoms period (figs. 12 and 13), one set of gold earrings and a jade flute from the Silla, two metal works from the Koryō, four ceramics from the Koryō (though three may date to the early Chosōn period), and two paintings from Chosōn.

The museum's official catalog, published in 1912, brings together the colonial authorities' achievements in collecting and preserving the cultural legacy of Chosōn within just three years. The two-volume catalog is titled *Ri Ōke Hakubutsukan shozōhin shashinchō* 李王家博物館所藏品寫真帖 (*Photo Album of the Prince Yi Household Museum Collection*) and is bound in silk with a sumptuous cover reminiscent of an illuminated sutra from Koryō (Riōshoku 1912; fig. 14). The first edition of the catalog contains 677 items with black-and-white photographs and short entries. The composition of this extravagant catalog faithfully represents the perspective of colonial authorities on Korean art. It opens with Sunjong's calligraphy and is followed by three pairs of photographs showing the zoo, arboretum, and museum (fig. 15). In these pictures, the outmoded palace of the Chosōn royal court is contrasted with the modern institutions of Imperial Japan (Mok 2000b: 94–96). This visual tactic, aptly called the genre of before-and-after photography, was adopted in many of the



**Figure 12.** “Gilt-bronze Cintāmaṇi Wheel Avalokiteśvara in the Three Kingdoms style” (Tōksu 2327, currently designated Treasure no. 331), after 1912. Photographer unknown. After the *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō*. Courtesy of Seoul Museum of History.

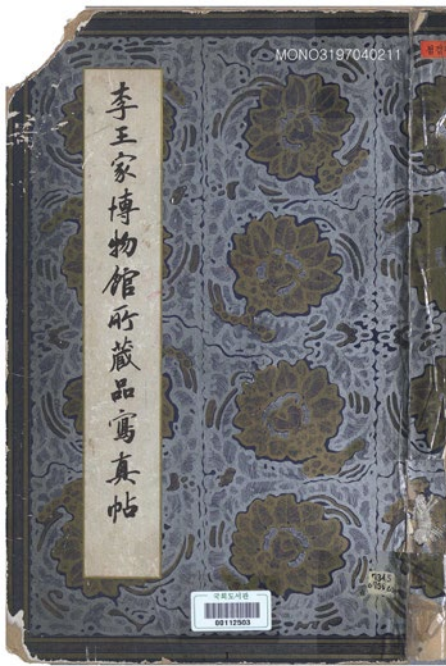


**Figure 13.** “Gilt-bronze Cintāmaṇi Wheel Avalokiteśvara in the Three Kingdoms style” (Tōksu 3312, currently designated National Treasure no. 83), after 1912. Photographer unknown. After the *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō*. Courtesy of Seoul Museum of History.

Government-General of Korea official publications, including the *Chōsen koseki zufu* 朝鮮古蹟圖譜 (*Album of Korean Antiquities*), a fifteen-volume series of cultural artifacts and monuments published by the Government-General of Korea from 1915 to 1935. What follows is Komiya’s preface narrating the establishment of the museum and a short introduction to a history of Korean art whose author remains unknown. In his preface to the volume, Komiya indicates that he had managed the task of establishing the museum, which included making purchases and building the collection, and that museum officials under his supervision had compiled the catalog. He humbly states that “the work of the Prince Yi Household Museum had, to date, been nothing more than the collecting of specimens of Korean art hitherto scattered across the globe. As to a systematic examination of art in this peninsula, we leave that for future studies. Publishing this album was simply intended to present some material for the study of Korean art and to cater to the wants of lovers of ancient art” (Komiya 1912: n.p.). Lacking the humility of Komiya’s remarks, the presentation of selected items validates the notion of unearthed objects as collectibles and the notion of art genres as derived from the West, thereby making it difficult to accept this catalog at face value.

The catalog’s first volume consists of Buddhist statues, metal works (J. *kinkō* 金工), stone works (J. *sekkō* 石工), wood carvings (J. *mokuchō* 木彫), lacquerware





**Figure 14.** Cover of the *Ri Ōke Hakubutsukan shozōhin shashinchō*, 1912. Courtesy of the National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea.



