

Art as the Marker of a Common Cultural Heritage
in East Asia: The Case of Goryeo Buddhist Painting in
Japan

Student: Pacini Benedetta

S1924109

Supervisor: Elena Paskaleva

Leiden University MA Thesis, Department of Asian Studies

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Preface

The following thesis has been written according to the general guidelines of the *Monumenta Nipponica* journal, published by the Sophia University of Tokyo. The MN style sheet presents a mixture of traditional Chicago style, commonly utilized in the humanities field, and an original style composed by the Sophia University in July 2016. The MN style keeps in consideration the characteristics of the Japanese-language sources, that may not fit the standard system of English-language citation formats. Therefore, footnotes will refer the source text by indicating the name of the author and the publishing date. Extensive descriptions of the sources will be listed at the end of the volume.

For what concerns transliteration of Japanese terms, I will use as a model the modified Hepburn system you can also find in the *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*: all Japanese terms are written in italics, save for names, places and for those words that have been fully anglicized (as example: geisha, shogun, hiragana) also words that are familiar to those in the field of Japanese studies are excluded (such as, bunraku, noh, nikki etc.). Moreover, Japanese terms often present longed vowels which are indicated by macrons. However, as said above names, places and anglicized words do not follow the rule (Tokyo instead of Tōkyō, Kyushu instead of Kyūshū).

Regarding the transliteration of Korean terminology, despite the suggestion of the MN style to use the McCune-Reischauer system, I decided to adopt the Revised Romanization of Korean Language system, proclaimed by the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2000; due to reasons of practicality and accuracy, and its closer similarity with the actual Korean pronunciation.

Japanese and Korean historical periods and dynasties

Korean Periods and Dynasties	Japanese Periods
Gojoseon ?–108 BC Jin state	Jōmon 14,000 – 300 BC
Goguryeo 37 BC – 668 AD Baekje 18 BC – 660 AD Silla 57 BC – 935 AD	Yayoi 300 BC – 250 AD
Unified Silla 668–935 Balhae 698–926	Kofun 250–538
Later Baekje 892–936 Later Goguryeo 901–918 Later Silla 668–935	Asuka 538–710
Goryeo 918–1392	Nara 710–794
Joseon 1392–1897	Heian 794–1185
Korean Empire 1897-1910	Kamakura 1185–1333
Japanese rule 1910-1945	Muromachi 1336–1573
Military Governments 1945-1948	Azuchi–Momoyama 1573–1603
North Korea 1948- present South Korea 1948- present	Edo Period 1603-1868
	Meiji period 1868- 1912
	Taisho 1912-1926
	Showa 1926-1989
	Heisei 1989- present

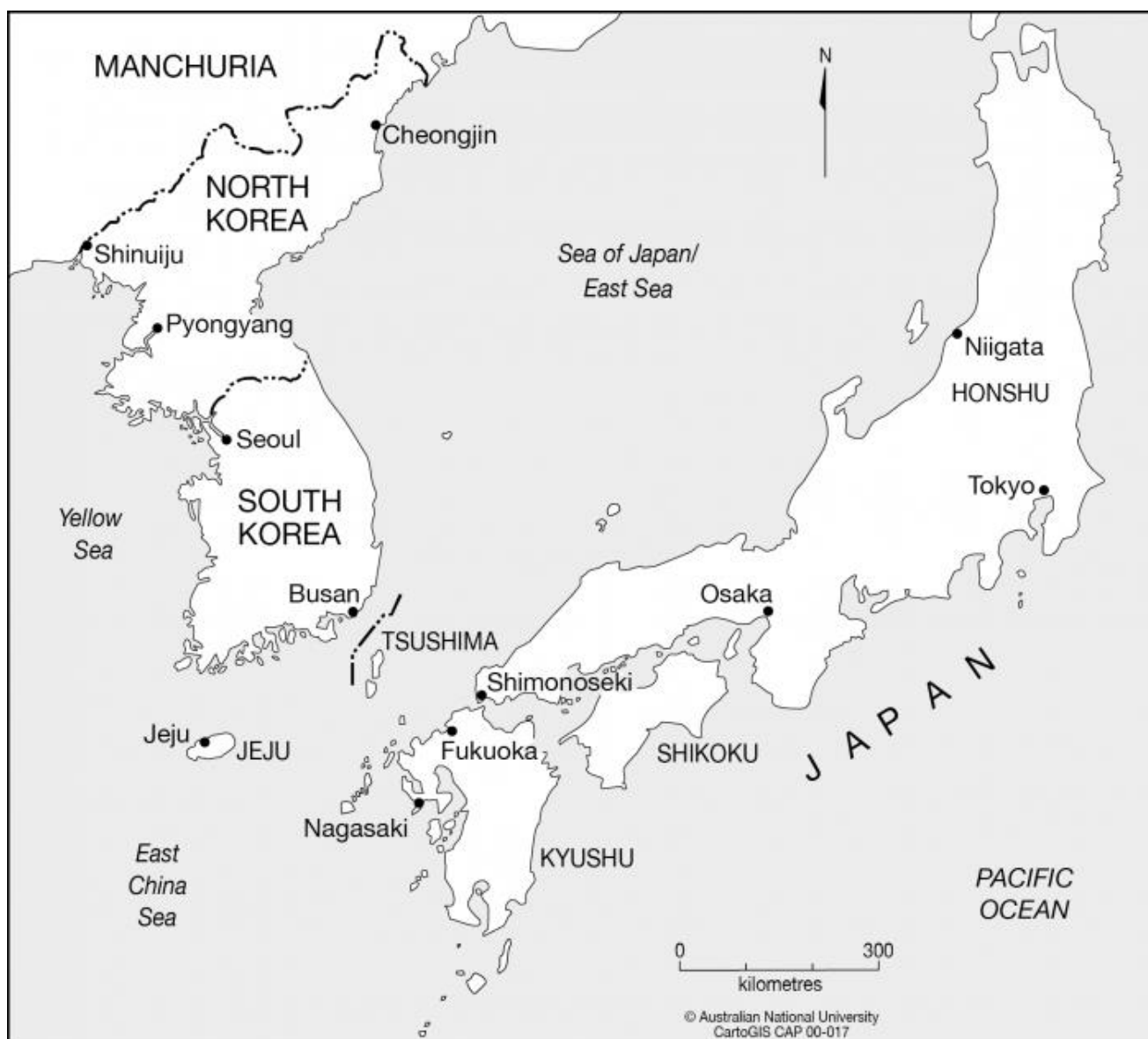


Figure 1. North Korea, South Korea and Japan modern map¹

¹ Coordinator, CartoGIS Services, and Cap.cartogis@anu.edu.au. "North Korea to Japan." North Korea to Japan - CartoGIS Services Maps Online - ANU. August 30, 2017. Accessed November 27, 2017. <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/north-korea-japan>.

Introduction

This thesis treats the problematic of the management of the Korean cultural properties dislocated from their original land to the Japanese archipelago. Throughout an interdisciplinary approach, but mostly focused on art historical researches, my thesis aims to demonstrate the importance of the aesthetic and cultural value of the art production itself over the pressure of the political claim for ownership and identity. I conducted this analysis by centralizing on the case study of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings, since I believe that, thanks to their peculiar condition, they are the most suitable examples to show how politically neutral and collaborative scholarship can help recovering disputes between countries such as Japan and South Korea.

0.1 Contextualisation

On the management of cultural properties in East Asia, there are many debates ongoing. Some of these disputes are crucial elements in a wider political frame that affects the balance in international relationships. Since the cultural heritage has always been the favourite tool of every nation-state entity to create a narrative of self-identification and uniqueness that differentiate a country from its neighbours, the cultural heritage's debate has become one of the protagonists of the last century political discourse.

One of the major controversies, linked to the cultural heritage discourse in East Asia, is the debate between Japan and South Korea over the return of a considerable amount of Korean cultural properties. The South Korea's Cultural Heritage Administration claims that over 34,000 Korean cultural properties are currently situated in Japan, allegedly detained by both private citizens and public institutions. Furthermore, it is estimated that the number might even reach 100,000 pieces, if we consider that the Japanese government has no responsibility for the objects possessed by private citizens², and many items might still be undeclared, or undiscovered among hundreds of temples and private collections.

Notwithstanding the relevance of the topic itself, during my researches I became particularly interested in a specific phenomenon: the Goryeo Buddhist Paintings, and the history of their exodus. I talk about "exodus" because these paintings, produced during the

² Scott, Geoffrey R., *Spoliation, Cultural Property, and Japan*, 29 U. PA. J. Int'l L. 803, 805 (2008), p. 824

Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392)³, seem to have massively left the Korean peninsula to reach Japan. Their richness and the highly elaborated patterns demonstrate the mastery in workshops of the late Goryeo Kingdom, that marked the highest peak of the Buddhist painting techniques in the Korean history.

Close to 165 Goryeo Buddhist paintings have been identified thus far⁴, but while nearly 115 are located in Japan only 30 belong to South Korea⁵. It is no wonder then, that these artworks are incredibly prized, and in the last century they have become a target for art thieves and black markets.

Surprisingly though, Japan worked as a “shelter” from the frequent foreign invasions, the piracy incursions and from the Buddhist suppression that took place in Korea during the Joseon era (1392-1897) and that caused the destruction of the Buddhist artefacts left in the country⁶. The expatriation of the Buddhist Goryeo paintings not only assured the survival of this painting corpus but also gave life, in modern times, to a rich scholarship conducted primarily in Japanese language.

How the paintings arrived in Japan is not clear, nor it can be defined with precision. Several and diverse events might have conducted the paintings from the Goryeo Kingdom to the Japanese archipelago. Among the most accredited causes, there are: Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1598, the commercial trades between the two countries, the Buddhist suppression in the Joseon era’s Korean, and also the looting of temples and palaces occurred during Japanese colonialism. However, scholars indicate Hideyoshi’s bloody incursions as the major driving force for the Goryeo paintings’ expatriation⁷.

0.2 Political and ideological problematic

One can surely consider art historical research on Goryeo Buddhist paintings as an

³ The Goryeo dynasty, was the only dynasty in the history of East Asia who promoted Buddhism as a state religion. It is also accredited to be the first dynasty to completely unify the Korean peninsula. For more historical sources see: Breuker, Remco E. *Establishing a pluralist society in medieval Korea: 918-1170 ; history, ideology and identity in the Koryŏ dynasty*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

⁴ According to Kumja Paik Kim and Yukio Lippit the number should be around 160. It varies according to the source.

⁵ Woothak, Chung, *高麗仏画- 香りたつ装飾美= The fragrant sublime: Koryŏ Buddhist paintings.*, Tokyo: Sen-Oku Hakuko Kand and Nezu Museum, 2016 p. 205

⁶ This point will be deepened later in the thesis, see: Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Buddhism in the early Chosŏn: suppression and transformation*. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 2002.

⁷ Lippit, Yukio, *Goryeo Buddhist Painting in an Interregional Context*, in *Ars Orientalis*, Vol.35 (2008), Ann Arbor: Freer Gallery of Art, The Smithsonian Institution and Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan, pp.193-194.

interesting field of study, we necessarily need to expand, and which is finally having a consistent voice in the recent scholarship. Personally, I am more interested in knowing how this specific phenomenon can be inserted in the scene of cultural properties return. How does the South Korean Government (and Korean people) relate with the Goryeo Buddhist paintings issue; what are the real benefits of the Japanese scholarship on Korean art, and lastly, what is the contribution of the international conventions in this matter. Perhaps, analysing what has been done in the past by the two governments to address the problem, can help us to predict how Korea and Japan might deal with the repatriation of cultural properties in the future.

Observing the different positions of both Korea and Japan (and their scholarships), is relevant to locate the issue inside a political context and to produce helpful insights.

The return of the Korean cultural properties is a delicate matter, which also concerns grave issues as: the need of re-building the Korean cultural identity, the revanchist sentiment against Japanese colonialism, and the general dissatisfaction with war compensation received from Japan through the post-war agreements. This is not simply an art historical research, but it also includes nationalist and socio-cultural discourses.

0.3 Aims and research question

Nevertheless what I said above, finding solutions for the Korean cultural properties return is not the principal aim of my research. Indeed, due to the extreme complexity and vastness of the subject I distrust the possibility to find any universal response to the question of cultural properties return.

