

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COLOR IMAGE OF BUDDHISM IN KOREA, MONGOLIA, CHINA AND JAPAN

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ABSTRACT:

These days, people's interest in culture is higher than ever, and in response to such a current trend, each country is making efforts to search for its identity in various areas. In order to understand our own cultural characteristics properly, we need not only to conduct an in-depth study of our own culture but also to compare it with other cultures. From ancient times, Mongolia, Korea, China and Japan have had great influences on one another through active socio-cultural exchange,

especially through their common religious ties, and at the same time they have their own unique cultural characteristics. Therefore, this paper is intended to be a comparative study of the Image of the culture of Buddhism traditionally worshipped from old times in these countries and connecting their traditional cultures and customs. In particular, we have chosen color images that are more popular and common in design and other aspects of our life.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND NECESSITY

Recently, most countries of the world are striving to develop their economies and to enhance their national images (Korea Society of Color Studies, 2002). The international society is changing rapidly and is becoming more complex and diverse. In this diversified international society, the function of communication that facilitates exchange of information and meaning among nations is accentuated. There are many prominent characteristics of the international society of the twenty-first century. The most commonly cited features are globalization and the advent of information society (Kim Jinok, 2006). To cope with globalization, each country has to creatively convey the uniqueness of its culture, thereby enhancing its national image and carrying out successful marketing strategies. Therefore, successful management of the national image contributes to a country's prestige and economic development. It is for such a reason that interest in culture is increasing. Following the trend, countries are trying to redefine their identities. In diverse fields, they are actively carrying out researches that compare their culture with those of other countries.

Peoples of the world throughout their long histories have been continuously developing. Religion has been a constant feature of their development. From

primeval times, religious culture has played an important role in the lives of people and greatly affected traditional culture. As ancient philosophy or culture, religion has been the core of traditional cultures and arts. In particular, Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan have been engaged in active socio-cultural exchanges and have affected each other. The four countries boast unique cultural characteristics. Unfortunately, the cultural distinctiveness of Korea and Mongolia are not properly recognized by the world audience. All four countries have a long history of Buddhism and they share common religio-cultural traits. Westerners understandably have difficulties in comparing the cultures of the four countries. Amid similarities, however, there are many interesting differences in the religion and culture of these countries and the differences are the very ones that distinguish the national identities of these four countries.

Visual expression is one of the most important aspects of national image. In particular, color is the most prominent means of visual expression that captures the eyes and the imagination. Color also leaves a lasting impression. Color is also an important element of design that is constantly perceived and used by peoples around the world. It is a universal medium and the foundation of civilization. Color is a natural phenomenon. At the same time, it is a cultural phenomenon that is created through complex interactions among human, social, economic, technological, and environmental factors. Color is the most powerful visual element that affects human mood and emotion. It is for such reasons that color is widely used in products, ads, construction, and landscape engineering to visually express national images (Lim Kyong Ae, 2002)

By comparing the characteristics of Buddhist color images in Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan, which are based on the Buddhist culture, it is possible to reveal the similarities and differences of the national cultures of these countries. The findings from such research can contribute to a better understanding of the national culture and to establishing strategies to enhance the national image. This study includes Mongolian Buddhist cultural expression, which is often

unfortunately excluded in most studies of East Asian culture that center on Korea, China, and Japan. Considering the cultural and historical linkages that exist between Mongolia and the other three East Asian countries, an analysis of the color images of Buddhist culture and the art of all four countries will help better understand similarities and differences between the cultural and national identities of East Asia. This study may thus set a research trend—the inclusion of Mongolia when comparative analyses of East Asian cultures are conducted.

1.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE

This study purports to compare the religio-cultural characteristics of Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan, which have a long history of Buddhist culture, by focusing on color to identify the similarities and differences in the color images of these countries. Based on the findings, a Buddhist color palette, which can contribute to the establishment of national color image strategy, is proposed. The following are the relevant theoretical issues:

- (1) What is the definition of Buddhist culture and what is its historical background? What is the meaning of color in the definition?
- (2) What is the symbolic meaning of color in the Buddhist culture of Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan?
- (3) What are the similarities and differences between the Buddhist color symbols or images of these countries? And what are their respective characteristics?

1.3 RESEARCH METHOD AND SCOPE

The historical method is used to identify the characteristics of Buddhist culture and the meaning of color as well as the similarities and differences between the

Buddhist cultures of the four nations. The case study method is used to illustrate the characteristics of the Buddhist color images in each country.