**Figure 15.** Layout showing before and after views of the Myōngjōngjōn Hall area, 1912. After *Riōshoku* 1912, 1: n.p. Courtesy of the National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea.

(J. *shikki* 漆器), and embroidery and textiles (J. *shishū oyobi orimono* 刺繡及織物), whereas the second features ceramics (J. *tōki* 陶器), roof tiles (J. *kawara* 瓦), glass (J. *shōshi* 硝子), and paintings (J. *kaiga* 繪畫). The objects are categorized mostly by material. The order of mediums seems somewhat arbitrary. One scholar even notes that art mediums may have been arranged by market value in descending order of expense (Mok 2000b: 97). Each category begins with a brief introduction, the author of which is unidentified, and then proceeds with individual entries, each consisting of text and a photograph. Within each category, the featured items appear in chronological order.

Though seemingly simple and straightforward, the composition of the catalog is intriguing in several respects. First, the selected objects differ greatly from those in the traditional court collection. As mentioned previously, the first volume begins with Buddhist statues and the second with ceramics, both of which spilled into the nascent art market with the illegal excavation of Koryō tombs and unknown sites throughout the kingdom. Given that the catalog features only 677 items out of more than 12,000, it represents the sort of facade that its builders intended to show the world. In 1912, the intended readers were apparently Japanese. This was then extended to include Westerners by the second edition in 1918,



**Figure 16.** “Gilt-bronze Amitābha Buddha (Three Kingdoms period)” (Tōksu 2958). After Riōshoku 1912, 1: pl. 1. Courtesy of the National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea.

as suggested by the addition of an English translation of Komiya’s preface, an introductory essay on Korean art, and titles for each object (Riōshoku 1918, 1: n.p.). The most represented art mediums are ceramics and metal works, comprising 41.4 percent and 30.3 percent of the selection, respectively. Paintings comprise just 9.0 percent, whereas Buddhist statues correspond to 7.2 percent of the represented items, representing the fourth among the five categories of ceramics, metal works, paintings, Buddhist statues, and others (Pak K. 2003: 227). The catalog does not include a single book or work of calligraphy—the art mediums most cherished by the Chosŏn court and scholar-officials in the premodern era. This composition, as a number of scholars have aptly noted, represents the tastes of contemporary colonial authorities, such as Itō and Komiya, and Japanese intellectuals who were avid collectors of Koryŏ ceramics and collaborated with the Meiji government.

Second, it is noteworthy that Buddhist statues are listed before other mediums, including the highly prized celadons. As mentioned previously, the category of Buddhist statues is not comparable to that of ceramics or metal works in terms of quantity since there were forty-eight related items in total, with forty-seven Buddhist statues from the Three Kingdoms to Chosŏn periods and a miniature shrine for Buddhist statues from Koryŏ. Furthermore, early staff members of the museum as well as art dealers seldom, in their memoirs, mention an art market frenzy for Buddhist statues among major collectors, including private wealthy Japanese people and institutions. Therefore, it is highly unusual to see Buddha statues gracing the very first page of the first volume (fig. 16). This is precisely what distinguishes this catalog from the two early publications examined above, not to mention the extensiveness of the selections or the extravagance of its binding. Although Buddhism had been perhaps the most revered and important religion in Korean history since

its introduction in the Three Kingdoms period up through Koryŏ, the Chosŏn state oppressed Buddhists and marginalized the role of Buddhism in society (Kim H. I. 2012: 24–50). By the mid-Chosŏn period, for example, no Buddhist temples stood within the capital's four gates. Monks were not even allowed in the city. Not until 1895 was the ban prohibiting monks from entering the four gates lifted due to the petition of a missionary from the Japanese Nichirenshū 日蓮宗 sect.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Buddhist statues were never considered collectibles by the Chosŏn court and upper echelons of society. Key court members during the reigns of Kojong and Sunjong were major patrons of Buddhist temples and artifacts but far from collectors of ancient Buddhist statues. In all likelihood, their commissions remained at Buddhist temples on the outskirts of Seoul, which functioned as private votive temples for members of the royal court called *wŏndang* 願堂 or *wŏnch'al* 願刹 and which were not even in the palace precinct (Lee 2020). Thus, the museum's display of ancient Buddhist statues validated their newfound status as collectibles.

