



Yangji, A Silla Sculptor

저자 (Authors)	MUN MYŎNG-DAE
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certain masks including the one we just discussed. What I am implying is that as most of us know, the distinctive differences between various social status of men are essentially artificial and at best transient. Therefore, such a confusion in regard to the status of certain old masks are not only harmless but also interesting and significant in that the confusion itself is integral to the realistic tradition of the particular folk art form we are dealing with. For, which one of us can honestly declare that a person of a highest social standing of today would not land on a pitiable position which not even a common peasant or a shopkeeper would envy tomorrow? At any event, as the old saying goes, isn't a man's life but a short spell of spring dream? Wasn't it Chungtzu himself who dreamt of becoming a human one moment and then a butterfly another?

Let us for a moment imagine that the Bride mask and the Monk mask that are sitting side by side on a shelf are not masks but real human characters. It might then look as if the young woman who was carried away against her will by a renegade monk and the woman-stealing monk himself have in the meantime become a loving couple and at the moment having a family picture taken in Seoul. All this may sound like too idle and fantastic an imagination to those who do not know these ancient works of art which are so evokative of eternal mysteries of man's destiny and so fancy-inspiring. But if one of these skeptical friends of ours would take a little time off his mundane preoccupations and duties and let his eyes wander freely and idly about these interesting faces with sympathy and an open, loving mind, he would more likely than not come to know what I meant in the above and moreover may go through all kinds of strange experiences of the mind and thinking that would give him a strange feeling of liberation and a deep and affirmative understanding for the complexity of human living.

I am very glad that these Hahoe masks have been finally promoted to the long-deserved rank of the national treasure this year. This official recognition of the artistic and cultural value of Hahoe masks has not only made them assume a status equal to

any other historical treasures of traditional Korea but also, humorously enough, settled the problem of defining status of the masks which we discussed above in relation to the misinterpretation involving the Yangban (or Monk, or Butcher) mask. Because now, whether he was Yangban, Monk, or Butcher, he has become no better nor more inferior to either of the other two and also to all the rest of the masks with their diverse status differences.

Finally I feel a special need to emphasize the fact that this recent official recognition of Hahoe masks as our traditional art treasure is an affair which has become a great event in the village of Hahoe, the original site for the production of these excellent masks, is a happening to be celebrated by the people related not only to the mask art but also to all forms of Korean folk art.

Yangji, A Silla Sculptor

MUN MYŎNG-DAE

Yangji was the most outstanding sculptor of Silla as Solgō was the most eminent painter. As we do not know about the birth and parentage of most ancient artists, we also do not know when Yangji was born and where he died, except the record in *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) that "although it is not clear who Yangji's ancestors were and where he was born, we know that he lived during the reign of Queen Sōndōk." This enables us to presume that he was active during the queen's reign. It is also certain that he outlived the queen's reign, for the image of a divine general on Sach'ōnwang-sa Temple pagoda which dates to 679 is accredited to him. From these facts we may presume that Yangji was active from the years

MUN MYŎNG-DAE is a professor of Korean Art history at Tongkuk University.

of Queen Söndök (632–646) to the reign of King Munmu (661–680). This period was truly a hectic one for Silla. Offensives mounted by Koguryö and Paekche against Silla grew intense from the second year of Queen Söndök (633); and by 642 Silla had lost more than 40 castles to Paekche. In order to overcome the national crisis, Silla made all possible efforts desperately. The Sönggol aristocrats were replaced by Chin'gol aristocrats in the hierarchy while Silla formed an alliance with T'ang China in an attempt to keep Koguryö and Paekche at bay and, if possible, to destroy them and unify the Korean peninsula. Finally Silla crushed Paekche in 660 and Koguryö in 668. It was as late as 676 before Silla could drive the T'ang forces from the Korean peninsula to finally achieve unification. The most important thing for the colossal task was to insure spiritual unity among her people. In other words, Silla realized the urgent necessity of fortifying Buddhist faith and undertaking Buddhist construction. One manifestation of this movement was the systematization of the Buddhist doctrine by the monk Chajang. The construction of a nine-story pagoda at Hwangnyong-sa Temple was a grand project which was designed to demonstrate the national prestige of Silla internally and externally. The construction of such national temples as Yöngmyo-sa, Punhwang-sa, Sach'önwang-sa and Mangdök-sa also sprang from the same motive or was aimed at commemorating Silla's success in unifying the three kingdoms.