This study explores the symbolic meaning of color in the context of Buddhist culture after defining it. The meaning of color in each country's Buddhist culture is examined by case studies. To propose a color combination palette of Buddhist color image, two works—in the fields of architecture, painting, sculpture, and costume— representing each country were analyzed.

In this study Buddhism was chosen because of its representative value among the religions of Asia. Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan were selected because they have long histories and are still clearly influenced by Buddhist culture. The Buddhist color scheme was proposed as a combination palette and the image scale of I.R.I color scheme was used to compare the works of these four countries to reveal the similarities and differences between their Buddhist color images.

2. THE COLOR IMAGE AND THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

2.1 IMAGE AND SYMBOLISM OF COLOR

Before defining color image, it is necessary to explain image. Humans perceive an object through a comprehensive evaluation of the data obtained through the senses. An image integrates and systematizes diverse information. In other words, an image is an association of ideas and feeling when humans think about or see an object. When talking about color, images or associations are the basic emotional characteristics when humans perceive a color and they are shared by the majority of people and are resistant to change (Moon Eun Bae, 2005).

Color impacts us as physical and emotional beings as well as members of a society. Many of the associations we make with color stem from things like what context we have seen the color in before and how the color is used in our cultural environment. We learn about color through language, mythology, literature, and social practice.

The country in which we live and the culture in which we were raised may have certain uses for particular colors, and we tend to absorb these as a part of our social learning. If you grow up in a society where most brides wear white, for example, you will likely come to connect the color white with purity, chastity, and even new beginnings. If you come from a Latin country where mourning is traditionally associated with purple, you will likely associate purple, on some level, with funerals.

Cultural color associations can spread to other cultures, and in today's world, which is more and more connected, this is a rising trend. For example, the color saffron-the reddish gold shade of the robes worn by Dalai Lama and other Buddhist monks-has taken on a meaning for many Westerners as both spiritual and exotic(Mimi Cooper, 2000).

The color scheme of an age or society reflects the spirit of the age and aspects of society. The color scheme shared within a civilization is a cultural product that is created by the interaction of all the elements of an age and society including natural factors such as the climate, thoughts and custom, the market and industries, materials and technology, and institutions and laws. Therefore, color is a medium that is resistant to attempts of objectification and standardization and is a sensitive factor that espouses relative values in the contexts of time and space. Color is a natural phenomenon. At the same time, however, color is a cultural phenomenon that is created by a complex combination of human, social, economic, technological, and environmental factors. Therefore, exploring the future of color

necessitates intensive examination and multidimensional discussions. The adoption of color and people's color preference are shaped by a nation or society's human and natural environments. And the culture of an age changes in connection with the paradigms of the social and natural sciences in it (Korea Society of Color Studies, 2002).

As stated above, color is present in all aspects of our life and we see and feel it everywhere. In this age of globalization and information, color plays an essential role in the transmission of information among nations. In other words, color plays a pivotal role in accentuating the image of each nation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the cultural characteristics of color in each country because it can be used in diverse fields and can uniquely reflect national images.

2.2 HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

Traditional culture, which is an important element that shapes the national image, is formed through long history and is closely related with religion. The traditional cultures of Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan are strongly influenced by Buddhism. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly review the history and characteristics of Buddhist culture. Buddhism refers to the teachings of the Buddha as well as the teachings that lead to the attainment of the Buddha hood. Buddha is a common name in Sanskrit and Pali referring to the enlightened. The word was commonly used in ancient India. Later, it was used as a proper noun to designate Sakyamuni. The Buddhist church organized missionary activities even during the lifetime of the Buddha. Its full-scale expansion, however, began after the Buddha's death. Around the first century of the Common Era, Buddhism spread to India and Sri Lanka and then to Southeast Asia. Through Tibet, Mongolia, and the regions bordering Western China, Buddhism arrived in China, Korea, and Japan. The sphere of Buddhism thus expanded and Buddhism was firmly established as a

world religion. The following are the characteristics of Buddhism that separate it from other religions.

- God or gods are not emphasized in Buddhism. After his death, Buddha was endowed with idealistic qualities such as absoluteness and limitlessness. Buddha became an agent of enlightenment and salvation. Buddha, however, is not a creator or conqueror.

- The spirit of Buddhism is represented by wisdom and compassion. It is also characterized by strong practicality.