The catalog showcases the types of Buddhist statues that the museum emphasized. It further illustrates the museum authorities' assessment of Korean Buddhism and its art, which is couched within their portrayal of Korean art history. Buddhist statues dated to the Three Kingdoms, Silla, and Koryŏ periods numbered eleven, twenty-three, and eleven, respectively, while only three dated to Chosŏn. Although the dates of some statues have been changed subsequently, the selected statues still reveal the museum authorities' preference for earlier Buddhist statues, especially those believed to be prototypes of slightly later Japanese examples. This tendency is best exemplified in the treatment of three statues of bodhisattvas seated in contemplation with the right leg crossed over the left. The bodhisattva statues showing this posture were mostly identified as Nyoirin Kannon (Yŏuiryun Kwanŭm 如意輪觀音) since the Nara 奈良 (710–94) and Heian 平安 (794–1185) periods. For this reason, the three bodhisattva statues in the catalog were identified as Nyoirin Kannon (Riōshoku 1912, 1: pls. 7–9). For example, plate 7, introduced in the *Shōtokukū Shōkeien shashinchō* without accompanying text, is brought to the fore as a prototype or example of “Buddhist statues in the Suiko style” (J. Suiko shiki 推古式; fig. 12).<sup>31</sup> This understanding appears to have been widespread among art circles in the decades to follow. Langdon Warner (1881–1955), a Harvard-trained historian of Asian art and one-time student of Okakura, incorporated three Korean statues with this iconography from the collection of the Prince Yi Household Museum in his extensive treatment of Japanese Buddhist sculpture of the Suiko period (Warner 1923: 30–36, pls. 47, 57, 64).<sup>32</sup> Asakawa Noritaka 淺川伯教 (1884–1964), a pioneer in the study of Korean ceramics who lived on the Korean peninsula from 1913 to 1946, left a similar account in his memoir of 1945. Connections among China's Six Dynasties period, Korea's Three Kingdoms period, and Japan's Asuka period are, according to Asakawa, to be found in the statue of “Nyoirin Kannon of the Prince Yi Household Museum” (Asakawa 1945: 266).<sup>33</sup>

The high value placed on the earlier periods of Korean Buddhist art reflects the contemporaneous assessment of Korean Buddhism and Buddhist art, which itself is framed by the larger Japanese discourse on the inevitable fall of the Chosŏn dynasty. The biological narrative of Korean art—with the Three King-

doms and Unified Silla periods as the golden age of the wholehearted embrace of Buddhism, Koryŏ as the start of the fall, and Chosŏn as the utter decline—was widely shared among colonial scholars, such as Sekino, as well as officials (Pak S. 2006: 19–22). A good example is found in Suematsu’s essay discussed above. Having visited monasteries throughout the Korean peninsula, he concluded that few Buddhist statues had aesthetic value except for stone sculptures (Suematsu 1913: 126). Most Buddhist statues, enshrined at temples as objects of worship, were produced in the seventeenth century, whereas earlier ones were destroyed in the Imjin Wars (1592–98). In this respect, Suematsu’s appraisal of Buddhist statues in temple collections bespeaks the museum authorities’ fondness for earlier periods of Korean Buddhist art while sustaining the contemporary narrative of Chosŏn having failed to continue the great artistic achievements of earlier Korean kingdoms.

