

Seckel ■ Buddhist Art of East Asia

Center for East Asian Studies
Western Washington University

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Translated by Ulrich Mammitzsch

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Buddhist Art of East Asia

by

Dietrich Seckel

translated by Ulrich Mammitzsch



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Translator's Preface

The publication of an English translation of a work which was originally published thirty years ago requires some explanation. Professor Seckel's work has not only stood the test of time remarkably well, it has also remained the only attempt to date to provide a systematic survey of East Asian Buddhist art. This emphasis on the basic principles of this art constitutes the value of this study and ensures at the same time its relevance for years to come. To be sure, many individual works of Buddhist art have become better known to us during the thirty years which have elapsed since the German original appeared in 1957. Many particular details have been uncovered by students as part of the rapidly expanding scholarship in Buddhist art. Mention should also be made of the advances in color photography and reproduction which has also contributed in a significant manner towards acquainting us with the Buddhist art of East Asia.

Professor Seckel himself has continued to make significant contributions to this process. His survey of the historical development of Buddhist art, *Die Kunst des Buddhismus* (German original 1962, English translation 1964) has appeared in several translations and has become a standard work in its field. Two of his more recent studies, *Jenseits des Bildes* [Beyond the Icon] (1976) and *Buddhistische Tempelnamen in Japan* [Buddhist Temple Names in Japan] (1985) have explored two significant aspects relevant for this art in greater detail.

Treasures of Buddhist art from storehouses of Buddhist art, most notable among them the cave temples of Tun-huang, have become much more accessible to us through both detailed studies and magnificent color reproductions. But this greater familiarity which details has not forced major revisions in the findings presented by Professor Seckel thirty years ago. The work has remained the only comprehensive study of the principles underlying the Buddhist Art of East Asia. The publication of an English version, it is hoped, will enable us to put into the hands of our students a reliable guide to this art.

I have attempted to keep the English rendition as close as possible to the German original. Professor Seckel has added a few short paragraphs on Korean art and occasional minor changes in the wording of the text wherever this was deemed necessary in the light of more recent scholarship. But these changes do not in any substantial manner alter both content and conclusions of the 1957 version. There

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are also a few updated additions to the biographical section. It is hoped that this English version of Professor Seckel's study will become a welcome addition to the ever-growing English-language literature on Buddhist art and that it will take a place of distinction within this literature.

*Ulrich Mammitzsch
Bellingham, Washington
February, 1989*

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