- Calm, comfortable, and unshakable understanding called the nirvana is the ideal goal of Buddhism. The creed is based on Buddha's right views. The content of Buddhism, however, grew with the ages. It is commonly said that there are 84,000 writings of Buddha. The Buddhist belief therefore became diverse and complex. Buddha initially referred to Sakyamuni. After his death, however, discussions were made regarding Buddhas of the past and the future and Buddhas and bodhisattva of other worlds. As a result, Buddhism became "polytheistic" (100.naver.com, Encyclopedia). An important characteristic of Buddhism is the existence of rituals involving diverse Buddhist entities, which have been expressed in paintings and sculptures.

Throughout its long history, Buddhism has left many artistic masterpieces to the posterity. The works of Buddhist art, which share common themes, however differ because of the influence of traditional culture in each country and region.

2.3. THE COLOR AND THE NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHIST CULTURE AND ARTS

Buddhist culture, which began in ancient India, took hundreds of years to flourish in Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan. Today's Buddhist culture is an integration

of each country's nature, regional characteristics and traditional culture. Its long proud history left temples as well as works of sculpture and painting. The Buddhist culture and art that we have inherited differ depending on regional culture and national characteristics. A common set of Buddhist characteristics mark them. Through a review of the literature on Buddhism, the following differences in the areas of form and color were revealed.

Unformed members of the public, especially westerners, will not readily perceive differences in the Buddhist art of the four countries. However, Buddhist art in the fields of architecture, painting, sculpture, and industrial arts reveal many differences. Korean Buddhist art is characterized by elegance and simplicity. For instance, *buncheongsagi* (grayish-blue-powdered celadon) appears to be made effortlessly. The celadon, however, expresses simple beauty.

Japanese art is characterized by an emphasis on decoration, practicality, and realism. Buddha's statues in Japan, unlike in China and Korea, are vivid and threatening. In the case of the statues of famous monks, realism is apparent. At times, the statues are marked with exaggeration. Because Japanese painting and sculpture originated from China and Korea, earlier Japanese works are characterized by continental influences.

Chinese Buddhist art, which has played a leading role in Northeast Asia since the ancient times, is characterized by diversity, and elements of Korean and Japanese art can be found in it. The art of ancient China was based on China's myths, legends, and Confucian thought. Buddhist art flourished during the period of Southern and Northern dynasties. China's landscape painting emerged during Song dynasty. The differences between Korean, Chinese, and Japanese culture are also reflected in the realm of food. It is said that Korean food is for "health," Chinese food is for "taste," and Japanese food is for "look" (Kwon Young Geol, 2006).

Initially, Mongolia's Buddhist art was strongly influenced by Tibet. Since the 17th century, the works of Zanabazar began to display unique characteristics of Mongolian Buddhist art. Mongolian Buddhist art emphasizes splendor and ornamental qualities in contrast with the Buddhist art of Korea and Japan. Such a trait is evident in *tanga*, *tara*, and *mandala*. Mongolians have a strong preference for primary colors. Probably because the color world of the Mongols is marked by primary colors--the sky, green land, and the white and the gray that changes with the seasons, the preference for vivid colors probably emerged (Shiba Ryutaru, 1993).

In traditional Chinese sculpture, the use of color is variegated and the changes in color tone, value, and saturation are volatile. In contrast, Korean sculpture maintained a unified system of colors and extreme contrast is less widespread in comparison with Chinese and Japanese sculpture. In contrast with Korean and Chinese Buddhist art, Japanese Buddhist art is characterized by a wide use of achromatic colors. Strong contrast is used for clarity and emphasis (Kwon Young Geol, 2006).

3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BUDDHIST COLOR IMAGES BY COUNTRIES

3.1. EXTRACTION OF COLOR SCHEMES OF KOREA, MONGOLIA, CHINA AND JAPAN

3.1.1. THE METHOD OF COLOR SCHEME EXTRACTION

As said above, national characteristics are evident in Buddhist cultural realms: architecture, painting, sculpture, and clothing. To analyze the characteristics of

Buddhist color images, a Buddhist color scheme was extracted. The following method was used.

A Buddhist color image palette of Korea (K), China (C), and Japan (J) was extracted from architecture (A), Buddhist painting (P), Buddhist sculpture (S), and clothing (C), which strongly reflect Buddhist culture. The following steps were followed to extract the Buddhist colors.