While the category of “Buddhist statues” accentuates a pan-empire Buddhist legacy, this classificatory scheme further betrays its compilers’ affinity for sculpture. For example, the two Buddhist paintings, which had functioned as objects of worship in their original context, appeared in the painting section of the catalog from 1912 (figs. 17 and 18). Such a grouping of artworks already hints at the Western notion of art genres laden with values. Clearly, the catalog aimed to present a new order while subtly degrading what had been cherished by the royal court of Chosŏn. While Buddhist statues are presented under a separate, independent category regardless of their material, other Buddhist artifacts, such as ritual implements, talismans, and paintings, are categorized as metal works or paintings. So why did the compilers give primacy to the medium of statuary? It is notable that the term *Buddhist statues*, though it had been used in East Asia for centuries to designate icons in three-dimensional form, gained a new meaning as a translation of the term *sculpture* in the late nineteenth century. A new word, *chōkoku*, literally meaning sculpting and carving, was coined as a translation of *sculpture*. Nevertheless, the Meiji intellectuals preferred to use the expression Buddhist statues instead of Buddhist sculptures, due perhaps to the term’s association with modern sculpture (Abe 2012: 87; 2017: 96). So why did the compilers of the catalog give primacy to the Buddhist statues?

Sculpture had long been regarded as one of the great artistic achievements in Western standards of cultural progress (Abe 2012). As scholars have demonstrated, Buddhist statues were rediscovered and promoted by Meiji intellectuals as the closest parallel to the monumental statues and busts that were common in the public spaces such as plazas, roadsides, or parks in nineteenth-century Europe and North America (Brandt 2007: 28–29). Fenollosa, an American art historian and educator active in Japan during the Meiji era, along with his protégé Okakura, were highly influential in the rediscovery of Japanese Buddhist art after a movement to eradicate Buddhism under the slogan “abolish the Buddha, destroy his statues” (J. *haibutsu kishaku* 廢佛毀釋). From 1868 to 1876, Buddhist properties, including temples and their icons, were destroyed on a large scale all over Japan. Yet, Buddhism was resurrected as a philosophical creed through the efforts of devout laity and clergy, as well as political and educational leaders of the Meiji state, who



**Figure 17.** “Buddhist painting drawn with gold pigment on indigo paper by an unidentified artist” (Tōksu 3324, currently designated Treasure no. 2012). After Riōshoku 1912, 2: pl. 631. Courtesy of the National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea.

**Figure 18.** “Polychrome Buddhist painting on silk by an unidentified artist” (Tōksu 2680). After Riōshoku 1912, 2: pl. 648. Courtesy of the National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea.

desired to craft a modern Japanese national identity encompassing Buddhist ideals. Along with the resurrection of Buddhism came the reformulation of Buddhist statues as the visual embodiment of Buddhist teachings, seen as representative of Asian philosophy. Writing around 1897–98, for example, Okakura asserted that Japanese art flourished only after the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century and regarded Nara-period Buddhist statues as corresponding to the Greek and Roman sculptures of Hegelian “classical art” (Okakura 1984: 30; Racel 2014: 27; Suzuki 2009: 75). By 1900 Buddhist statues, which had functioned as objects of worship, were brought out from temples and housed in museums behind glass as objects of aesthetic appreciation (Kinoshita 1993: 32–34). In the broader scholarly narrative, Japan was considered a pristine reservoir of Buddhism since it had been developing Buddhist art continuously ever since the introduction of Buddhism (Kang 2009: 93–94). Against such a political and cultural backdrop, Buddhist statues became major objects of collecting in Asia.

Viewed in this regard, the designer of the Prince Yi Household Museum took the de- and recontextualization of Buddhist icons—which the modernizing elites of the Meiji era had completed a decade earlier on the Japanese archipelago—and replicated it on the Korean peninsula. The difference between the two cases is that many of the items on display at the Prince Yi Household Museum were illegally

unearthed or retrieved from temples, thereby losing their original contexts. This seems to be the rationale behind the creation of the “Buddhist Statues” section of the catalog, which was placed before more popular art mediums and included Buddhist statues exclusively. This line of thinking, which had been internalized in the minds of Meiji intellectuals, is succinctly encapsulated in the beginning paragraph of the introductory essay of the section. The author stated that the art of Korea had a close relation with the rise and fall of Buddhism, as it were, in China and Japan and that the periods in which Buddhism prospered witnessed the rise of the arts. He further contended that “the overall state of the arts can be presumed through a discussion of the superiority and inferiority of production of Buddhist statues” (Riōshoku 1912: 1: n.p.). In other words, it had to be Buddhist statues, the medium of sculpture.