Until nowadays, the numerous artworks of Korean origin in Japan have been regarded as the product of a bloody pillage. Instead, what if we started looking at them as the remains of a long shared history? After interrogating myself over this possibility new interrogatives emerged about Korea and Japan cultural properties diatribe: whose heritage? How do we protect it? how can we address the problematic considering the broadness of its social and historical circumstances?

All these questions eventually led me to my final research question:

Does the Goryeo Buddhist paintings case demonstrate the impossibility to establish a neat division between Korean and Japanese cultural heritage?

My wish is to propose an alternative vision of the problem: a research that could help

to sketch a comprehensive portrait about the Goryeo Buddhist paintings, as envisioned inside the bigger context of the cultural properties return.

Even in nowadays, several quarrels prevent Japan and South Korea from having smooth and peaceful relationships. Both countries try their best to demonstrate the historical value of their art, their literature, and their traditions. Mostly, it happens by putting these elements as opposing characteristics to each other's culture. Yet, I am profoundly convinced that no culture is totally isolated or self-generated, without the slightest influence from the surrounding civilizations. Japan and Korea have been deeply tied, religiously, artistically, and culturally, for long centuries. This is the reason why I believe that this bounding needs to be rediscovered, in order to better understand the meaning of the artistic production that Japan and Korea clearly share. In my thesis I will try to demonstrate how observing the art production in East Asia in a transcultural prospective can generate better understanding of its importance, rather than asking "who's the owner?". Art as the solution, not as the source of the problem.



Figure 2. A visitor looks at an important Korean cultural property at the Tokyo National Museum: the helmet and the armour of the Joseon dynasty king Gojong (1852-1919)⁸.

0.4 Methodology and thesis outline

As I mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, my thesis develops inside an

⁸ "Seoul verifying reported cover-up of artifacts removed by Japan." Koreatimes. July 29, 2014. Accessed December 11, 2017. http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2014/07/148_161952.html

interdisciplinary context. The first part of it focuses on the researches already conducted in this field: throughout a qualitative approach I analyze and compare all the historical sources I had accessed to, treating the pre-modern Korean-Japanese relationship and connecting it to the “exodus” of the Goryeo paintings as much as possible. I start illustrating it from the ancient time (the Yamato era) until the Colonial period, in order to see what role did the political interactions play in the creation of the cultural heritage contentious. In the second part of the thesis I go through legislations and international conventions adopted to solve the problem of cultural heritage return, in the modern era. The intent is to understand how local authorities and international mediations interacted on the Japan-Korea case; later I also compare the solutions proposed by several scholars from the field of international relationships and conflict resolution, which I integrate with the historical background sketched in the first chapters. The aim is to observe what approach has been adopted to propose solution by previous researchers. Finally, in the last part of the thesis I introduce the Goryeo Buddhist paintings’ scholarship in all its aspects: the art, the style, the techniques, the characteristics of the paintings, the patrons and, naturally, the history of the scholarship itself.

Taking in consideration what the study of these artworks have revealed so far I will proceed to a content analysis and finally to a critical discourse analysis of the data I collected.

The thesis is organized to follow the evolution of the research question and the process engaged to produce its answer:

The roots of the dispute → The identification of the problem → The attempts of resolution → The scholarship as a solution.

The conclusion will see the merging of all previous perspectives (historical, political and artistic) to generate a solution (or better, a different interpretation of the problem) that encompasses any field that has been concerned with the problem so far. Trying to frame the Goryeo Buddhist paintings into this larger picture, my main statement will emerge: the artworks as testament of a shared cultural past and mutual exchange of artistic trends between the two countries, rather than objects of dispute.

Describing the detailed outline of my thesis: Chapter I will address Korea and Japan’s pre-modern relationship: a brief chronology of the major events from the earliest times, to the Meiji restoration.

Chapter II will treat the colonial period and its repercussions on the modern society, also analysing the view point of major scholars on the topic.

In Chapter III I discuss the post-war era: the bilateral agreements, the managing

policies and the disputes around the return of cultural properties. Therefore I will talk about the status of cultural properties nowadays, referring also to the UNESCO guidelines, and the debate in modern Japan and South-Korea.

Finally, in Chapter IV I will deepen into the peculiar case-study of the Buddhist Goryeo Paintings throughout a proper art historical analysis of the artworks and its scholarship in Japan and abroad, pointing out the constant growing and prosperous international scholarship on the Goryeo Period.

Chapter I

The roots of the dispute

This initial chapter introduces the history of Japan-Korea relationship, which is useful to contextualize the relocation of the Korean cultural properties on the Japanese soil. In particular manner to understand the complexity of the query for the cultural treasure's identity, especially when we take as an example the Goryeo Buddhist paintings and how they arrived in Japan.

1.1 Conquering the land across the sea

Material culture can tell us extraordinary things about the people that produced it, since it is not only a literary subject, but also a helpful tool for the study of societies. Material objects, and in particular manner art productions, canalize many inputs and influences from both inside and outside the context of their realization. When some artistic products coincide with what the producers consider as “expressions of cultural identity” or simpler, their cultural heritage, than the situation get more complicate, because more ideological and political factors interact with the nature of the object itself.

In East Asia, differently from other geographical areas, cultural heritage is strongly perceived as the manifestation of local realities, and it is a means to emphasize the differences from one country to the another. This use of heritage as a marker for differences is limiting, though, because it dejects the possibility to study the commonalities and the similarities of two adjoining cultures⁹.

In my personal opinion, there is no such a thing as “standing alone culture”, and Japan and Korea represent a perfect example for this stance.

The deep connection between the two countries is reflected on their cultural heritage, which is a clear manifestation of a tangled history that crossed its roads several times during the last centuries. However, this connection was quietly ignored until recent times. Not only because of the sour events of the Japanese colonial period, which produced a half century of tense diplomacy, but also because most of the East Asian scholarship has often responded to

⁹ Matsuda, Akira, and Luisa E. Mengoni. *Reconsidering cultural heritage in East Asia*. London: Ubiquity Press, 2016, pp. 2-4

political needs. It is not a case that, in both Japan and Korea, academic fields such as anthropology, art-history, history and philosophy are deployed to promote the concept of a unique cultural and national identity of the Korean (or Japanese) people.¹⁰

In order to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings problematic, I consider necessary to start my thesis by outlining some of the most relevant issues in the history of Korea-Japan relationship. These premises will be fundamental to explain the massive presence of Korean artefacts in the Japanese archipelago, and I hope it will be helpful to explore the meaning of what I call a ‘shared heritage’.



Figure 3. Korean regalia, gilt bronze crown, excavated in Yangsan, 32.9 cm height, Three Kingdoms Period(Silla), 6th century. Now, Tokyo National Museum¹¹

To begin with one of the first blatant examples of historical misconception concerning Japan and Korea, but mostly Japan, we see the widespread belief that *sakoku* indicates a total restriction against foreign relationships, in premodern Japan¹². Although, the concept of

¹⁰ Pai, Hyung Il. *Nationalism and the construction of Korean identity*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2001, pp. 1-2

¹¹ トーハク-, 東京国立博物館. "コレクション 名品ギャラリー 考古冠・冠帽 (かんむり かんぼう) 拡大して表示." 東京国立博物館. Accessed December 11, 2017.

http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl_img&size=L&colid=TJ4149&t=type_s&id=1

¹² *Sakoku* is a term that indicated the a Tokugawa shogunate policy which strictly regulated every foreign trade

sakoku intended as a complete isolationism from the rest of the world is imprecise, the main reason for this misleading interpretation of history is, perhaps, the wrong approach early scholars had toward East Asian history. Probably, Japanese *sakoku* solely entailed closure against the Western countries, while Japan kept active relationships with its major Asian neighbours: China, Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom¹³. As Ronald P. Toby says: “Japan cannot be removed from Asia, nor Asia from Japan”¹⁴.

It is clear by now, and firmly supported by archaeological researches that, since the Yayoi period (300 BC- 250 AD) migrants from the Korean peninsula started to cross the sea and to settle down in Japan. They brought rice growing knowledge, shamanic traditions, earth ware and ironware techniques¹⁵. Ancient Korean nomadic tribes greatly contributed to the development of the later Japanese society. There are proves of this cultural influence in the grave goods present in Nara and Osaka area’s tombs. On the other hand, other evidences of Japanese settlements in the Korean peninsula are found: recently, Japanese *haniwa* statuettes (from around the sixth century AD) were excavated in Gwangju.¹⁶ However, this kind of thematic still creates tensions on both Korean and Japanese sides.

A glimpse of another debate is the contentious around the figure of Empress Jingu. Empress Jingu is a mythological character from both Japanese and Korean mythology. To Koreans she is the shamanic princess crossing the sea from the Southern Korean Kingdom of Baekche to conquer Japan¹⁷. In Japan, the myth is chronicled in the early *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, where the empress is not only depicted as fully Japanese, but she is also said to have conducted an expedition to subjugate the Korean peninsula.¹⁸ In the meantime, while both Korea and Japan claim the nativity of the mythical empress, archaeological assets reveal the unequivocal kinship between the Baekche Royal family and the Yamato imperial clan¹⁹.

Connection and exchanges between the two countries continued even throughout the periods Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1185). Especially intensified by the advent of

from and to Japan.

¹³ Kang, Etsuko Hae-jin. *Diplomacy and Ideology in Japanese-Korean Relations: From the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997, p.2

¹⁴ See: Toby, Ronald P. *Carnival of the Aliens: Korean Embassies in Edo-period Art and Popular Culture*. *Monumenta Nipponica* 41:4, 1986

¹⁵ Kang, 1997, p.3

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Covell, Jon Etta Hastings Carter, and Alan Carter Covell. *Korean impact on Japanese culture: Japans hidden history*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2009, pp. 35-36

¹⁸ *Kojiki*, “records of ancient matters” together with the *Nihon Shoki* are the first written historical records of Japan, dating 712 and 720, by imperial order following Japanese oral tradition. These books important source book for ceremonies, customs, and magical practices of ancient Japan. It includes myths, legends, and historical accounts of the imperial court from the earliest days of its creation.

¹⁹ See “the theory of horse-riders” Hong, Wontack. *Relationship between Korea and Japan in early period: Paekche and Yamato Wa*. Seoul: Ilsimsa, 1988, pp. 83-90

Buddhism that was introduced to Japan by the Korean kingdoms of Baekche and Silla, in the year 552 AD. It is a fact that, everything coming from China to Japan, necessarily passed by the Korean peninsula, since at that time a direct contact between the archipelago and the continental Empire was extremely difficult²⁰. But when, and how mutual exchanges started being considered cultural pillage?



Figure 4. “Dancing People”, *Haniwa* statuettes. From Nohara, Kumagaya-shi, Saitama, Terracotta statuettes, 64.1 cm height, Kofun Period, 6th century, now Tokyo National Museum²¹.

Concerning the history of ‘cultural pillage’ and in the specific case, of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings, the period of maximum interest to my research starts with the Muromachi period (1333-1568), the period marked by the ruling of Ashikaga family’s bakufu²², and it lasts until the end of the Edo period (1603- 1868).

²⁰ Covell, 2009, pp.44-46

²¹ トーハク-, 東京国立博物館. "コレクション 名品ギャラリー 考古 埴輪 踊る人々 (はにわ おどるひとびと) 拡大して表示." 東京国立博物館. Accessed December 11, 2017.

http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl_img&size=L&colid=J21428X&t=type&id=1.

²² The *bakufu*, which means ‘tent government’, was the fundamental administrative body of the shogunate, a hereditary military dictatorship that ruled Japan from 1192 to 1868. The Ashikaga family took the control of the military government of Japan in the year 1336 and their supremacy lasted until 1573. This period of more than 200 years is called Muromachi Period. See: Sansom, George Bailey. *A history of Japan 1334-1615*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1994.

1.2 Trades and Pirates: relationships between the Joseon Korea and the Muromachi bakufu

Yukio Lippit has identified some major catalyst factors that helped the dislocation of the Goryeo paintings (as well as many important cultural assets). First of all, the political relationship between the Ashikaga bakufu and the early Joseon kingdom, which generated a conspicuous trade market of Buddhist goods. Secondly, the raids of the Japanese pirates, or *wakō*; this, followed by the depredations of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion campaigns. Finally, the significant Buddhist suppression that Korean Buddhist institutions suffered from the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897)²³.

