Red symbolizes summer. The symbolism originates from the traditional “five directional colors” based on the ancient Chinese thought of wuxing, or ohaeng in Korean. The five colors were associated with seasons and other phenomena in nature, including the fate of humans. The cover features the artefacts from the ancient kingdom of Silla, that were on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York recently. For more stories on this, see p. 12.
Ssireum, Korean Wrestling

Ssireum is a Korean folk wrestling game where two contestants grapple for dominance, grasping each other by the belt, or satba (a length of cloth wrapped around the waist and thighs), while using various techniques to gain control over the opponent. The one who lifts up, knocks down, or pushes the other contestant out of the ring wins the game.

Historical records and scholarly research indicate that this indigenous contact sport has been around since ancient times. Ssireum images are featured on mural paintings from the Goguryeo Kingdom. Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms) records that General Kim Yu-sin and Prince Chunchu had their coat strings torn off during a wrestling match. Scholars in Korea and Japan confirm that Korean folk wrestling was disseminated to Japan. Korean wrestling was also enjoyed during the Joseon Dynasty, as noted in Joseon wangjo sillok (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) and Nanjung ilgi (War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin).

After a nationwide wrestling competition held in Seoul in October 1912 and the First Joseon Wrestling Game in 1927, diverse variations of ssireum competitions have been held throughout the country until the present.
KOREAN HERITAGE

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Emergence and Advancement of Confucian Academies
Boosted by Neo-Confucianism

Text by Park Jin-jae (Ph. D.), Korea Seowon Association
Photos by Oh Jong-eun, Sosu Museum & Hamyang Museum

Upholding the principles of Neo-Confucianism, Confucian academies not only took responsibility for local education in the Korean countryside but also came to serve as political strongholds for scholars during the Joseon Dynasty. Their spiritual legacies still hold relevance for the contemporary world.
Emergence of Confucian Academies

Seowon, private Confucian academies, first appeared during the early Joseon period, established and championed by the rural literati, or sarim, a term that means, literally, “a group of scholars.” Sarim were a new social and political force that emerged as a foil to the entrenched power of the learned nobility, or sadaebu, who played a leading role in the establishment of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Although they professed to follow the lofty ideal of valuing both intellectual achievement and good governance, sadaebu started to abuse their power, fomenting political conflicts and breeding corruption after ushering in the new dynasty of Joseon.

The sarim, which was a faction of the sadaebu, were steeped in the same scholarly tradition of Neo-Confucianism, but soon found themselves at odds with the establishment’s learned nobility. They retreated to the rural areas after the founding of the Joseon Dynasty and focused on enhancing academic capacity and nurturing new generations of scholars. The rural literati as a social group were not based on hereditary titles but on individual capacities.

The failure of the local education system also created an environment conducive to the emergence of seowon. Driven by the need to produce bureaucrats, the royal court of Joseon established central and local educational institutions. But the local schools, hyanggyo, were dysfunctional, bogged down by teachers and curricula lacking in quality and substance. Alternative educational institutions based in rural areas were sorely needed. Under these circumstances, seowon filled the educational void, led by the rural literati who pursued a more liberal and at the same time in-depth study of Neo-Confucianism as the foundation of education.

Advancement of Confucian Academies

The role of seowon expanded alongside the rise of the sarim’s political influence. As the rural literati grew into a major political force, seowon as their academic bases developed into strongholds for social and political activities. In the archives of seowon today are found visitors’ books containing brief personal information on guests, which show that scholars who visited seowon came not only from the vicinity but also from far-flung areas. Scholars from various regions assembled in seowon and solidified social bonds; thus these local Confucian academies became lively centers for social and cultural activities.

History of Confucian Academies

The first seowon was built in 1543 by Ju Se-bung, the magistrate of Punggi, to honor the prominent scholar An Hyang (1243–1306), who introduced Neo-Confucianism from China in the late Goryeo period. Ju built Munseongsa Shrine in 1542 on the old site of Susuksa Temple in An’s hometown, Sunheung, Gyeongsang-do Province. The following year he constructed a separate structure next to it as a study space; together they were called Baegundong Seowon. Baegundong Seowon was built to complement the function of the state local education system. Later it became the first royally authorized seowon. In 1550, King Myeongjong bestowed to it a nameplate carved with the new name Sosu Seowon in the king’s handwriting, upon the request of Yi Hwang (1501–1570), who was the foremost Neo-Confucian philosopher of the time.

The development of private Confucian academies in Korea are divided into three stages: emergence in the 16th century, development in the 17th century, and decline after the 18th century. During the emergence stage, seowon gained recognition from the state as educational institutions and solidified their capacity, laying the foundation for future development. Sosu Seowon was the first to be endowed with a new name from the king during this period, followed by Imgo Seowon.
in Yeongcheon (1554), Namgye Seowon in Hamyang (1566), Oksan Seowon in Gyeongju (1574), Sungyang Seowon in Kaesong (1575), and Dosan Seowon in Andong (1575). A rich trove of historical materials provide detailed records on the organization and operation of local Confucian academies during this period.