### Epilogue

Every day I go to the little Museum which is a marvel of perfection in its way. I shall recommend that the M.F.A. be modeled on it. The way to make a museum is this: first capture the country, then turn the king out of his palace which is a dozen or more ancient buildings in a thirty-acre enclosure, then turn these buildings into exhibition halls each one for its special exhibit arranged according to kind or period.

—Langdon Warner

This excerpt from a letter penned by Langdon Warner, who first visited Korea in 1911, poignantly encapsulates the first of the Japanese imperial projects to lay claim to its colony’s artistic heritage (Bowie 1966, 36; C. Kim 2017: 612). Indeed, the conversion of a palace into a public museum, though not unprecedented in Europe, was shocking for Koreans in the 1900s, for many reasons. Not only was opening the palace to the public a notion that Koreans first experienced during the turmoil of modernization, but even the very objects installed in this once sacred palace were viewed as offensive by the scholar-officials whose access had previously been exclusive. Things had shifted, but the direction of movement chosen by the foundation of the Prince Yi Household Museum at Ch’anggyōng-gung Palace was one that Koreans had never experienced before. By the same token, displaying inside the palatial halls Buddhist statues, ancient artifacts, or coffins that once held corpses and granting commoners permission to enter with their muddy feet seemed unbearable to many (Gondō 1926: 23–24). Unlike the collections of early Western museums, born out of donations from royal patrons or wealthy collectors, the Prince Yi Household Museum built its collection within a short time span primarily through purchases on the art market by the colonial authorities. It could not turn into a national collection housed behind an architectural edifice that embodied the historical and cultural identity of its makers but was almost always relegated to the private domain of the Yi royal house, one of the many noble houses under imperial Japan and in thrall to colonial intervention. As such, it seemingly had no voice in the making of the art historical canon. Admittedly, it had not yet become a full-fledged museum with

research and education functions but was more a compilation of objects selected by museum personnel headed by Komiya.

The history of the Prince Yi Household Museum, as traced through this article, is full of ruptures—between past and present, colonizer and colonized, and collectibles and devotional items. As a colonized state, Korea's experience of museums and other modern practices differed markedly from other nation-states. In a way, the museumization of Korean artifacts was intended to ingratiate the colonizer to the colonized by grafting noble tastes onto the insipid land—that is, Korea—while presenting the colonizer as a protector of indigenous culture rather than usurper. In a similar vein, the reformulation of Buddhist icons into “Buddhist statues,” an important category constituting a national art history, depended on the colonial authorities' prior experience several decades earlier on the archipelago. The museum's Buddhist art collection reveals what was available in the art market at the time and what was considered worthy of collecting in a royal museum, albeit in name only. Quite a few questions remain. How and where were these Buddhist artifacts collected? How significantly did the Japanese authorities' categorization of “Buddhist art” impact the general perception of Korean art among the Korean public of the colonial period? And how did Korean Buddhists respond to the rising significance of Buddhist statues and other artifacts? The forty-eight Buddhist statues celebrated in the *Ri Ōke Hakubutsukan shozōhin shashinchō* held at the Prince Yi Household Museum—some of which were immediately designated officially as Treasures in the colonial period and National Treasures in postwar Korea for their aesthetic value—constitute an idiosyncratic group that stands in sharp contrast to the established canon of Korean Buddhist images and has not been fully contextualized in Korean Buddhist art history, since their provenance has been lost through predatory collecting. This study is presented as just the first of many steps necessary to rewrite the history of Korean Buddhist images.

Seunghye Lee specializes in Buddhist art, focusing on the interrelationship among images, ritual practices, and materiality from the late medieval through modern periods of Chinese and Korean history. Her journal articles on Buddhist art and patronage, the consecration of Buddhist images, and the material culture of Buddhist relics have appeared in *Acta Koreana*, *Korea Journal*, *Journal of Korean Art and Archaeology*, and *Religions*. She was the first coeditor of and a contributor to *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 28 (2019), dedicated to the consecration of Korean Buddhist images.