First, the images of architecture, painting, sculpture, and clothing that reflect Buddhist colors in each country were found from the following websites:

- www.buddhist-artofjapan.com, www.buddhistmuseum.com

- www.buddhanet.net, www.asianart.com, www.pep.com.cn

- www.anderart.jp, www.onmarkproductions.com

- www.tnm.go.jp/en/gallery/index.html, www.zanabazar.mn

- www.orientalarchitecture.com, www.emuseum.jp Etc.

Second, to extract the basic colors, Photoshop CS was used to resize the images to 500 pixels and 24 squares were chosen as the cell size of Filter-Pixelate-Mosaic.

Third, the extracted basic colors were compared with the colors of the originals by the naked eye. They were then compressed to make basic figures. The forms of the main colors, supplementary colors, and colors for emphasis were analyzed.

Fourth, based on the analysis of forms, proportional relationship of colors was used for the combination palette of colors. (Table 1)

Color analysis phase				Combination palette
				

Table 1: Example of Color Extraction

3.1.2. EXTRACTION OF COLOR PALETTE BY COUNTRY

The Buddhist Color Combination palette of Korea, Mongolia, China and Japan was extracted and the results are shown in tables 2, 3, 4, 5 respectively by country.

I. Extraction of Color Palette of Korean Buddhism

	KA	KP	KS	KC
Color				
Image	Beobjusa temple, Chungbuk.(Silla– Era)	YongSangheSangDu, (Jeoson–Era)	MugjuNahanSang, (Jeoson–Era)	Monk’s costume of TaeHan Buddhism
Color				
Image	Bulguksa Temple, Gyeonju. (Silla–Era)	Amati Busal, (Jeoson –Era)	Kuanem Busal, (Jeoson–Era)	Monk’s costume of TaeHan Buddhism

Table 2: Extraction of Color Combination Palette of Korea

II. Extraction of Color Palette of Mongolian Buddhism

	MA	MP	MS	MC
Color				
Image	ErdeneZuu Monastery, Laviran Temple, 16th century	The Vajra Mandala, 19th century	Vajrasattva, 17th century	Head lama of the Dambaravjaalin, ErdeneZuu Monastery
Color				
Image	Gandan Monastery, Main Gate. 1835	The Eight Stupas, 17–18th century	Amitayus, Buddha. 18th century	Amarbayasgalant Monastery, Young Lama

Table 3: Extraction of Color Combination Palette of Mongolia

III. Extraction of Color Palette of Chinese Buddhism

	CA	CP	CS	CC
Color				
Image	Confucian Temple, Main Hall, Suzhou.	PictureScrollDepicting Ceremony, Ming Era	Goddess of Mercy, 14th century	Monk of Shaolin Monastery
Color				
Image	Temple of Heaven, Beijing, 15th century	Vajra van, Qing Era	FourarmedManjusri, Ming Era	Head Monk of Monastery

Table 4: Extraction of Color Combination Palette of China

IV. Extraction of Color Palette of Japanese Buddhism


	JA	JP	JS	JC
Color				
Image	Sensoji Temple, Tokyo.7th century	Buddhist Scroll, Edo Era,	Buddhist Statue, 18th century	Monk of Buddhist School
Color				
Image	Todai-ji Temple, Nara. Tempyo Period	KokuzoBosatsu (Akasagarbha). Kamakura Period,	StandingAmida Nyorai Kamakura Period,	Monk of Buddhist Temple

Table 5: Extraction of Color Combination Palette of Japan

3.2. A COMPARISON OF BUDDHIST COLOR COMBINATION IMAGE BY COUNTRY

3.2.1. A COMPARISON TOOL FOR COLOR COMBINATION IMAGE

In this paper, the color image analysis is performed with combination color images rather than single color images. The reason is that not only the design colors but also whole things in nature exists in combinations of 3, 4 or more colors rather than in a single color. Therefore, we performed the color analysis using the Combination Image Scale and Keyword Image Scale from I.R.I (Image Research Institute). Although there are many tools for color image analysis, we chose this tool based on the fact that, firstly, designed in Korea, thus it may have the advantage of having Asian characteristics; secondly it is simple to use; and lastly this tool is deigned to be used by specialists.

Below is shown a Combination and Keyword Image Scale (Fig1), which has 4 axes: Soft, Hard, Dynamic and Static and their corresponding characteristics expressed with adjectives. A single adjective or keyword should be understood as having its meaning spreading and loosening ripples rather than as a fixed point (IRI Image Research Institute, 2003).