The problem of Japanese pirates raised during the latter period of the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392). The first *wakō* raid is registered in 1223, and continued regularly until the fall of the Goryeo kingdom, causing pillages and atrocities on the coasts of the Korean peninsula and Eastern China. They did not only steal food and slaughter locals: they did also ravage temples and kidnapped slaves to sell abroad²⁴. Japanese pirates' raids were so violent that they are even considered to be one of the reasons for the collapse of the Goryeo regime²⁵. However, the piracy issue was also an incentive for collaboration between the governments of the two countries, since it boosted the emergence of political and diplomatic ideology that became the foundation for later decades diplomacy²⁶.

Since before the Kamakura period (1185-1333) *daimyō* and Japanese western lords profited from piracy. Even after the defeat of the Taira clan (1185) the central government could not keep under firm control all those families who took their strength from illegal maritime trade. At the time no distinction was made between piracy and trade; and the Minamoto shogunate struggled to suppress the phenomenon²⁷.

In 1392, the new Korean dynasty (the Yi dynasty, or Joseon) brought new peaceful conditions. Kyushu and the western clans of Japan instituted with Korea annual or even more frequent envoys, while the Joseon king pressed the Ashikaga shoguns to put a firm stop to *wakō* incursions²⁸.

The complete suppression of piracy was a priority to the new Korean government.

²³ Lippit, 2008, p.195

²⁴ Actually, Japanese pirates were not only Japanese but also counted many Chinese mercenaries and other people from different regions of East Asia.

²⁵ Kang, 1997, p.28

²⁶ This topic is also well deepened by Robison, see: Robison, Kenneth R. "From Raiders to Traders: Border Security and Border Control in Early Chosŏn, 1392-1450." *Korean Studies* 16, no. 1 (1992), pp. 94-115

²⁷ Samson, 1994, pp.177-178

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Hence, Joseon administration enabled legal trade with the Japanese *daimyō* and supported the markets of Korean goods that were flourishing in Hakata port (Kyushu) and Naha (Okinawa) since the time of piracy.

Since the establishment of Ashikaga headquarters in Kyoto (1378), international relationships became a central tool for the legitimization of the shogun's power. Commerce developed quickly and any kind of luxury and cultural product was sold from China and Korea to Japan. The Ashikaga family members were important patrons of Buddhism, and it is in the Muromachi period (1336-1573) that Zen Buddhism reached its maximum expansion. The Korean government kept good relationships with every Japanese lord or authority who had the power to block *wakō*. However, since the Ashikaga *bakufu*'s power was fluctuating, they had no stable grip on illegal trade. Therefore, to fight piracy, Korean rulers had to deal directly with the lords and to meet the demands of merchants and of the powerful clans of Kyushu (as for instance the Sō family of Tsushima island). One of the most demanded items was, for instance, the *Tripitaka Koreana*²⁹.

Although the international trade flourished in Muromachi Japan, it was mostly dedicated to materials such as cotton, copper and swords. Although, there is no doubt that both piracy and legal trade fed a small market for Korean Buddhist objects. A market specifically addressed to political elites and Buddhist institutions who craved to own goods from the renown Korean craftsmanship. The *Tripitaka Koreana*, a complete canon of woodblock printed Buddhist texts, was indeed, sought by the majority of the Northeast Asian elites. As Lippit explains, 'sutra grants were used as incentives for cooperation in keeping marauding marines at bay'³⁰.

Little or no written record can testify the direct connection between the expatriation of Goryeo Buddhist paintings and the Muromachi trades. However, we have numerous inscriptions on early Joseon sutras and cast-iron bells that demonstrate a frequent release of Buddhist artefacts under the Yi dynasty. It is not a case that Korean Buddhist artefacts of all kinds are found in western temples and Kyushu samurai families' collections. These objects were official gifts of political interaction between powerful maritime clans (especially Sō and Ōuchi) and Korean royalty. The hypothesis that a considerable part of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings reached Japan as ornamental supplies of the *Tripitaka* merchandize is a plausible

²⁹ Robinson, Kenneth R. "Centering the King of Choson: Aspects of Korean Maritime Diplomacy, 1392-1592." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000), pp. 112-116

³⁰ Lippit, 2008, p.198

scenario³¹.

After this market of Buddhist goods had its final climax, in the fourteenth-century, the Korean-Japanese relationships started cracking and finally ended in 1592, with the first military campaign of Toyotomi Hideyoshi³².



Figure 5. 倭寇図巻
“Wakō Zukan”
Picture Scroll of
Japanese pirates,
Colour on Silk,
China, 17th century
Historiographical
institute of the
University of
Tokyo³³.

1.3 Hideyoshi and the invasion of Korea

Despite the slow downfall of the Korean-Japanese trade market, a new wave of Korean art and artefacts invaded Japan at the end of the sixteenth century, caused by the craftsmen and artisans who were forcibly brought to Japan during the Imjin war (1592-1598). Assaulting and plundering temples and imperial houses was one of the main objectives of Hideyoshi, who left precise instructions about this to his warriors: such as stealing maps, books and important cultural assets³⁴. According to South Korean Cultural Properties Administration officials, it is in this invasion that the greater quantity of Goryeo period's objects left the country. The two aggressions of 1592 and 1597 were so violent that if not looted, all treasures from Goryeo period were destroyed³⁵.

We still lack a conspicuous body of primary sources on the dynamics of the Imjin war. We don't know much about the reasons behind the start of the war or why the Korean defence collapsed that rapidly and which necessities ruled the war. Even if the open intent of Hideyoshi was to conquer China crossing the Korean peninsula, the real aims of the invasion

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.198

³² Hideyoshi, 1536-1598, is a central figure of Japanese history, since he is the one who completed the unification of Japan (previously started by Oda Nobunaga). He settled the basis of what would become the Edo period in Japan. Both he and Oda Nobunaga gave life to that unruly period of Japanese history know as Sengoku, and marked by constant military conflicts and social upheaval. The death of Hideyoshi and the rise to power of the Tokugawa clan in the early seventeenth-century will then establish a new peace.

³³ Historiographical Institute The University of Tokyo. Accessed December 12, 2017. <http://www.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/english/library-collection/collection-e.html>.

³⁴ Koo, Melissa. “Repatriation of Korean cultural property looted by Japan - can a sincere apology resolve the centuries-old Korea/Japan disputes?”. *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2015, Vol.16(2), pp.627-628.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.629

are still being discussed among historians, also because existing monographs leave us with many questions³⁶. Kenneth R. Robinson suggests how the diplomacy of the Muromachi period failed to keep peaceful exchanges between the two countries, and that the re-emergence of piracy and the restrictions of legal trade with Japan might have caused the outbreak of the war. Robinson identifies some cyclic features in the Japan-Korea relationship of the fifteenth and sixteenth century:

Japanese freebooters' violence subvert Joseon's coasts



Koreans restrict trades



The king negotiates with *daimyō*



The trades are established again.

Might this repetitive dynamic have reached its depletion in the 1590s³⁷? Unfortunately, there is no room in this thesis for a historical discussion on the Korea invasions of 1592 and 1597, instead, it is important to the objective of my research to shortly go into the impacts of it, over the material culture of the two countries.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi started preparations for the invasion in 1591, from his headquarters in Kyushu. The Imjin war, even if partly neglected by many historians, was a gigantic event which mobilized up to 500,000 combatants, and that permanently changed the relationships among the East Asian countries³⁸.

The first campaign caught the Joseon militias by surprise, and in only three weeks Hideyoshi forces penetrated the country and reached Hangseong (ancient Seoul). However, once arrived, they found an abandoned city where the citizens had already burned down all administrative palaces and institutions, as a protest for the inadequate defence deployed by the

³⁶ An exhaustive (and recent) analysis of the Imjin war's backgrounds had been conducted by James B. Lewis, in his *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: international relations, violence and memory*, Routledge, 2015.

³⁷ Robinson, Kenneth R. "Organizing Japanese and Jurchens in Tribute Systems in Early Chosŏn Korea." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 02 (2013), pp. 340-41

³⁸ Lewis, 2015, pp 1-2.

Yi sovereign. The Japanese forces could be pushed back only thanks to the Ming China (1368-1644), which run to rescue its major tributary reign³⁹. It is reported that retreating Japanese troops burned much of the royal palace and temples of the major cities, and in this occasion many cultural properties were looted or lost. In 1593, the Japanese abandoned Korea and in 1594 peace negotiations were opened. However, two years later, the dealing attempt drowned and in 1597 Hideyoshi rattled his saber to conduct a new invasion.⁴⁰

The second attack was even harder and ferocious than the previous one. The savageness of this invasion can still even be testified by the *Mimizuka*, 'Mound of Ears', located in Kyoto, a mound which contains 38,000 ears and noses of Korean soldiers that Japanese officials sent to their home country to show off Japanese military mastery. On the way to conquest, Hideyoshi's army levelled Kyeongju, the ancient capital of the Silla kingdom and the Bulguksa temple. In winter of 1598 Chinese and Japanese forces meet again on Korean soil, but this time Japanese defeat is accelerated by the sudden death of Hideyoshi, in September 1598⁴¹.

The damage caused by the Imjin war to tangible and intangible heritage from the Goryeo period is immeasurable. Not only temples and palaces are brutally ravaged or plundered, but also 50,000/ 60,000 captives⁴² are dragged to Japan (especially to Kyushu island). All these captives represented a large quantity of lost intangible heritage: they were artists, craftsmen and potters, whose knowledge moved to Japan irremediably, also influencing later artistic expressions in the archipelago⁴³.

1.4 From Tokugawa shogunate to the beginning of the modern era

The Imjin war had a great impact on the power balances of the East Asian countries. It involved not only Korea, Japan and China but also, indirectly compromised South-East Asians and Europeans⁴⁴. Unsurprisingly, during the invasions, Korea-Japan relationships were abruptly interrupted, but new emerging issues required the Joseon court to re-establish contacts as soon as the enemy retreated its troops. Repatriation of the Korean captives became a priority to the Korean government since the end of the war; an issue that characterized the

³⁹ Berry, Mary Elizabeth. *Hideyoshi*. Cambridge, Mass. : Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990, pp.209-210

⁴⁰ Scott, 2008, p.833

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.834

⁴² On the number of captives I have a dilemma ongoing: different sources report different data. For example, Etsuko Kang talks about around 100,000 Korean captives.

⁴³ Scott, 2008, p. 835

⁴⁴ Lewis, 2015, pp. 1-5

Korea-Japan diplomacy in the following years⁴⁵.

In 1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu takes the control of Japan and establishes its own *bakufu* in Edo, present day Tokyo. Tokugawa's ruling will last for more than 200 years and this historical period is marked by a relatively status of quietness, renown by many scholars as *Pax Tokugawa*.

At this point of the chapter, I must clarify that it is not possible to individuate any direct cause for the exportation of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings, or other cultural assets, in the Edo period⁴⁶. Partially, because no extensive scholarship on the Tokugawa-Joseon cultural exchange has been conducted, but mostly because there are no evidences supporting the expatriation of Korean artefacts in this period. Although, I will make some reflections about the Tokugawa era and its Korean cultural influence anyway.

First of all, as I briefly mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, we have to revise the concept of *sakoku*, in view of the fact that the classical depiction of Tokugawa Japan as a completely isolated nation, keenly protected by any external influence, and which developed a unique self-referential culture, does not reflect the reality in its complexity. From 1607 to 1811, both Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom were engaged in exchanging several envoys with Japan. The arrival of an embassy from Korea was depicted as a huge event to the lives of the civilians: copious crowds amassed in Edo streets to witness the peculiar parade of Korean officials, ambassadors, monks and nuns. Artists also rushed to catch the exciting moment and make it into prints⁴⁷.

The envoys were not only a political institution, but also an occasion for intellectual and artistical exchange between the literates of the two countries. Japanese literati from Tokugawa period had a great interest in the embassies since they could get hold of Chinese poetry and brushworks. Personal collections, written exchanges and other material proof of the Korean embassies have to be thoroughly revealed⁴⁸. Still, even if this information could be marginal for the ends of my thesis, it is noteworthy to say that the Korean embassies of Tokugawa period (the so called, *tongsinsa*) established a pattern in the history of the Korea-Japan diplomacy, which was strictly controlled by both countries' authorities, yet peaceful and

⁴⁵ See: Lee, Hoon. "The Repatriation of Castaways in Chosŏn Korea-Japan Relations, 1599-1888." *Korean Studies* 30, no. 1 (2006), pp. 67-90.