## NOTES

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1. Song 1999 provides a critical review of primary and secondary sources published up until the late 1990s pertaining to the museum's establishment.

2. The frequent name changes the museum underwent reflect its contested identity as well as colonial interventions. Names included the Museum (Pangmulgwan 博物館), Imperial Household Museum (Chesil Pangmulgwan 帝室博物館), Ch'anggyönggung Palace Museum (Ch'anggyönggung Pangmulgwan 昌慶宮博物館), Ch'anggyöngwön Park Museum (Ch'anggyöngwön Pangmulgwan 昌慶苑博物館), Museum in the Royal Garden (Öwön Pangmulgwan 御苑博物館), Ch'angdökkung Palace Museum (Ch'angdökkung Pangmulgwan 昌德宮博物館), Prince Yi Household Museum (alternatively rendered in modern scholarship as the Yi Royal Family Museum; Yi Wangga Pangmulgwan 李王家博物館), and Prince Yi Household Museum of Fine Arts (Yi Wangga Misulgwan 李王家美術館). It was also referred to as the Prince Yi Museum or Prince Yi's Household Museum in English-language publications from the colonial period. Throughout this article, I refer to it as the Prince Yi Household Museum, as it is written in English in the second edition of museum's catalog published in 1918, since this represents the official stance of the museum authorities.

3. There is considerable literature regarding the impact of works of the Government-General of Korea on Korea's cultural heritage and its implications. For representative studies, see Yi Sunja 2009, Kang 2012, and Pai 2013.

4. My approach has been informed by revisionist studies on the recontextualization of Buddhist icons in the West first and in Imperial Japan at the beginnings of the modern era. See Abe 2008, 2012, 2017. See also Kang 2009. The recontextualization of Korean Buddhist statues has been thoroughly examined by the art historian Kang Heejung (Kang Hüijöng). See Kang 2010, 2012.

5. *Sunjong sillok*, August 27, 1907.

6. *Süngjöngwön ilgi*, sixth day of the seventh lunar month, 1907; *Sunjong sillok*, November 13, 1907.

7. For example, the Empire of Japan and the Korean Empire concluded the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1907, under which the former administered the internal affairs of the latter and appointed a Japanese vice minister to every ministry of the cabinet.

8. *Taehan maeil sinbo* 大韓每日申報, January 9, 1908; *Hwangšöng sinmun* 皇城新聞, January 10, 1908.

9. *Taehan maeil sinbo*, February 9, 1908; *Hwangšöng sinmun*, February 12, 1908. See also *Kongnip sinbo* 共立新報, March 4, 1908. Notably, the aim stated in these newspapers differs markedly from the remarks of Japanese officials. The latter invariably stated that the museum complex was designed for Sunjong's leisure.

10. *Süngjöngwön ilgi*, March 7, May 29, June 18, July 15, 1908.

11. *Taehan maeil sinbo*, May 26, 1909.

12. *Taehan maeil sinbo*, July 22, August 10, September 8, 1909.

13. *Sunjong sillok*, November 1, 1909.

14. *Sunjong sillok purok*, April 26, 1911.

15. For a counterargument that emphasizes the autonomy of Emperor Sunjong and the Korean ministers, see Pak K. 2009: 35–38. Notably, the National Museum of Korea states several times that the first Korean museum was born out of Sunjong's desire to "share pleasure with the people" (*yömin haerak* 與民偕樂) in the publication celebrating the centennial anniversary of the Korean museum. See NMK 2009. The phrase "share pleasure with the people" originally occurs in Komiya 1912.



16. *Sunjong sillok*, September 23, 1907; February 1, 1911; and January 16, 1917. For more on Komiya's connection to Itō, see Himaraya sannin 1909: 69 and Kim Ch'ansong 2018: 94.