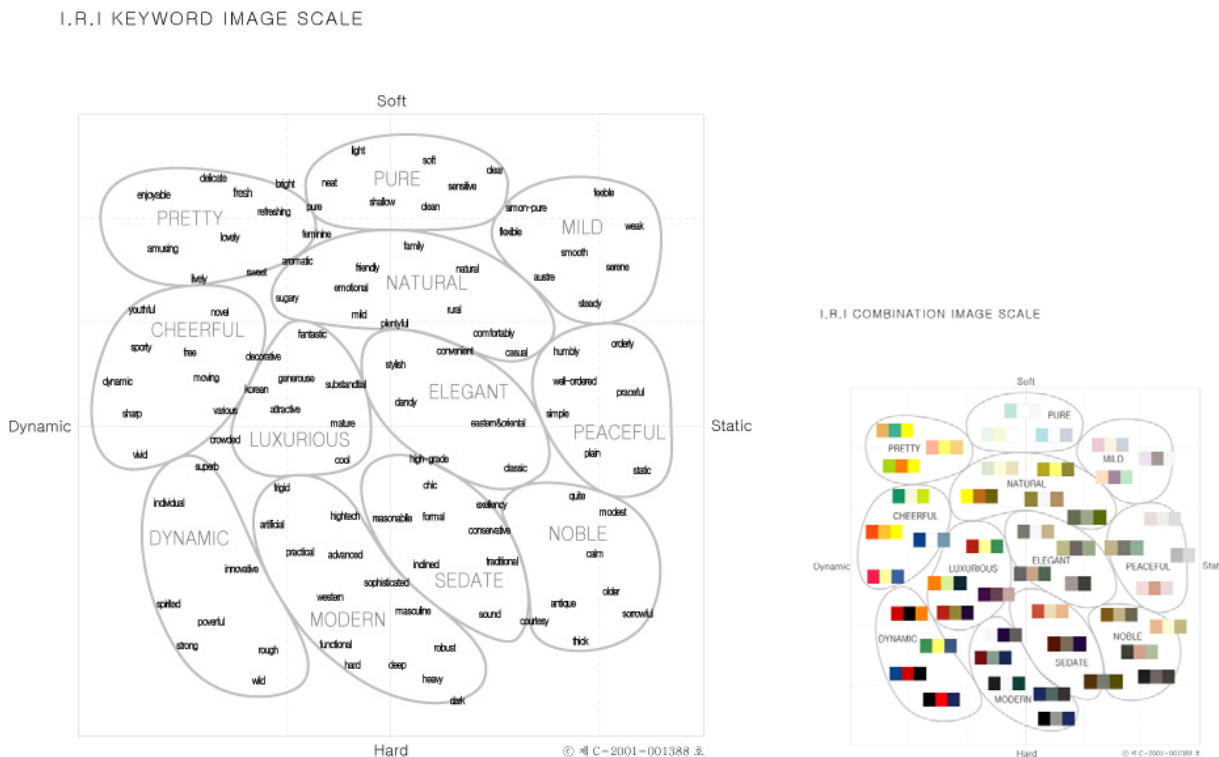


Figure1: I.R.I Keyword & Combination Image Scale

3.2.2. THE BUDDHIST COLOR COMBINATION IMAGE BY COUNTRY

The extracted Buddhist color combinations were treated with the I.R.I Combination image scale and the I.R.I Keyword image scale for an analysis of the Buddhist combination images in each country. The I.R.I keyword image scale was based on the keywords dynamic, static, soft, and hard. Spatially, its 12 parts were each labelled as pure, pretty, natural, mild, elegant, pale, noble, sedate, modern, luxurious, dynamic, or cheerful. Each of these 12 keyword categories consisted of

more detailed adjectives that numbered 106 in total. For instance the pure image consisted of soft, light, tender, shallow, neat, delicate, sensitive, and clean. Using the adjectives, Buddhist color combination images of Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan were analyzed.

The Korean Buddhist combination image is characterized by a tilt toward static and hard in the I.R.I keyword image scale and prominence of elegant, noble, and genteel images. Color tone contrast overall maintained unified color tone marked by genteel and calm images and was less complex than that of the other countries. In the case of Mongolia, the color scheme was less elaborate than that of China. However, strong color tone contrast with high color saturation and color value was used to convey a dynamic image. The Buddhist art of Mongolia and China, which were influenced by Tibetan Buddhist art, is characterized by wide use of brilliant and complex circular forms that are yellow, red, or blue. China's Buddhist color combination is marked by splendid, cheerful and dynamic images. Of the four countries, Japan stood rather apart with a Buddhist color combination characterized by an overall hard and dark impression that was influenced by a modern-type of color arrangement (Fig 2). In the IRI Keyword Image Scale by color line the Buddhist Color Image has illustrated Korea as a green, Mongolia as a blue, China as an orange, and Japan as a dark green color, respectively.