⁴⁶ Most of Korean scholars and also the South Korean Cultural Properties Administration authorities, agree on the fact that the greatest damage to the Goryeo cultural assets was inflicted (exclusively) by the *wakō* ravages and Hideyoshi's military campaigns. Which narrows the phenomenon to the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century.

⁴⁷ See: Toby, 1986.

⁴⁸ Lewis, James Bryant. *Frontier Contact between Chosŏn Korea and Tokugawa Japan*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, p.8

equal.

Another key point that I mentioned frequently, is the question of Buddhist repression in Joseon Korea. As for the case of *sakoku*, I believe that clarifying what it is meant by "suppression of Buddhism" may add new clues for the analyzation of the historical facts. Bringing up the Joseon's policies toward the religious institution of the time does not refer to any cruel or violent suppression. Nevertheless, it is true that the long-established Goryeo Buddhist tradition declined and drastically reduced its size with the advent of the new dynasty. It might also be true that this transformation eased the expatriation of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings. Some Japanese scholars actually support the theory that the diplomatic embassies coming to Japan in the Edo period, and the restrictive policies against Buddhism in Korea, are the two major catalyst events that pushed the artworks out of the country and brought them to Japan. Such speculation is however weak and finds little validation in the international community⁴⁹.

The Joseon institutions, which aimed to the achievement of a society ruled by Confucian principles saw Buddhism as nothing but an obstacle. A decadent and majestic tradition which was strongly bounded to the outdated nobility of the Goryeo court. Buddhism did not disappear from Joseon Korea, instead it abandoned the lavish palaces and the Korean royalty and retired into the mountains, where new forms of Buddhism were developing even if away from the eye of the king and the literati elite. Whether this change had a direct impact on the transfer of Buddhist cultural assets is unknown, but surely it contributed to the decadence of many Buddhist sites and the abandon or disappearing of Buddhist treasure. Ironically, this made it possible to Japan to have more Korean Buddhist artefacts in its well protected temples, than Korea.

1.5 Conclusive thoughts

In my opinion, questioning the history and the established assumptions of art production is a relevant task in my research, as the aim is to find an answer to my initial research question: this historical chapter demonstrated the complex web of connections the two countries always had, peacefully or belligerently. A connotation that makes them having a "shared history", and sometimes led to a "shared heritage", hence, as in my case study, the

⁴⁹Kamigaito Kenichi, Professor of comparative cultures at the Otsuma Women University in Tokyo, is one of the main opponents to the Hideyoshi's pillage theory, he believes instead that the paintings were gifts from the Korean embassies of the Tokugawa period. See: Kamigaito, Kenichi, *Japan as seen from Korea : 朝鮮半島から見た日本* 帝塚山学院大学教授 2004年2月10日、社団法人如水会

impossibility to choose a final heir for the Goryeo period paintings in Japan.

The exodus of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings and other cultural assets from Korea to Japan, is connected to a continuous line of events that occurred between the two countries. Despite its relevance, I think that not all the passages of this process were perfectly interpreted, therefore I consider important to question it properly. In this chapter I tried to summarize the main steps in the history of Korean cultural properties travel to Japan, in their broader context, and of Goryeo Buddhist paintings in the specific case-study. Showing the complexity of the Korea-Japan relationship, demonstrates how difficult is to find a single definition for these objects, because their history is linked to the land of production as much as to Japan. They represent the result of a cultural process that cannot be reversed and that took several centuries to happen. The goal of this chapter was also to outline the contour of the problem by tracing back to the roots of the cultural clash between Japan and Korea, which makes it difficult to neatly divide “looted heritage” from “not-looted heritage”, and therefore, what should return from what should not return to Korea.

Now that I confirmed the existence of the problematic, in next chapters I will illustrate its development and the attempts of dealing with the cultural properties return made by both the Japanese and Korean communities and the international mediators.

Chapter II

Identification of a Problem

In this chapter I will introduce the colonial rule of Japan over Korea, as the source of the speculation on the Korean art and the Korean identity. This was the dramatic event that generated the anti-Japanese rhetoric, and the necessity to create a distinguished “cultural heritage” to separate the two countries. Here, the heritage is as a stronghold to claim the lost past. However, this chapter will also look closer to the colonial dynamics to research if the cultural heritage can be an element of communion and not of conflict.

2.1 A five-centuries old wrongdoing

In spring 2016, the chairman of a cosmetics and pharmaceutical manufacturing company (Kolmar Korea), bought an important cultural property back from Japan. The artwork coasted to the Korean businessman Yoon Dong-Han 2.5 billion won (\$2.19 million). Yoon Dong-Han made it to acquire the Goryeo Buddhist painting *Water-Moon Avalokitesvara* from a Japanese art dealer, with the intent of bringing it back to South Korea and donating it to the National Museum of Korea, in the same year October. The surprising donation allowed the National Museum of Korea to show permanently, for the first time in its history, one of the most beautiful iconographies belonging to the Goryeo Buddhist painting’s corpus. Before this purchase, no painting of the *Water-Moon Avalokitesvara* series was present in South Korea at all⁵⁰. Many headlines reported the news, talking about a ‘Korean Buddhist painting returning home’. However, was the painting really coming back home? What does it mean ‘home’, for a seven-hundred years old painting that spent most of its existence in a different country other than the one of its production?

In the last thirty years, cases of Korean cultural properties leaving Japan, legally or not, were numerous. In 1990, a Korean man, Kim Soo-hong, broke into the house of a Japanese collector and stole nine valuable porcelains that were said to have been taken by the Japanese colonial authorities during the occupation of Korea⁵¹. Again, in 1994, 493 written copies of

⁵⁰ Kim, Yu-young. "14th-century Goryeo Buddhist painting returns home." *The Korea Herald*. October 17, 2016. Accessed September 18, 2017. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161017000928>.

⁵¹ James Sterngold, *South Korea Seeks Return of its Artworks From Japan*, *The New York Times*, 11 July 1991

the Buddhist Sutra *Dai Hannya Haramitta Kyo* 大般若波羅蜜多經, were stolen from the Ankokuji temple 安国寺, in Nagasaki. The books emerged later in South Korea, but because they were designated as Korean National Treasure in 1995, it was no possible to return them to Japan⁵².

The most interesting cases occurred, though, in the last decade: in 2002 eight Korean Buddhist paintings from the Goryeo period were abducted from the Kakurinji temple 鶴林寺, in Hyogo prefecture. Still, in 2005 and 2006 an organized group of art thieves burst into several temples in Aichi and Fukui prefectures. There, they stole a large number of tenth-fourteenth century Buddhist paintings of Korean origin. The 2002 looting also included an hanging scroll of the renown Amida Triad. The painting was illicitly transferred to South Korea, and purchased by a Korean businessman for 400 million won, who subsequently donated it to a temple in Daegu⁵³.

Figure 6. Kolmar Korea Chairman Yoon Dong-han speaks to reporters at a press conference held at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul⁵⁴



Reading of these thefts (and of many other similar incidents) the profile of a problem is visibly getting into shape. The issue of Korean cultural properties return, does not only have a political and historical connotations, but it clearly produces reverberations in nowadays society, more than it did in the pre-modern times.

We need only think to the fact that the organized group, responsible for the lootings in 2002, 2005 and 2006, are generally considered in South Korea as patriots, who have corrected

⁵² Scott, 2008, p.814

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.815

⁵⁴ Kim, Yu-young, "14th-century Goryeo Buddhist painting returns home." The Korea Herald. October 17, 2016. Accessed December 11, 2017. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161017000928>.

a five centuries-old wrongdoing perpetuated by Japanese invaders⁵⁵. But how did this belief spread into the modern Korean society? To understand this widely embraced anti-Japanese rhetoric, we need to deepen inside the colonial period's most significant aspects.

2.2 Collectors of the colonial period

In order to explain the process that generated the post-colonial conceptualization of the anti-Japanese narrative, we need to go back to the early twentieth century and retrace the major events of the Japanese colonial ruling in Korea. Before starting, though, I need to clarify that I will not try to diminish the seriousness of the 1900s events, and the horrors of colonial ruling. However some authors gave interesting and differing viewpoints about the management of the Korean cultural properties in the colonial period, which produced relevant insights for reflection.

In 1895, throughout the Treaty of Shimonoseki with Qing China, Japan dictated its dominance over the Korean territory. Naturally, due to the annexation, the impact on the Korean cultural properties of the time was notable. As a first instance, in 1913, Terauchi Masataka, the Governor General, decided to remove 760 volumes, the complete Annals of the Joseon dynasty, from the palace's archives and to bring them to Tokyo. Subsequently, the majority of these artefacts went lost in the great Kanto earthquake, in 1923. In 1932, 27 volumes of the survived 74 annals, were sent back to Korea⁵⁶. The complete collection has returned to Seoul only in recent times.

The list of the endangered or misplaced cultural assets in this period is impressive, just to mention a couple of them: we have the demolition of numerous buildings on the grounds of the Gyeongbok royal palace, the removal of pillars from the Korean royal tombs' gates, which were transferred to Kyoto National Museum; the looting of thousands pieces of precious Yi dynasty's celadon ceramics, and so on. Only in the private collection of Terauchi Masataka, 1,855 works of calligraphy and 432 ancient books were recovered after the end of the war⁵⁷. Many of these items found their way back home, along the decades, but negotiations are in progress still nowadays. Unluckily, analyzing every single step of this process is a laborious work and it is not the principal aim of this thesis. Still, what are the dynamics beyond the massive misappropriation of Korean cultural properties in the twentieth century?

To some extent, one can perceive a sort of attraction, or 'fascination' of the Japanese

⁵⁵ Scott, 2008, p.816

⁵⁶ Koo, 2015, p.631

⁵⁷ Scott, 2008, p.845

toward the Korean arts, and apparently this interest did not lead to complete disastrous outcomes. As stated by Geoffrey Scott:

“Japan is said to have had a free hand in virtually every aspect of Korean life, both private and public, and like any other international and cultural experience, there is a diversity of opinion as to the consequences.”⁵⁸

Statements about the Japanese colonization in Korea diverge. In the past years, many historians have proved how Japanese management benefitted the cultural heritage management in Korea, beside all the negative effects.

To North and South Korea Japanese occupation was a bitter chapter of their history, dominated by violence and discrimination, and the idea that somehow, the Japanese presence encouraged the development of cultural heritage identity, cultural heritage management policies or that it provided patterns for the future protection of cultural heritage, recalls indignation among the population of both Koreas⁵⁹.

The faults of colonial policies in Korea are undeniable, and in the colonial era, Japan has also showed toward Korean heritage an attitude common to many imperialist nations of the time: they made prominent efforts to identify and document the country’s artistic heritage. During the first phase of the occupation, Japan sent scholars, archaeologists and art historians to Korea, to record the cultural properties and to help accumulating knowledge about Korean culture and folk traditions. As a positive outcome, colonial academics gave birth to a fifteen volumes series on the arts and tradition of the Korean people and, in 1924, to the first detailed register of Korean cultural properties⁶⁰.

2.3. Alternative voices, the invention of Korean art

In 2000, Kim Brandt writes an article on Japanese collectors and colonial Korea that illuminates the way to new interpretations of the Japanese collecting and research activity of the 1920s and 1930s. He does it throughout the history of Yanagi Sōetsu (1889-1961), an art collector, philosopher and activist who also was a heroic defender of the Korean art and folk culture. According to Brandt, Yanagi’s activism offers insight into what he calls “the reinvention of Korean art in Japan, made by Japanese colonialism”; since colonialism gave the opportunity to the Japanese cultural elite to select and promote some Korean objects as

⁵⁸ Scott, 2008, p.844

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Koo, 2015, p.632

“fine arts”⁶¹. Naturally, the ruling Japanese elite had varying interests at stake, which were not merely studying or preserving the occupied country’s cultural identity. This is, for sure, an argumentation we easily encounter in modern Heritage Studies manuals: the establishment of museums as a tool to legitimate a political regime, the employment of the scholarship not as a means of knowledge, but as a sanction of the hierarchical status quo between the imperialist and the colonized. This mechanism, a common narrative of the super powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was useful to make seem the possession of a country, by another one, somehow natural and inevitable⁶².

Talking about revised interpretation of the Japanese colonial past, also Hyung Il Pai (as Brandt) accredits to the colonial rule the merit of having partly contributed to the creation of “Korean art”, in the way that the South Korean government tries to advertise it now.

