

Painting of Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the Museo d'Arte Orientale Edoardo Chiossone in Genova, Italy

Prof. Dr. Woothak Chung
Dongguk University

As only eight out of a total of 160 Goryeo Buddhist paintings are housed in European museums, the discovery of a new Goryeo Buddhist painting, as one of the over 15,000 artworks that Edoardo Chiossone (1833-1889) donated to the city of Genova, should be considered a remarkable event.

This Painting of Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a masterpiece that contains delicate details and a composition and color harmony that are gentle but perfect. Although it is generally similar to other paintings of its kind created during from the Goryeo Dynasty, this painting shows unique characteristics of its own, including a pine tree facing the viewer on the top of the left side. This is the first example of a pine tree depicted in the painting of Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and, at the same time, it is the oldest painting of a pine tree in the history of Korean painting.

Goryeo Buddhist paintings tend to reveal their topics to the full. They seek to express the "beauty of stillness" with delicate details and exquisite harmony of lines, colors, forms and patterns. I believe that the delicacy of Goryeo Buddhist paintings can be attributable to their bold actuality, selected accessibility, and shared practical purpose.