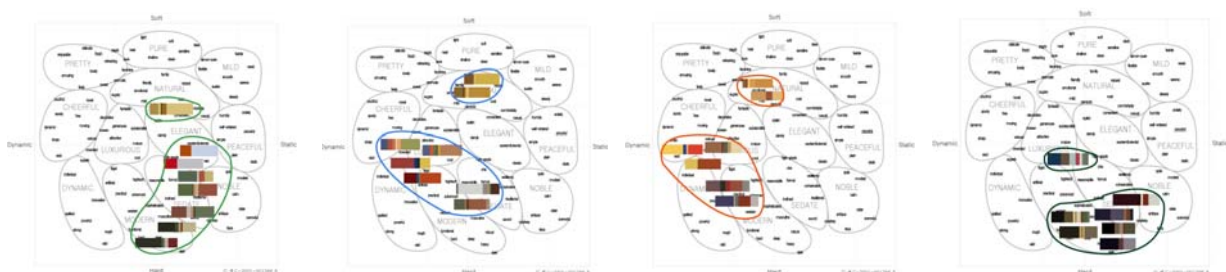


Figure2. I.R.I Keyword Image Scale by Country

3.3. A COMPARISON OF BUDDHIST COLOR COMBINATION IMAGE IN KOREA, CHINA, JAPAN, AND MONGOLIA

The result of the comparison of Buddhist combination images in Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan using the I.R.I keyword image scale is shown in (Fig 3). Actual use of colors may differ depending upon the area, region, or Buddhist group. However, the analysis of the representative works from Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan reveal the following characteristics about Buddhist combination images in these countries. Korea's Buddhist combination images are elegant, noble, and genteel. Those of Mongolia are uniquely dynamic. The images of China are similar to those of Mongolia but are more diverse and splendid. Japan's Buddhist combination arrangement tends to be heavier and harder than that of the other countries.