The OCP, of Office of Cultural Properties, founded in South Korea in 1961, is accused by Pai to be the principal maker of the “Korean art”. Throughout the selection of certain archaeological and artistic assets, it defines what the Korean cultural heritage should look like.



Figure 7. Yanagi Sōetsu at the Korean Folk Art Exhibition held in 1921 at the Ruissō Gallery in Kanda (Tokyo)⁶³.

The OCP was fully aware of its role and its collective mission of “creating the Korean civilization”; especially in the 1960s, the OCP journals were pretty active in promoting a field of research that investigated those items that are now regarded as “uniquely Korean”⁶⁴.

As she notes: “Such congratulatory statements crediting the OCP for rediscovering Korea’s national heritage and remains were also frequently accompanied by condemnations of

⁶¹ Brandt, K. "Objects of Desire: Japanese Collectors and Colonial Korea." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8, no. 3 (2000), p.713

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.713-714

⁶³ Marquet, Christophe. "Folk painting as defined by Yanagi Sōetsu: from revolutionary paint..." *Cipango - French Journal of Japanese Studies*. English Selection. May 22, 2012. Accessed December 11, 2017. <https://cjs.revues.org/132>.

⁶⁴ Pai, 2001, p.76

the Japanese colonial government for indiscriminately plundering Korean cultural relics as part of an elaborate conspiracy to deprive Koreans of their national heritage and, thus, racial identity”⁶⁵.

Pai does not only utilize these terms to address to the Korean attitude toward its colonial past, but also talks about an “attempt to portray Koreans as victims of superpower politics”. Which explains why many are so concerned with the problem of “who is to blame for the plunder of Korea?” and then, of Korea-Japan cultural properties’ issue⁶⁶.

Eventually, that Japanese colonial authorities exercised an influence on the selection of “national treasures” in Korea is plausible. Considering that the promulgation of preservation laws for temples, shrines and cultural assets in Japan are as early as the late nineteenth century; while the first preservation laws issued in the Korea, don’t date before the colonial period. In addition, laws and regulations promulgated in Korea, in the twentieth century, resembled the Japanese Meiji (1868-1912) and early Taisho (1912-1926) laws, ideated for the preservation of the cultural heritage in Japan⁶⁷.

Even the later South Korean *Cultural Properties Promulgation Act*, declared in 1962, recalls in many of its parts the 1950s’ Japanese domestic law for the protection of cultural properties⁶⁸.

The Japanese were also the first to list and record every single item conserved in Korean temples’ estate, throughout a survey called *Chōsen sōtokufu Jisetsu chōsa shiryō* 朝鮮総督府調査資料 (*Records of Temple Investigations by the Governor-General of Korea*). Japanese pioneered the heritage management in Korea, and the protection laws refined continuously, along the whole period of the occupation. One of the first acts promulgated in Korea was the 1916’s Regulations *on the Preservation of Ancient Sites and Relics of Chōsen* (*Koseki oyobi ibutsu hōzon kitei* 戸籍及び遺物法損規定), and the creation of the Korea’s Governor-General Museum, nowadays the National Museum of Korea. Which opened in December 1915, under the supervision of the colonial authorities and of Yanagi Sōetsu⁶⁹.

The 1916 laws did help identifying which remains needed to be destined to preservation, research or simply registration. Especially this last action permitted to the Japanese authorities a stricter control on the traffic of entering and exporting materials, and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Pai, 2013, pp. 128-130

⁶⁸ To deepen the topic of Japanese preservation law in the Meiji era see: Lowen, Lenore, *One Foot in the Past, One Foot in the Future: Japanese Cultural Identity and Preservation Law 1868–1950*, Ann Arbor: University of Southern California, 2013

⁶⁹ Brandt, 2000, p.723

even if it sounds paradoxical, not even Japanese officials could appropriate a Korean cultural property without the right bureaucratic procedures⁷⁰.

Another interesting Pai's assertion is about the major footprint left by Japanese colonialism: the predominant position acquired by Buddhist art in the definition of the Korean cultural identity. Indeed, more than the 90 percent of the artefacts registered by the Japanese colonial authorities were Buddhist statues, architectures, pagodas, or paintings. Pai's conclusion is that, the emphasis on Buddhist art is with no doubt a "surviving colonial trait"⁷¹, especially in the light of the fact that the previous Korean ruling elite had abandoned the Buddhist sites and monuments, letting them slowly falling into ruin.

2.4. Conclusive thoughts

I started this thesis talking about the Buddhist Goryeo paintings, their controversial exodus in the late sixteenth century and the modern attempts to bring them back to Korea. Oddly, Korean attention to these artworks does not have a long history though: as explained in the first chapter, exportation of Buddhist artefacts was not uncommon in the pre-modern era and in general during the Yi dynasty in Korea there was little or no attention to the gradually shrinking Buddhist institutions. Also, concepts such as art preservation and cultural identity were pretty unknown until the twentieth century. Whether we want to believe it or not, the Japanese colonial government substantially contributed to the creation of the Korean art, and it is inappropriate to talk about a "Korean identity" connected to the artistic representation before the 1910s. Therefore, we must suppose that the nowadays widespread sentiment of cultural revanchism against Japan is the fruit of the offences that Korean people suffered in the colonial period.

Undoubtedly, Japan applied an orientalist attitude towards the cultural artefacts it encountered during its colonization of East Asia. Disguised as the saviour of the East Asian civilization, from the European and American tyranny, Japan perfectly played the role of the Western imperialist: colonizing the land, studying the people and looting the historical treasures. However, Japanese governmental forces in Korea gave life to an academic structure which took care to research and re-discovered Korean artistic mastery. Still, problems related to the return of cultural properties between the two countries cause big discussions.

This chapter on the management of cultural heritage in colonial Korea means to answer my research question, in the sense that it shows the modern and political aspect of the

⁷⁰ Brandt, 2000, p.722

⁷¹ Pai, 2001,p.84

cultural treasures' reclaim: concepts such as "heritage pillage" "lost past" or "deprivation of the cultural identity" are products of the twentieth century political events, and they difficultly can be applied to older cases (as the Goryeo paintings). Therefore even cultural heritage itself, becomes a modern construct, often generated as a reaction to the colonial oppression, or as a tool to dominate colonized populations.

Even Yanagi Sōetsu, one of the few that in the 1920s bravely disagreed with the Japanese occupational policies, suggesting that art was the only necessary tool to promote peaceful and understanding relations between Japan and Korea⁷². He firmly believed that art could surpass the political barriers and, as many art historians of his time, he could not ignore the kinship between early Japanese Buddhist statuary and the Korean medieval Buddhist production. Therefore, the fascination of the Japanese colonial rule for Goryeo and even earlier religious art is explained. A fascination that in 1967 lead to a new field of research, thanks to the emergence of some first Goryeo paintings in Japanese collections, paintings that were misattributed to Chinese masters and therefore ignored by Korean art historians so far⁷³.

⁷² Brandt, 2000, p.724

⁷³ Lippit, 2008, p.204

Chapter III

Attempts of Resolution

The following chapter will focus on the interaction between international organizations and local realities in Japan and Korea, concerning the resolution of cultural heritage's management problems. First, I will scan briefly the meaning of the UNESCO and UNIDROIT conventions, and then go through the agreements between the two countries I am interested in. Finally I will compare the resolutions proposed by the authors I included into my research and I will try to integrate them with my interpretation of the problematic.

3.1 Return of cultural treasures in an international prospective

Naturally, illegal plunders in war time and return of cultural assets are not exclusive problem of Japan and Korea. Instead, those are some of the most discussed problems of the modern era. Cases of illicit expropriation of cultural properties, especially in war zones and colonized area are countless. Therefore it is natural that, from the end of WWII and after the dispersion of colonial empires in the mid-twentieth century, new and old international organs entered into action to regulate a phenomenon which was only managed privately or locally until that moment. Just to cite one recent episode of heritage plunder in warzone, we have the 2003 ravages at the Iraq National Museum, in occasion of the fall of Baghdad, in the recent Iraqi war. Consequently, the archaeological world blamed the US invasion forces for neglecting the consequences of the war on the cultural heritage of Iraq. This event showed to the international community how war and poverty still contribute to illicit trafficking in antiquities, even nowadays⁷⁴.

It is in the last century, that the idea of cultural property as an international matter emerges. According to the UNESCO general mission, cultural properties must be preserved, as they represent a unique part of all humankind's heritage. Therefore, it becomes natural to ask: is this value universally shared? Should the UNESCO's guidelines surpass the individual countries' civil legislations? Whether the answers are, the need for international actions to transversally interact with local legislations, and prevent illicit exportation, looting or damage has became clear.

Discussions on heritage during the twentieth century led to two diverging paths: first,

⁷⁴ Greenfield, Jeanette. *Return of cultural treasures*. Place of publication not identified: Cambridge University Press., 2013, pp. 263-271

to the recognition of the need to protect cultural assets, for the good of all humanity. Second, they revealed the fact that cultural heritage narratives paralleled the search for authenticity and national identity⁷⁵. Unfortunately, these two facts, do not always get along inside the same heritage protection context.

I wish to use Gao Sheng's words, by saying that "cultural property is an irreplaceable expression and testimony of the cultural identity of a nation, people or group"⁷⁶. He also analyses the convergence of two different ideological positions in cultural heritage field: cultural nationalism and cultural internationalism. A topic, to which I will get back later in this chapter.

In the history of international actions against cultural property's plunders and threats, there are three main steps to consider:

- first, the 1954 the *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (which entered in force in August 1956).
- second, the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, export and transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (in force from April 1970).
- Lastly, the 1995 UNIDROIT *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* (in force since July 1998)⁷⁷.

The convention that entered into force in 1956 was the first comprehensive international agreement for the protection of cultural property, and at the time of its promulgation there only were five countries ratifying it. In 2005, the convention counted 113 participants, with the exclusion of U.K. and U.S.

Several other legislations followed the guidelines dictated by *The Hague Convention*.

The 1970's UNESCO convention was, instead, the culmination of attempts of many years, to achieve international agreement not only on cultural property's protection but also on its return. Interestingly, Japan has accepted it (but not ratified) it only in 2002⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Pai, Hyung Il. *Heritage management in Korea and Japan: the politics of antiquity and identity*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013, p.164

⁷⁶ Gao Sheng, *International Protection of Cultural Property: Some Preliminary Issues and the Role of International Conventions*, 12 Singapore Y.B. INT'L L. 57, 57 (2008), p.57

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.58

⁷⁸ "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. Paris, 14 November 1970.1." Conventions. Accessed December 12, 2017. <http://www.unesco.org/eri/la/convention.asp?KO=13039&language=E&order=alpha>.

UNESCO's primarily objective was the promulgation of recommendations and resolutions for multilateral conventions. This is the convention that most directly deals with the illicit trafficking of cultural property⁷⁹. Making no difference between privately or publicly owned properties, the convention aims at the property's protection in the source country. However, many critics have been moved against the 1970 Convention: the major one is the non-retroactivity of the legislation. Sheng in his article, makes an interesting analysis of these two conventions. He considers how the first convention, aiming to protect cultural property from destruction (insisted on the retention), is based on a nationalist ideology, while the second, which adopts an universalist protective vision, aimed to support the retention of the cultural property in the source country⁸⁰. The notion of cultural nationalism versus cultural internationalism, though, in anything but new, since it emerged for the first time in the 1980s, by the works of the American scholar John. M. Merryman⁸¹.

Finally, after ten years of preparations, the UNIDROIT *Convention* is held in Rome, in 1995. This convention intends to smooth the recovery and the procedures of return for already stolen or expatriated cultural properties. It is clear then, that this convention aimed to fix the flaws of the preceding convention and its non-retroactivity; especially because, for the first time in history, the Rome Convention dealt with the precarious problematic of the compensation for *bona fide* purchasers, an argument that also involves Japan closely.