17. Shimokōriyama Seiichi, "Ri Ōke Hakubutsukan-Shōkeien sōsetsu kaiko dan" 李王家博物館·昌慶苑創設懷古談 (Reminiscences of the Establishment of the Prince Yi Household Museum and Ch'anggyōngwŏn Garden), tape recording, Chōsen Mondai Kenkyūkai, May 19, 1966; quoted in Pak S. 2004: 149. A similar understanding can be found in Asakawa 1945: 267–68.

18. For more on the establishment of the national museum in Meiji Japan, see Mok 2000b: 96–99 and Aso 2014: 50–93.

19. Paintings comprised a considerable portion of the collection. Pak Kyeri (2003: 237–38) asserted that a few Korean ministers, who were renowned connoisseurs of paintings, may have played a significant role in building the painting collection from 1907 to 1910.

20. "Pangmulgwan ū pulsang maeip" 博物館의 佛像買入 [The museum's acquisition of Buddhist statues], *Maeil sinbo*, February 4, 1911.

21. In February 1910, the museum placed newspaper ads seeking to buy art objects. The title and contents of the announcement were the same in each paper. For exhibition purposes, the museum aimed to purchase "Korean artworks and craftworks possessed of a long history and incomparable excellence as well as objects with comparative historical value" along with products of Japan and China. See *Hwangšōng sinmun*, February 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, and 24, 1910.

22. The National Museum of Korea uses the expression *duk* instead of *Tōksu* and *pan* instead of *Kōnp'an* 건판, which will be introduced shortly, in its English publications. I use *Tōksu* and *Kōnp'an* throughout this article to avoid any confusion.

23. For more on these dealers' sales of ceramics, see Son 2018: 267–68, 277–78.

24. *Keijō nippō* 京城日報, February 17, 1911; Chōn T. 2017: 206. See also Keijō-fu 1934: 73; and Pak K. 2009: 49.

25. *Maeil sinbo*, March 16, 1912; Chōn T. 2017: 206. The building's construction has been misrecorded as completed in November 1911; see *Sunjong sillok purok*, November 30, 1911.

26. The building was later used as a storage facility for Changšōgak Library after the museum was relocated to Tōksugung Palace in 1938. The building was demolished in 1992 owing to its distinctive Japanese style.

27. Kim Ch'ansong 2018 was the first to discuss this leaflet in comparison with another leaflet also issued by the Prince Yi Household in 1936.

28. The photograph, identified as the "Hakubutsukan," was originally published in Shihaki, Moriyama, and Murakami 1911.

29. Accession no. 사19012. The album has been dated to 1910 by the Seoul Museum of History. However, it must have been published after 1912 given that a photograph of the new museum building, completed in March 1912 (fig. 10), is included. The publisher of the album remains unknown.

30. This lifting of the ban is widely considered one of the watershed moments in the history of Korean Buddhism, which some even consider the starting point of modern Buddhism. Interestingly, Nichiren missionaries held a celebratory ceremony on May 5, 1895, in a special prayer hall built directly outside Ch'angdōkkung Palace. During the ceremony, a Buddha statue and a cloth embroidered with titles of the Korean king, queen, and prince were enshrined on the altar. For more on this topic, see Kim H. I. 2012: 125–33.

31. See entry for Riōshoku 1912: 1, pl. 7. The term *Suiko style* refers to an artistic manner prevalent in the Suiko period, named after Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (r. 592–628). The period in question is more widely known as the Asuka 飛鳥 (538–710).

32. Warner was one of the most influential scholars to introduce Asian art to the American public in the early twentieth century. He identified this type of bodhisattva as Maitreya (J. Miroku 彌勒) through a comparison of Buddhist statues from contemporary China, Korea, and Japan. Ko Yusöp 高裕燮 (1904–44), the first Korean art historian in the modern sense of the term, also identified this type of bodhisattva as Maitreya in an article published in 1931. See Ko (1931) 2007.

33. For a reproduction of this particular Nyoirin Kannon, see figure 13. See also Riōshoku 1912, 1: pl. 9; and Warner 1923: pl. 64. Asakawa also mentioned an interesting anecdote about Okakura reportedly uttering “marvelous” several times upon examining it at the Prince Yi Household Museum in 1912 (1945: 266–67).

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