Yangji did not pass a single year without doing something worthwhile during this hectic period. Commanding his whole ability, he made his share of contribution to the construction of these temples. His contribution made his name immortal as a great artist; and his life itself was truly a fruitful one.

Before being a sculptor Yangji was a priest. Perhaps he was born to a humble family and ended his life as a sculptor. But we should not overlook the fact that he was also an eminent priest who cultivated himself through veritable ascetic practices. The priest Ilyön once spoke of Yangji as "perfect in talent and replete with virtue." From this remark it is certain that Yangji was exceptionally gifted also as a priest. In *Samguk Yusa* we find an interesting anecdote concerning this point.

"When he hung a bag on his *sökchang* (priest's stick), the stick used to fly of itself to the house of a Buddhist and stay there producing sound by shaking itself until the follower came out and put his alms into the bag. Then the stick flew to the house of another adherent. When the bag was filled with alms, the stick returned to its master. For this reason the temple in which he resided came to be called Sökchang-sa."

His stick was, so to speak, an automatic collector of alms. This may, of course, be a fictitious story; but, in any case, Ilyön evaluated it as very mysterious. There lived during the reign of Queen Söndök an eminent priest named Milbon who was devoted to Esoteric Buddhism. When the queen fell ill, the story goes, he threw his stick to pierce a fox, which helped the monarch recover from the illness. Here we find a method similar to that which Yangji employed to let his stick collect alms.

Such a method, whether it was employed to heal a disease or to subjugate foreign intruders, is called *piböp* (secret method). All were not able to command the secret method. It was believed to be a monopoly of Esoteric Buddhist priests. The priest Myöng-nang of that time was known as an expert in these secret methods. By one he expelled T'ang forces on a few occasions. This distinguished service earned the priest a post at which he supervised the construction of Sach'önwang-sa Temple as well as royal approval for the foundation of an Esoteric Buddhist sect called Sinin-jong.

It seems that Yangji was as proficient as these Esoteric Buddhist priests in commanding secret methods. As praised in *Samguk Yusa*, his method was very mysterious as demonstrated by his stick-throwing. Consequently it may be safe to regard Yangji as a high priest in Esoteric Buddhism.

However, he was more famous as an artist than as a priest. He was not merely a master in sculpture. "He is proficient in arts. He is excelled by none in the marvellousness of artistic accomplishment." This comment on him shows how versatile Yangji was. In addition, he was an excellent calligrapher and a fine handicraftsman dexterous in roof-tile making. He was so great a calligrapher that he was asked to write the names of such

noted temples as Yōngmyo-sa and Pōnmim-sa for hanging at the main halls on wooden boards. It seems that Yangji was a versatile artist who was proficient in sculpture, painting, calligraphy, and handicraft.

It was, of course, in sculpture that Yangji was most excellent. In sculpture his speciality was modeling clay figures. *Samguk Yusa* lists seven as his greatest masterpieces which are all plastic images. They include Yōngmyo-sa Temple's 16-foot-tall images of the Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas, an image of a divine general on the Sach'ōnwang-sa Temple pagoda, rooftiles for Buddhist temples and pagodas, Pōnmim-sa Temple's images of the Buddha and two of his disciples, an image of a Deva King, and 3,000 images of the Buddha on the brick pagoda of Sōkchang-sa Temple.

Of the masterpieces, only two are extant; and it is very regretful that the 16-foot-tall images of the Buddha and his disciples of Yōngmyo-sa Temple, rated as the most excellent of his representative works, vanished, making it impossible to clarify the whole range of his genius. It is fortunate, however, that the image of the Sach'ōnwang-sa Temple pagoda and the 3,000 images of Buddha on the brick pagoda of Sōkchang-sa Temple remain to this date to enable us to look into some aspects of his marvellous skills. We are struck with admiration by the almost perfect beauty of refined equilibrium which the relics from Sach'ōnwang-sa Temple embody, which are housed at the National Museum of Seoul and its branch in Kyōngju, by their precise patterns, their tense lines, and their taut vitality.

Of his works which are extant, none retains its original shape. In four items, the upper halves and heads are destroyed. In another, the face is destroyed. His works embody realism, being elegant yet exquisite. In other words, he never neglected details, adding a precise touch even to a sleeve. His delicateness is sublimated into grandeur. Realism was a novel style in Yangji's days. This technique was employed only by some court artists who turned out the tortoise-shaped base of the monument at the tomb of King Muyōl and the 12 zodiacal images which guard the tomb of Kim Yu-sin. As

his biographic sketches indicate, Yangji must have been a court artist; and, at that position, he could have an easy access to realism, a new style introduced to Silla through a direct route opened to T'ang China.