3.2 Japan and Korea in the post-war era

In Japan and Korea, discussions about the return of stolen cultural assets remained silent for a long time since the end of the Japanese occupation, in 1945. If on one side, the allied occupational forces had little or no interest, in repatriating the objects taken by Japan, on the other side, the tense relationship of the two countries, made it impossible to start any discussion on the misappropriation of the Korean cultural properties soon after the end of the war. Actually, no diplomatic contacts between Japan and Korea (both North and South) happened at all until the 1960s. War compensations, works of art's repatriation and other matters linked to the colonial period remained unsolved until the announcement of the *Treaty of Basic Relations*, which had place between Japan and the new born Republic of South Korea,

⁷⁹ Greenfield, 2013, p.224

⁸⁰ Sheng, 2008, pp.59-60

⁸¹ The elaboration of cultural nationalism and internationalism is to be attributed to John. M. Merryman. Cultural nationalism advocates the national control over people and things, since the cultural property represents an important part of national identity that must be protected and that cannot be separated from its source. Cultural internationalism, instead, claims the independency of a cultural property from its source nation since the cultural property must be shared and appreciated by the whole humankind. Cultural internationalism believes not only in the protection and integrity of the cultural property but also in its distribution. Sheng,2008, pp.59-60

in 1965⁸².

The situation started changing with the institution of the military dictatorship of General Park Chung-Hee (1917-1979), who acquired power throughout a military coup in 1961. President Park, who was dazzled by the '60s Japanese economic miracle, was fervidly searching for Japan's financial assistance⁸³.

The issue of the return of cultural treasures was the most litigious topic for the South Korean government, and one of the major points discussed on the negotiation table, as it was considered essential for the normalization of the relationships between Japan and South Korea⁸⁴.

The Japanese government, which wished for South Korea to abandon any claims concerning the repatriation of its artworks, meant to make the treaty the conclusive point of any discussion on the argument. The *Agreement on Art Objects and Cultural Cooperation*, included in the treaty, requested Japan to provide monetary assistance to the post-war South Korea, while South Korea promised to abandon any claims for the return of cultural treasures removed prior to and during the colonial period. From General Park perspective, accepting monetary reparation would have been the perfect occasion to finance his ambitious infrastructure projects, aimed at raising up the Korean economy, devastated by the Korean War (1950-1953). At the moment of the Agreement signature, only 1326 items were repatriated, which mostly of them being *celadon* porcelains and old documents. Since the 1965 *Convention of Basic Relations* ratified the lawful status of the cultural objects' transfer to Japan, the number of repatriated assets has not increased substantially from that time on⁸⁵.

Some other sporadic agreements followed the 1965 convention, as for instance the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, which made the repatriation of treasures stolen from North Korean territory a topic of diplomatic concern⁸⁶; and the treaty of 2011 between South Korean and Japanese governments for the restitution of circa 1,200 historical volumes from the archive of Joseon dynasty, mentioned before⁸⁷.

Dealing with the issue of Korean cultural property taken by Japan, under the provisions of the conflicting international conventions, presents a problem, also because UNESCO, UNIDROIT and the Hague Convention have differing interpretations of what

⁸² Koo, 2015, p.634

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.635

⁸⁴ See: Pai, 2013

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Koo,2015, p.635

⁸⁷ "Japan: Lower house approves treaty to transfer archives to South Korea", BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, 28 April 2011

cultural property is. In the case of Japan and Korea, the problem does not only concern the definition of cultural property itself, but also the “cultural heir” of the property⁸⁸.

The 1970 convention was especially troublesome, to some of the signatories because of its treatment of the *bona fide* purchasers. In most legal systems, states provide protection for *bona fide purchasers*, except for the cases when the property is stolen. Some civil law countries like Japan, Mexico or Switzerland, accord even greater protection to the purchasers in good fate and this can collide with international legislations that try to harmonize the huge varieties of civil codes⁸⁹. This was the major reason why UNESCO decided to promote the creation of a new convention, in 1995, that could treat the problem of “in good faith” purchasers directly and resolutely.

The problem of Japan with return of stolen art and *bona fide* purchasers goes beyond the Korean problem, since there are unsolved contentious with China, Italy and Afghanistan too. The Japanese legal system allows the purchasers of stolen cultural objects to obtain the ownership of the objects if a certain amount of years have passed with no reclaims (at least 10 years). In this sense also UNIDROIT convention had scarce effect. In addition, only 30 countries ratified it, and Japan is not among them.

Consequently, in accordance with the law, Japan can reject any claims for the return of any cultural property, even if stolen at the beginning of the twentieth century, and much more if stolen in the sixteenth century⁹⁰.

3.3. *Proposals for solution*

Scholars have discussed and analyzed the problems related to the cultural heritage management in Japan and Korea throughout many perspectives. However, what I noticed is a lack of consistence in many of the past studies, mostly because of the broadness of this field: when we talk about the Korean cultural properties in Japan we are naming an endless variety of objects, from very ancient archaeological remains to nineteenth century ceramics. All these cultural assets have their own history, they have various reasons for being in Japan, and it is not possible, or it is extreme unlikely to level out all the causes and all the consequences of this phenomenon to reach an univocal solution. Even more difficult appears the mission to

⁸⁸ Scott, 2008 p.819

⁸⁹ Hoffman, Barbara T. *Art and cultural heritage: law, policy and practice*. Cambridge u.a.: Cambridge University Press, 2009., p.90

⁹⁰ See: Papadopoulous, Jeannette. *International meeting on illicit traffic of cultural property*. Gangemi Editore, 2011.

create a multilateral convention that can solve both private and public disputes of stolen art's ownership, which presumes to be applicable to every single case of art illicit appropriation.

First of all, in order to study and understand these matters we need definitions and boundaries that can contain the objects of our study. Therefore the definition of cultural heritage is fundamental to understand the problematic behind it.

Ideally, for the purposes of my thesis, I would like to go beyond the schematic definitions of UNESCO as intangible, tangible and natural heritage, and I will take as a reference every kind of material object which entails an artistic, historical, religious, social or emotional value to the Korean people, that had been transferred legitimately or not from the Korean peninsula to Japanese archipelago along history. This must be the starting point to analyze the importance of cultural properties' return, and to question the legitimacy of their claim. Once I have established the nature of the objects under discussion, and we have portrayed the profile of the problematic, I wish to examine: what solutions have been proposed so far?

Melissa Koo, for instance, wonders if a deep and sincere act of apologies might solve the puzzled controversy between the two countries. She appeals to the ancient Confucian spirit of the Korean people, which is characterized by preferring informal manners of conciliation, rather than opened conflict, that risk to disrupt the harmony of the society. Koo also attributes to this "non-litigiousness" attitude of many East Asian countries, the repulsion or the mistrust toward international arbitration and ADR systems (alternative dispute resolutions). She proposes then, the apology as a formal remedy for the conflict resolution between Japan and Korea. Also considering the fact that Japan never declared formal admission of guilt for the atrocities committed during the colonial time⁹¹. This unconventional proposal could sedate many years of tense political relations but it cannot solve the whole problematic of the cultural properties' ownership and return, for good.

Geoffrey Scott is, instead, focused on the question: who is the owner of the heritage? According to him the solution may lie in the identification of the rightful owner of the properties. Logically, should not we consider the "natural heir" of a cultural property the people who created the item⁹²?

⁹¹ Koo, 2015, pp. 646-650

⁹² Scott, 2008, p.888-890

From Hyung Il Pai's point of view, the controversy for the return of cultural property is mostly an ideological debate, based on the assertion of South Korea and Japan's national identity.

If on one side, we have Korea, trying to raise his voice and taking back its "stolen" past. On the other, there is Japan: one of the most advanced nations in conservation and museum technologies, the ex-colonizer willing to take credits for Korea's improvements in the field of heritage management, and then advocating the right to retain the objects they were the firsts to study⁹³. As a result, both asking for formal apology or moving thousands of ancient artworks and archaeological assets back to the Korean peninsula (regardless the Japanese legislation on the matter) may not solve the problematic completely.

3.4. Conclusive thoughts

Finally, we see the cultural nationalism versus the cultural internationalism narrative enter into action: from the perspective of cultural nationalism both North and South Korea are rightful to demand the return of all stolen/exported artworks because of their intrinsic value for the construction a solid cultural identity. Although, according to the principle of conservation and distribution (cultural internationalism), Japan does not have to cede the collection in its possession. Instead, since many ancient Korean artworks exist in limited number, the remaining items should be assigned to more varied countries and museums, giving to a larger portion of the world's population, the possibility to admire such rare pieces.

As a conclusion, I want to clarify the reasons why, among the varied panorama of Korean cultural properties in Japan I chose the Goryeo Buddhist paintings as the most representative case study of this trial: Goryeo Buddhist paintings are unique examples of the Goryeo dynasty's painting mastery; they arrived in Japan during an uncertain historical period, throughout a controversial invasion, and too far in the past to have relevant records that could narrate the exact happenings of the time. They are scattered all over the Japanese territory and their ownership is not homogenous: bargaining for their return means not only to deal with the central government but also with private collectors and religious institutions, which enshrined these mementos for more than four hundred years. In addition, the claimer of the objects is a country that has put aside Buddhism for six hundred years, and that now, keeps only a feeble

⁹³ We can find assertions on the construction of Korean identity and on the narrative of "stolen past by the Japanese colonial authorities" in Pai's 2013 *Heritage Menagement in Japan and Korea*, but also see: Pai's 2001, *Nationalism and the construction of Korean identity*.

relationship with it. Contrarily to Japan, where Buddhism is still a good portion of the people's cultural identity.

Thus, what is the value of Goryeo Buddhist paintings to the Korean population? The answer is not easy to find.

In this chapter I decided to list and confront both international and national legislations, because I wanted to demonstrate how all conventions and treaties failed in defining one universal solution, and therefore because this aspect connects back to my initial research question, underlining the impossibility to nominate a single heir for the heritage.

In the local context, cultural heritage is subjected to the laws and limitations dictated by the national borders and the policies of the state entities. While in the international perspective, such a case study has few precedents in the human history, and there is neither a UNESCO nor a UNIDROIT convention that can cover this problematic. While the plunder of colonial period finds its paradigms worldwide (as for example Java with the Netherlands, or England with India), the mysterious transfer of Goryeo Buddhist paintings cannot refer to any precedent. In summary, it cannot be solved by the intervention of third parties. This means that there is no other way to solve the contentious but throughout open dialogue and collaborative behaviour between the two countries' scholarship.

Chapter IV

Scholarship as a resolution

Inside this chapter we will properly (and finally) face the subject of the Goryeo Buddhist Painting, by analysing its nature as art objects, and acquiring an art historical approach. I will run through the principal elements of an artistic query: iconography, historical background, colouring techniques, distinctive features, usage, patronage and so on. I will try to sum up the highlights of the Goryeo Buddhist Paintings scholarship and its history, from the Japanese pioneers who first started studying these objects until nowadays. I will also talk about the Korean art representation in Japan and the promotion of the Goryeo heritage. My final aim will be to suggest the idea of the Korean art scholarship in Japan as a tool of intermediation between the two countries; therefore, to support a new approach in the formulation of solutions for the return of cultural properties between Japan and Korea.

Figure 8. Map of the Extension of the Goryeo Kingdom in Korea 11th to 14th century⁹⁴



4.1 Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: context

The Goryeo period (918-1392) which lend its name to the modern countries of North

⁹⁴ Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS). "Goryeo." KOREA.net Gateway to Korea. Accessed November 27, 2017. <http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/History/Goryeo>

and South Korea, is seen as the age of Korean enlightenment from many points of view, not only artistically but also technologically. In the period from tenth to fourteenth century, Korea's artistic production and craftsmanship achieved incredible accomplishments, and their techniques were renown in all East Asia, as for the example the already named *Tripitaka Koreana* canon, entirely printed in woodblocks equipped with movable characters, something that was innovating also for the Chinese Empire. One of the most representative symbols of this development, though, are the refined Goryeo *celadon* ceramics. The *Tripitaka Koreana*, as well as the considerable amount of illustrated sutra survived to our days, are the demonstration of a strong faith and religious support of the Goryeo people, that permitted such an outstanding production of religious goods⁹⁵.

However, social and political factors must be counted in the equation: this development can also be attributed to the expansion of social mobility, the patronization of the arts and the letters by the Goryeo royal family, and the creation of a stable class of intellectuals and acculturated elite who had an active part in the court life. They commissioned paintings, calligraphies, books and promoted the constructions of temples. These activities belonged to organized popular actions, or “Buddhist projects”, which were supported by Buddhist civilians’ organizations, *Gyeolsa* 結社, able to gather even one thousand patrons at once, to erect a temple or cast a statue⁹⁶.

Furthermore, connections with China represent fundamental aspect: techniques, ideas and iconographies from Song (960–1279) and Yuan Empires (1279-1368) entered the country, where they were absorbed and re-elaborated into the peninsular taste.