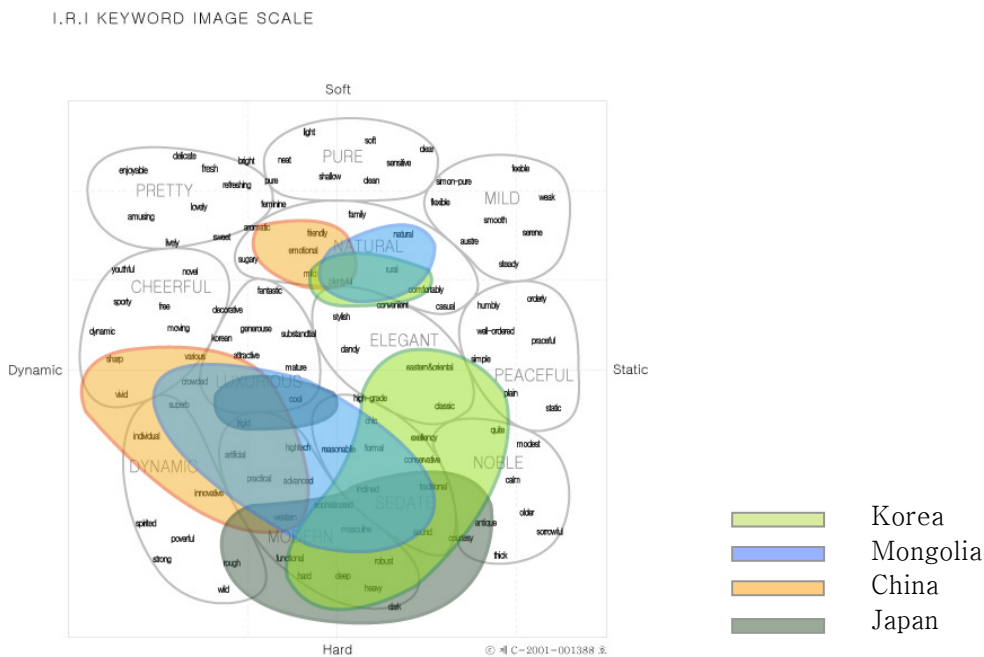


Figure3. A Comparison of Buddhist Color Combination Image by Country

As for the I.R.I combination image scale, Korean and Japanese Buddhist color combinations largely overlap in scale space and convey a heavy, genteel image. Chinese and Mongolian color combinations also overlap and are characterized by more splendid dynamic images in comparison with those of Korea and Japan. The Korea and Japan pair can be contrasted with the Mongolia and China pair. This means that Buddhist art expression was influenced by geographical proximity. China initially received Buddhism from ancient India. But China was also strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. The clothing of Chinese monks is yellow or red as in the case of that of Dalai Lama, Tibet's highest monk. Mongolian Buddhism, spread from Tibet, and Mongolian monks use yellow, orange, and red for their clothing. Under the strong influence of traditional shamanism that worshipped the heaven, Mongolian Buddhism is also characterized by wide use of blue color with high color saturation and color value. Another idiosyncratic trait of Chinese Buddhist art is its diverse, jovial and splendid images with relatively high color saturation and color value. And in the Mongolian Buddhist color combination, color saturation tends to be high whereas most images are of low color values. For emphasis, however, colors with high color values are used. As a result the Mongolian color scheme is less complex and brilliant than that of China.

A comparison of Korean and Japanese Buddhist color combination images shows that there is a considerable overlap of the two countries in the scale space. However, Korea's Buddhist color combination tends to be less heavy, relatively lighter, more elegant, simpler, and commonplace than that of Japan. The clothing of Korean Buddhist monks is gray, which is simpler than that of the other countries. Gray is used to seek emancipation from human needs and to follow the path of the Buddha. In Japan, gray is also used but the gray of Japanese Buddhist clothing is heavier and darker. Japan's Buddhist combination image is deep, genteel, and hard. In contrast with Japan is China's Buddhist color combination has a preference for dynamic, diverse, brilliant, and cheerful colors.

(Fig 4) shows that Korea, Mongolia, and China overlap in the scale space in the natural part. A closer look shows that the colors were extracted from the works of Buddhist sculpture. Works of Buddhist sculpture are often coated in gold or other metals. Even wooden works are coated in gold. The color of the coated metal was categorized as “natural” in the extraction process. The original image of gold—shiny, splendid, etc.—was therefore lost. The color image of Buddhist sculpture in Korea, Mongolia, and China is mostly brilliant and elegant. In contrast, that of Japan tends to be heavy and solid.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study Buddhist color combination palettes from Korea, Mongolia, China, and Japan were extracted and were analyzed with the I.R.I color combination and adjective image scale. The analysis shows that considerable similarities and differences reflecting influences from specific branches of Buddhism, traditional and cultural factors, and environmental factors can be found. The images tended to coalesce at the antique part and the dynamic, static, and hard parts of the I.R.I Keyword image scale. The results show that Korea and Japan tended to pair up as in the case of China and Mongolia. The following are the characteristics of the Buddhist color combination images of each country.

The Korean scheme displayed genteel, sedate and plain images. Under the influence of Korean philosophy, traditional culture, and traditional colors, the Korean Buddhist color scheme also tends to be simple, elegant, and beautiful. Of the four countries, the use of green was most prevalent in Korea. Green represents Buddha’s land and the nurturing of beautiful flowers amid polluted water. As a result, warm, natural, elegant, and genteel images prevailed.

Second, the color combination of Japanese Buddhism, like that of Korea, was noble and genteel. Overall, however, it was darker and heavier than that of Korea and conveyed solid and hard images. Furthermore, the Japanese Buddhist color combination was characterized by modern, minimalistic use of color.

Third, of the four countries, China's Buddhist color combination was the most diverse, brilliant, and cheerful. High color saturation and color value were used to impact high contrast. The result was a dynamic image.

Fourth, in the area of image scale, the Mongolia Buddhist color combination appeared to be similar to that of China. The contrast, however, was less accentuated than that of China. Furthermore, although color saturation was high, monochrome with relatively lower color value was used. Overall, the Mongolian Buddhist color combination displays the brilliant and active life style of nomads as well as noble and progressive images.

In this study, two works of architecture, painting, sculpture, and clothing from each of the countries which were the most representative of Buddhist color images were used. Future studies could be based on more diverse objects. Or a more detailed comparative analysis could be implemented by using the categories of main color, sub color and accent color.

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