Sach'ōnwang-sa Temple was constructed in a national project in commemoration of Silla's success in repelling T'ang invaders by dint of the secret method commanded by the priest Myōngnang. Most significant is the fact that the image of the divine general he molded for the temple's pagoda was intended to be a guardian of Silla and that it was his last work.

His most outstanding work was, of course, the images of the Buddha and two Bodhisattvas for Yōngmyo-sa Temple which he executed tens of years before the Sach'ōnwang-sa guardian. It must have been an enormous task to mold with clay such huge images towering 16 feet or almost five meters. "As he produced images of the Buddha according to what he had received rightly during his meditation, women of nobility vied each other in carrying the clay for his molding." From this fact, we can easily imagine how much his images of the Buddha touched the hearts of his contemporaries. No doubt the Yōngmyō-sa Temple images were as dignified



Tile with Guardian God in relief from Temple site of Sach'ōnwang-sa in Kyōngju. United Silla Period, 7th century. Height 53cm, width 60.7cm, thickness 7.9cm.

as the nine-story pagoda of Hwangnyong-sa Temple. All were perhaps overwhelmed by the solemn atmosphere created by the towering images. A *hyangga* poem which people sang while carrying the clay to his workshop recreates the scene of bygone days vividly.

“Come, come, come.

Come, Thou, Sorrow.

Those stricken with sorrow,

Come to lay treasures in heaven.”

Pak Han-mi, A Silla Bell Maker

CHIN HONG-SÖP

Many Buddhist bells were cast in Korea between the period of the Three Kingdoms and the Yi dynasty period, and some 100 bells are extant today in Korea and other countries. According to the Reminiscences of the Three Kingdoms, a 294,000-kilogram copper bell was cast at Hwangnyong-sa Temple in 754, and this might be the largest Buddhist bell ever made in Korea, though the bell is not extant today.

The oldest known Buddhist bell today is the one in Sangwön-sa Temple in Mt. Odae. This bell was cast in 725. The bell made for Silla King Söngdök is the largest known one today, and it is now at Kyöngju Museum. This bell was cast in 771.

In the middle of the 15th century, the Yi dynasty government collected Buddhist copper items such as statues and bells across the country to make coins and weapons, and it is believed that many Buddhist bells were destroyed at this time. But two bells avoided the destruction thanks to King Sejong's special consideration. One is the above-mentioned bell for King Söngdök and the other the bell at the South Gate of Kaesöng

which was originally at Yönbok-sa Temple. While the latter bell was cast by Yüan artisans, the former was cast by a Korean.

In general, of the many ancient artefacts remaining in Korea today, the makers of only a few are known. For example, the silver bracelet of the queen of Paekche King Mur-yöng was made by Tari in 520, the copper statue of Bhechadjaguru in Punhwang-sa Temple was made by Kanggo Naemal in 755, and the pot with an inscription of the fourth year of the Sunhwa era was made by Choe Kil-hoe in 993. And among the artisans who cast the bell for Silla King Söngdök was a man named Pak Han-mi, according to historical records.

King Kyöngdök who reigned from 742 through 764 ordered the founding of this bell with 72,000 kilograms of copper to pray for the repose of the soul of his father, King Söngdök, but he passed away without seeing the completion of the bell. His son, King Heygong, continued the bell project and dedicated the bell in 771. This means that the bell took some 20 years. Its measures are: 3.79 meters in height, 2.73 meters in mouth diameter and 6.98 meters in mouth circumference. This bell was first set in Pongdök-sa temple, which was also built for King Söngdök, and thus called Pongdök-sa Bell. When the temple was destroyed in a flood in 1460, it was moved to Yöngmyo-sa. When Yöngmyo-sa was reduced to ashes in a fire in 1506, the bell was again moved to a belfry specifically built for it in Kyöngju. In 1915, it was moved to Kyöngju Museum and has been kept there since.

The Buddhist bell is one of many Buddhist things used in Buddhist temples, and many Asian countries, where Buddhism developed as a popular religion, cast various types of Buddhist bells. But the bell for King Söngdök is unique in form. On the top of this bell is a dragon and the bell is hung by use of the hook attached to the dragon's waist. Beside the nook is a cylindrical pipe for sound adjustment. This pipe is not found in bells of other Asian countries. On the upper part of the bell are four rectangular breasts placed in symmetry, with each breast having nine lotus flower-shaped nipples. In other words, the four breasts have a total of 36 nipples. Below