The Goryeo kingdom emerged from the collapse of the United Silla kingdom (668–935) and ended with the rise of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897). Goryeo state was ruled by an aristocratic society, often defied by nomadic tribes in the northern border. The Goryeo kingdom generated a refined and sophisticated culture transmitted in its artistic heritage⁹⁷. The dynasty, founded by Wang Geon, inherited much from the previous kingdom, and shared many of its characteristics as a Buddhism-based monarchy. In this context, Buddhist paintings and sculptures did not simply represent a sort of aesthetic expression but they were vehicles of

⁹⁵ Kumja Paik Kim, *Goryeo Dynasty Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918-1392*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, Chong-Moon Lee Centre for Asian Art and Culture, 2003, pp.8-10

⁹⁶ Jeong Eunwoo, Buddhist Art Patronage during Goryeo Period. Presented at *Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: A Closer Look*, a symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery on March 9-10, 2017, pp.29-33

⁹⁷ Edward Shultz, Cultural History of Goryeo, in *Goryeo Dynasty Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918-1392*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2003, p.24

devotion and prayer⁹⁸. However, in the last part of its existence, the kingdom saw the decline of state support for the religion, which instead radicalized into civilians associations and found a new great support in middle and lower classes of the society. This process, intensified after the Mongol invasions of 1231⁹⁹.

Gaegyeong (nowadays Kaesong, North Korea), the Goryeo's ancient capital, was a trafficked commercial point, which had lively exchanges with its neighbours. Naturally, the influence of Chinese culture is huge, and Goryeo government looked at the new born Song's rule as a model of literacy and civilization.

The Goryeo paintings were likely produced by eminent artists or professional monastic painters who dwelled in the court environment. The royal family and their subjects had several reasons to patronage the making of a painting or a statue: they may have needed to pray for the peace of the country, the longevity of their beloved ones, the admission to paradise or for the accumulation of merits, in order to gain better rebirths.

The paintings do not vary greatly between 60 and 150 centimetres; thus, even if it cannot be excluded that such objects were produced to adorn the inner walls of temples and shrines¹⁰⁰, judging from their size and their appearance, it is more likely that the paintings were commissioned to be enshrined into private houses, for intimate contemplation or for self-cultivation.¹⁰¹

In Goryeo Korea there were two predominant Buddhist schools: *Gyo* (Doctrine) and *Seon* (Meditation). Where the second spread out in the countryside, the first school, based on the meticulous study of the sacred scriptures found support in the capital, Gaegyeong, among the nobles. The religious institutions, which had solid ties with the nobility and also with the royal family, succeeded in constructing thousands of temples inside and outside the city.

In the eleventh century, the royal monk Uicheon imported the Cheontae Doctrine from China (*Tiantai*) and tried to unify the doctrines into one single scholarship, boosting a radical reform of the Buddhist schools¹⁰². However, the Goryeo Buddhism of the twelfth century, started having even closer connections with the central authoritative power and lost its social character, becoming more conservative¹⁰³. In this era, it is common that nobles owned private

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Jung Byungsam, Late Goryeo Buddhism and Devotional Imagery, presented at *Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: A Closer Look*, a symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery on March 9-10, 2017, pp. 17-27

¹⁰⁰ Hong, Sön-pyo. *Traditional Korean painting*. Seoul: Ewha Womans Univ. Pr., 2011, p.40

¹⁰¹ Woothak, Chung "Identity of Goryeo Buddhist Painting", in *The International Journal of Korean Art and Archaeology*. Vol.4, Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2010, p.24

¹⁰² Shultz, 2003, p.25-26

¹⁰³ Woothak, 2010, p.25

temples to enshrine their paintings and conduct family rituals. Since it is clear that the majority of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings in our possession, were probably destined to private houses, it is risky to assume the trends of the Goryeo period Buddhism schools in their entirety. Although, if we observe the scrolls survived from this period, we cannot deny the big influence that the Pure Land Doctrine must had on the high society of Goryeo Kingdom: a philosophy which put at the centre of the worship the Amitabha Buddha, and the goal of entering into his Western Paradise after death¹⁰⁴.



Figure 9. Amitabha Nyorai, later Goryeo period, Colour on Silk, 190x87cm, Shōbō-ji, Kyoto¹⁰⁵.

4.2 Pictorial techniques

Emily Sano says: “Cultures of East Asia had significant commonalities, and also important differences from country to country”. Regarding this statement, it is difficult to find more appropriate words to describe what the stylistic differences between Chinese, Korean

¹⁰⁴ Woothak, 2010, p.26

¹⁰⁵ 禪心論壇 (香港正信佛教論壇) - Board. Accessed December 11, 2017. <http://www.zenheart.hk/viewthread.php?action=printable&tid=23446>.

and Japanese paintings are¹⁰⁶.

Naturally, the three countries share a common scriptural canon, and a standardized iconography: monastic painters had to follow detailed manuals of representation for Buddhist images in order to realize a painting that would not only be pleasant but also useful in terms of meditation and rituals effectiveness. Nevertheless, important differences can be found in the representative patterns and in the making techniques of the paintings.

First of all, scholars agree that the most distinctive trait of the Goryeo Buddhist painting is its colouring technique: the almost exclusive use of primary colours as green, red and cobalt blue, together with a generous use of gold powder. All paints were laid unmixed, used in bright shades. The incredibly vividness of the colours on the silk, is also given by the double white-coating on the fabric that helped keeping the vividness of the pigments. The deities depicted in the paintings are richly adorned: they wear accessories, jewels, and sumptuous veils splendidly decorated with floral and natural patterns. The gold pigment is used for contours as well as for all the decorative patterns and almost no space inside the painting's frame is left empty¹⁰⁷. The primary tones are brilliant but not harsh: this is because Goryeo Buddhist paintings were realized throughout the reverse painting technique, which required the silk to be painted from the back, giving an extraordinary softness and major depth to the paints.¹⁰⁸ This also helped to create a harmonious balance with the heavily decorated garments of the Buddha's robes and the primary colours.

The Goryeo paintings can also be easily identified by the recurrent usage of these decorative motifs: chrysanthemum, phoenix and most importantly the arabesque-medallion, which never appears in Japan or China¹⁰⁹. Woothak also uses an interesting vocabulary to discern the Chinese and Japanese paintings from the Goryeo's tradition: he defines the first as an "expository representations" kind of painting, while he talks about the second as characterized by an "interrelatedness of the compositional elements"¹¹⁰.

Ide Seinosuke, from Kyushu University, states that the most important elements to identify the Goryeo paintings are, the presence of the *shrivatsa* symbol¹¹¹ on deities' chest, and the *chackra* or wheel symbol, usually depicted on both palms, a combination that is rarely

¹⁰⁶ Emily J. Sano, Preface, in *Goryeo Dynasty Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918-1392*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2003, p.9.

¹⁰⁷ Woothak, 2010, p.22

¹⁰⁸ Kumja Paik kim, 2003, pp.10-13

¹⁰⁹ Woothak, 2010, p.22

¹¹⁰ Woothak. 2010, pp.20-21

¹¹¹ Auspicious symbol of Indian origin, literally meaning "beloved of Deity Sri"

found in other contexts, even in later Korean painting¹¹². In addition, comparing them to Song paintings from the same period, we will notice that Chinese tradition had a stronger tendency toward more realistic representations: thanks to the use of various shades of colours and more rational proportions. Contrarily, the Goryeo painting emphasizes the size of the main Buddha or Bodhisattva in a hierarchical scale of importance. Despite that, the Goryeo Buddhist painting is still pretty close to the Southern Song academic style of painting, in the meticulous research of elegance and luxurious finish¹¹³. Contrarily, this tradition keeps a considerable distance from the Japanese Buddhist painting. This one incorporated many iconographic elements of the Japanese esoteric schools (*Shingon* and *Tendai*) that cannot be found neither in China nor in Korea, and sometimes it also included elements of the local folklore, absent inside the scriptures. This is a feature that makes Japanese medieval Buddhist painting unique, and made it possible to clearly distinguish Japanese painting from the Chinese one, to the detriment of the Korean tradition: for many years, art historians were convinced of the Chinese origin of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings, and only an attentive scrutiny could reveal the truth about their identity.

4.3 Iconographies and compositions

It is essential to identify the reasons for the production of a painting, in order to analyze its iconography correctly. Fortunately, the Goryeo paintings already present a homogeneous consistency, dictated by an uniform group of patrons, who probably commissioned the paintings in big numbers, for similar reasons.

Woothak addresses to the Goryeo Buddhist paintings as having an “uncomplicated iconographical schema”. The remaining paintings actually show a certain repetitive patterns of composition: out of 165 paintings circa, 60 are associated to the Buddha Amitabha, or the Buddha of Compassion, residing in the Western paradise; 42 depict the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and 26 the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha, the deity said to saves those suffering in the Buddhist hell¹¹⁴. The total of paintings related to this three topics rises to 130, indicating a striking predominance of the Pure Land doctrine in the Goryeo period religiosity.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ide Seinosuke, *The World of Goryeo Buddhist Painting*, in *Goryeo Dynasty Korea's Age of Enlightenment, 918-1392*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2003, p.34

¹¹³ Hong, 2011, p.49

¹¹⁴ Woothak, Chung, *Goryeo Buddhist Painting in East Asia*, presented at *Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: A Closer Look*, a symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery on March 9-10, 2017, pp.7-15

¹¹⁵ See: Byungsam, 2017.

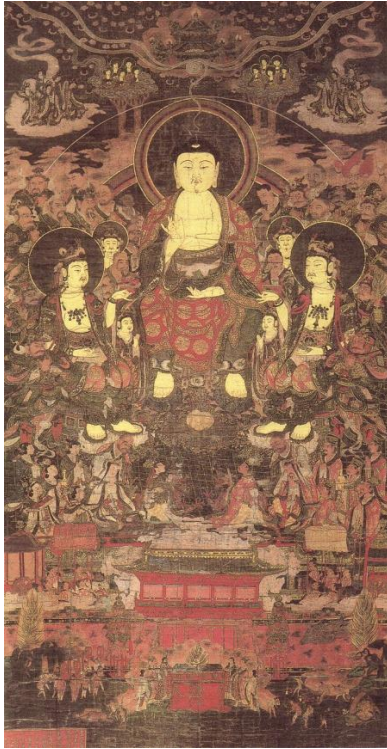


Figure 10. Illustration of the Sutra on the Descent of Maitreya, Colour on Silk, 227x129 cm height, 1294, Myō manji temple, Kyoto¹¹⁶

Along with the main subjects, other iconographies count: the Buddha *Bhaisajyaguru*, some depictions of the Buddha Maitreya, and some of the *Five Hundred Arhats*.

The Pure Land Buddhism advocated the possibility of a believer's own salvation throughout private worship of the Buddha Amitabha. We principally find three texts that may have inspired the artists of the Goryeo paintings: the *Sutra of the Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable life*, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and the *Flower Garland Sutra*¹¹⁷. The latter, is particularly controversial because, despite it seems to be the main source for inspiration of the Goryeo period painting, its effective influence on the Goryeo society in its entirety is debatable. Was the *Flower Garland Sutra* really influential in the Goryeo dynasty's philosophical environments, or was it just the doctrine shared in the private houses of the aristocratic community?

Of great relevance is also an *illustration of the Sutra of the Descendent of Maitreya* preserved in Myōmanji temple 妙満寺, which dates to the 1294, and it is the oldest Buddhist painting from the Goryeo period existing. Since all the other items belong the fourteenth century, it is not possible to speculate on the artistic trends of prior periods, only the

¹¹⁶ 禪心論壇 (香港正信佛教論壇). Accessed December 13, 2017.

<http://www.zenheart.hk/viewthread.php?action=printable&tid=23446>.

¹¹⁷ Woothak, 2010, p.16

Myōmanji's painting lets us image the canons of more ancient times.¹¹⁸

Goryeo Buddhist painting is an harmonious ensemble of artworks, which shows the preference of the artists towards a very conservative and homogenous kind of painting.

Considering this, it is highly possible that the court's painters had to follow the precepts of iconographic manuals from the Song and Yuan dynasties, which strictly arranged compositional and iconographic prototypes. If we take as example, the famous *Water-Moon Avalokitesvarha* iconography, whose most outstanding piece belongs to the Kagami shrine 鏡神社, in Kyoto; we will identify fix recurring elements: Avalokitesvara is always seating on a rocky throne, slightly turned to the right in the half-lotus position (one leg bended under the arm, the other left hanging loose), holding a the *kundika* bottle, while the boy pilgrim Sudhana is standing in one corner of the painting, admiring the deity.

4.4 Goryeo Buddhist Painting Scholarship

The memory of these artworks had already faded, when Japanese scholarship started realizing that some paintings, belonging to the Ashikaga collection and attributed to Chinese painters, revealed unique stylistic features that excluded them from the Chinese tradition.

The scholarship around the Goryeo Buddhist painting, was established not even fifty years ago. As a matter of fact, it is only in the course of the 1930s that the awareness among Japanese scholars on the existence of these paintings emerges, and the official scholarship merely started in the 1960s.

Yukio Lippit, investigates the odd nature of the Japanese scholarship on Goryeo Buddhist painting. He divides the history of the scholarship into three phases: the dawn of the investigation, focused on inventory activities (1932-1967); a second period of study devoted to the production of a general knowledge about the topic (1967-1981); and a last phase from the 1981 to recent times, that is expanding the researches throughout contextual studies¹¹⁹.

From the time of the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula, we see the explosion of the inquiry on Korean art, among the first researchers we find, for example, Sekino Tadashi and his *History of Korean Art*, published in 1932. Pioneers of the Goryeo Buddhist paintings are the professors Kikutake Junichi and Yoshida Hiroshi, who were the firsts to publish a full-scale document on the topic, in 1981: *Kōrai butsuma* 高麗仏画 (Goryeo Buddhist paintings)¹²⁰.

¹¹⁸ Woothak, 2010, p.18

¹¹⁹ Lippit, 2008, pp.203-217

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

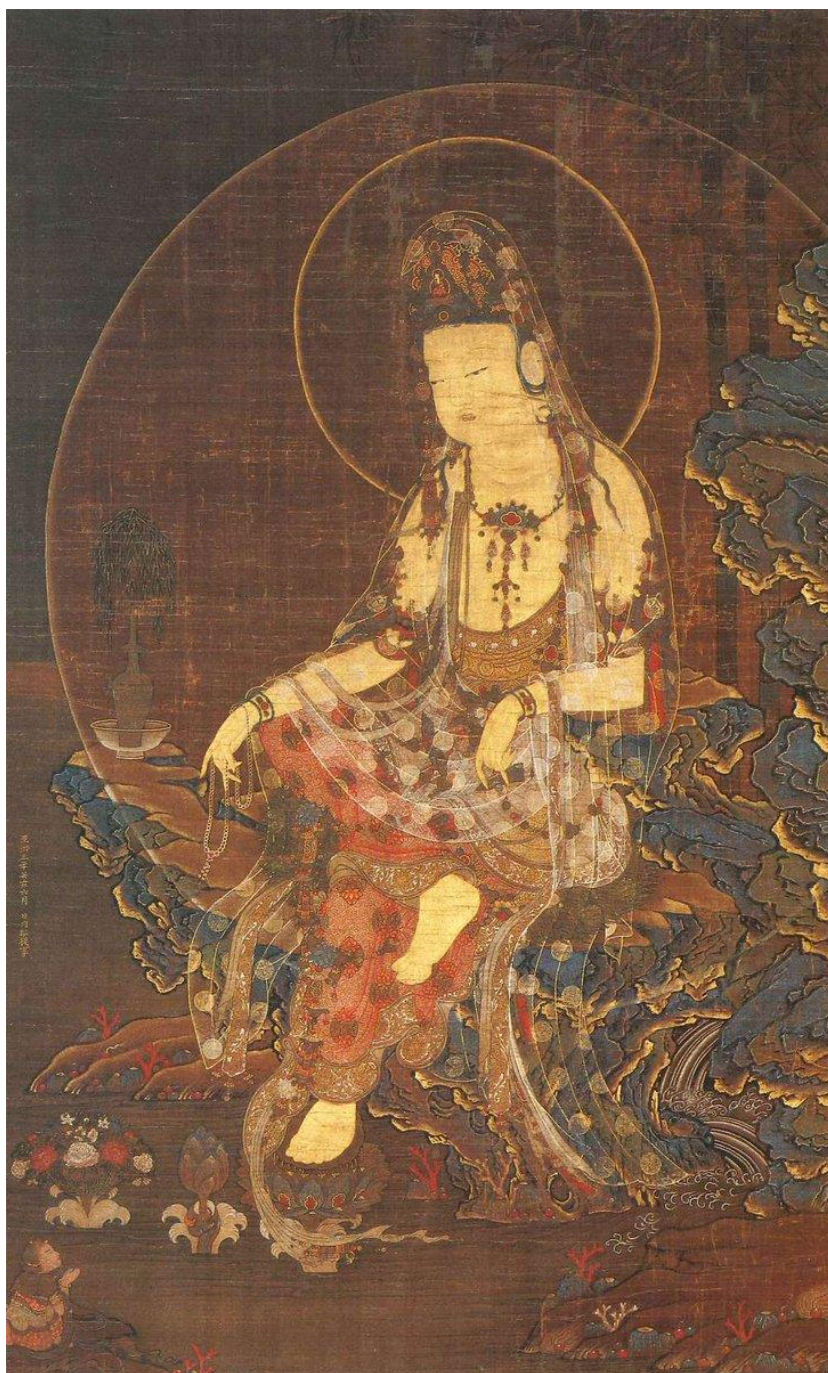


Figure 11. Watermoon Avalokitesvara, colour on silk, 164x101 cm height, 1323, Sen-Oku Akukokan Museum, Tokyo¹²¹.

¹²¹京都新聞社. "高麗仏画 —香りたつ装飾美—泉屋博古館 特集." 京都新聞. Accessed December 11, 2017. http://www.kyoto-np.co.jp/kp/kyo_np/info/kourai/.

Probably the first to really start a serious speculation on this matter was Kumagai Nobuo, researcher at the Research of Cultural Properties institute of Tokyo, at the end of the 1960s. Kumagai's survey of the Goryeo paintings inaugurated the systematic study of this field in Japan. At the time, he had only detected 75 paintings. Gradually, as the field was getting more attention, new artworks emerged, until reaching the incredible number of 133. Nowadays, in 2017, due to acquisitions and thefts, the actual number of paintings on Japanese soil has decreased to 115¹²².

The first public exposition of the paintings took place in the autumn of 1978, when the Nara Yamato Bunkakan 大知文華館 held an exhibition on Goryeo art. This was the first time that the scrolls were recognized as “Korean” and attracted the international eye¹²³.

More than ten years later, some of the paintings finally landed back to Korea again (but temporarily) for a public exhibition in 1993. It was called, *Goryeo: Eternal Beauty* and it was held at Ho-Am Art Gallery, in Seoul. That event inspired a 1997 publication, *Buddhist Paintings of the Goryeo Period*, a catalogue that collected for the first time in Korean language, all the paintings known until that moment¹²⁴.

Today the Goryeo Buddhist painting has acquired more and more attention from worldwide scholarship, giving birth to overseas symposiums and museum exhibitions, featuring not only the Japanese paintings but also the few examples located in North American and European collections.

Finally, after decades of isolated and localized researches, Japanese and Korean scholarship are uniting, merging their efforts together to depict a completed spectrum on the subject. Goryeo Buddhist painting's scholarship lives in an “interregional context”, as Yukio Lippit has defined it. It stretches from the area of its original production, to the country where the paintings were sheltered and conserved for more than four hundred years. It crosses the sea and the borders, but most importantly, it cannot aggregate with any specific cultural identity. Buddhist painting of the Goryeo period is not Korean nor Japanese cultural heritage. It is a human kind's treasure.

In conclusion, this chapter's objective was to advocate the predominance of the artistic value of the paintings over the political value attributed by the respective governments. This last section also helps to answer my research questions since it illustrates the active role of

¹²² Lippit, 2008, pp.203-217

¹²³ The catalogue published in occasion of this first exhibition is the only volume to contain the full list of the 133 paintings discovered in Japan in the 1930s. See: *Special exhibition Korean Buddhist Paintings of Koryo dynasty*. Nara-shi: Yamato Bunkakan, 1978.

¹²⁴ Woothak, 2017, pp.7

Japan in the conservation and study of the paintings, which resulted in the nomination of many of them as “Important National Treasures”. Hence, of both countries’ assertion of ownership, based on technological and intellectual power.

Conclusions

In the first half of my thesis I illustrated the historical feature of Japan and Korea relationship. How their past interactions influenced also the modern cultural heritage management, and I questioned if they also interfere with cultural identity process of creation, especially in South Korea.

Later, I shortly presented the larger frame of the debate on cultural properties return, specifically focusing on Japan legislations; but for the most part by defining the clash and the encounter of international conventions and local legislative realities.

In the last chapter then, I carried out the analysis of what I consider the most intriguing and exemplar case of distorted cultural heritage in Japan and Korea: the Goryeo Buddhist paintings.

A series of 165 rare paintings, of which the majority resides in Japan. Some of these painting scrolls are even designated as important Japanese national properties, as for instance the Amitabha Buddha of Shōbō-ji 正法寺, in Kyoto, or the *Water-Moon Avalokitesvara* at Sanshinzan Taisan-ji 三身山太山寺, in Kobe¹²⁵. Paradoxically, these paintings also belong to a large group of almost 40,000 items, of varied nature, that the Korean government wants to return from Japan.

This because, regardless the actual value of the objects themselves, the intent behind the claim is to construct an idea of Korean culture that can match the expectations of the people and the political agenda of their governors. The cultural identity is not spontaneous though, it is fabricated, and this reality is true for many other nation-state entities. Also Japan, as Korea, follows a precise scheme of cultural properties selection in order to negotiate its image with the past. The concept of cultural heritage as a manufactured is not new of course, and it has been the core centre of cultural heritage studies for more than a decade. The counter effect of this process is often the simplification and self-exoticisation of the cultural identity. Given

¹²⁵ See: *Koryō purhwa taejōn : 700-nyōn man ūi haehu = Masterpieces of Goryeo Buddhist painting*. Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2010.

that, a country's cultural heritage gets forcibly isolated from neighbouring nations, preventing any comparison of the similarities and denying any proof of external influences, elements that are instead important to contextualized the development of the cultural heritage itself¹²⁶.

In the end, getting back to my research question: does the Goryeo Buddhist paintings case demonstrate the impossibility to establish a neat cultural heritage that can divide Korean and Japanese identities? Yes it does.

The Goryeo Buddhist paintings originated on the Korean peninsula, in an area that nowadays roughly coincides with the modern North Korean territory, the paintings existed in an interregional context, reaching several different areas of the Japanese archipelago, where they were guarded for centuries and studied. Still, they are easily associated with the cultural and historical identity of the South Korean nation.

Hopefully, this interdisciplinary research helped to untangle the complicate situation of this small (but relevant) portion of Korean cultural properties in Japan.

Another contentious brought along with the investigation of the Korean cultural properties in Japan, is the nature of the Japanese scholarship on Korean art, and how it heavenly influenced the definition of it. Can we assert that this systematic investigation of Korea's cultural heritage, is in reality a legacy of the colonial period¹²⁷? While some scholars blame the Japanese for hiding, obscuring and voluntarily forgetting about the vast colonial archives that Japan storages. Others, re-evaluated the colonial period as the start of a catalyst force that led to a conspicuous amount of researches on Korean material culture¹²⁸. All these publications, unfortunately, often remained inside the borders of the Japanese archipelago since they were conducted, for most of the time, in Japanese language, and addressed to a Japanese public. For decades, Japanese scholarship on Korean art and Korean scholarship on Korean art remained separated, unable to communicate one with each other.

The status of the research on Goryeo period art, is certainly changed in the last 20 years and it is still changing since the spreading of the Japanese knowledge on the subject, to the international community. It created a vilely and fertile field of research, that allows the actors of the dispute to actively participate.

Although scholarship cannot be a resolution for international conflicts in absolute terms, I believe that as long as we continue to refer to cultural heritage as a matter of ownership, no real solutions can be virtually formulated. As an alternative, if we could look at the cultural

¹²⁶ Matsuda, and Mengoni, 2016, pp. 2-3

¹²⁷ Lippit, 2008, p.204

¹²⁸ Pai, 2013, pp.128-139

properties not as markers of a single national identity, but as monitors of the common past of more groups, then scholarship acquires the role of mediator. A tool to effectively overcome the vacuum of the unsolved question: who's the owner?

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