The development stage saw seowon multiply in number and spread throughout the country. Private Confucian academies began to spring up in the southeastern province of Gyeongsang-do, and then expanded to the southwestern and middle sections of the country and to the northern province of Hamkyong-do. During this period, a number of shrines commemorating Confucian sages were constructed under the different title sao, which was not distinct from seowon in their purposes and functions. The number of seowon peaked to about 900 towards the latter Joseon era, resulting in natural side-effects of rapid expansion: deterioration in quality of education at local academies accompanied by social and political problems as the sarim suffered reversal of fortunes.

A restriction was imposed by the state on the construction of private academies in the 18th century, and some existing ones were torn down. Confucian academies continued to be built irrespective of the significance of the sage to be honored or of educational purposes. The restriction culminated in a blanket closure in 1871 when all the seowon throughout the country, except for 47, were abolished based on the “one seowon for one sage” principle under orders from the royal regent Prince Heungseon (1820–1898).

Spiritual Legacies of Confucian Academies

Although many private Confucian academies were demolished, their spiritual legacies still bear implications for the modern world. Seowon were the space where competent scholars of character were nurtured during the Joseon Dynasty and those that survived, or had been revived, continue to serve as the bailiwick of education founded on ethics and morals in the present day.

Seowon’s educational focus on nurturing character and personal virtue in addition to academic capacity fosters precious spiritual values for contemporary and future generations. In the 1900s, private Confucian academies demolished in the late 19th century started to be restored, and there are currently about 640 of them throughout the country. Confucian academies are striving to revive and reinterpret the philosophical principles and teachings of the Confucian sages.

As the embodiment of the Confucian cosmology, seowon were not only educational institutions and ritual places but also were the center of a community operating diverse activities in such areas as publishing, arts, and politics, where scholars gathered together and raised public voices. For these reasons, seowon are a significant part of Korea’s tangible and intangible legacies, which have to be protected and transmitted well into the future.
The exhibition of cultural works from the Silla Kingdom at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was a chance to present to the world remarkable artistic achievements of the kingdom, which flourished for 1,000 years. The exhibition was highly acclaimed by visitors. One of the world’s four largest museums with an annual number of visitors reaching six million, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York spent five years in the preparation of this special exhibition. Their Korean counterparts were the National Museum of Korea and “the Gyeongju National Museum”, which assisted transporting 132 objects to New York, including 10 National Treasures and 14 Treasures.

A small state in the southeastern region of the Korean Peninsula called Silla rose to preeminence and ultimately accomplished the unification of the peninsula. Historical records indicate that the kingdom thrived for about 1,000 years, from 57 B.C. to A.D. 935. After adopting Buddhism as the national religion in 527, Silla gave rise to a splendid Buddhist culture; a unique aesthetic flourished after the unification of the peninsula, which integrated and reinterpreted diverse cultural elements from the unified proto-states of Silla, Goguryeo and Baekje. Races of cultural flowering remain intact in the kingdom’s capital, in present-day Gyeongju. The 13th-century history Samguk yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) comments that in Gyeongju Buddhist temples were as many as stars in the sky and Buddhist pagodas lined the mountainsides like formations of wild geese in flight.

Showcasing a Multifaceted Kingdom

The exhibition was divided into three sections. The first section featured singular works of gold, considered a distinctive achievement characteristic of Silla culture. The kingdom’s gold culture was widely renowned; in ancient Japan people referred to Silla as a “dazzling country of gold and silver.” During the Silla period, dead royals were buried in a stone mound as high as more than 20 meters along with diverse ornaments including a gilt crown. This burial practice contributed to a large quantity of precious metal artifacts remaining intact today. The exhibition presented decorative artifacts excavated from royal burials from the fourth to the sixth centuries. The gold and jade crown found in the north mound of Hwangnamdaechong Tomb in Gyeongju (National Treasure No. 191), the oldest of the five excavated

Silla, a Country of Gold
An Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Text by the National Museum of Korea
Photos by the National Museum of Korea & Yoon Sang-deok, Curator, National Museum of Korea

An exhibition, Silla: Korea’s Golden Kingdom, was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City from October 29, 2013, to February 23, 2014, featuring artifacts exemplifying the spectacular culture of the ancient Korean kingdom.
from Silla burials, suggests a prototypical gold crown of Silla with jade decorations and emblematic motifs of three tree branches and two antlers. One of the most splendid exhibits was a pair of golden earrings excavated from Bubuchong Tomb (National Treasure No. 90). It was crafted through the granulation process where the surface of the earrings were covered with gold grains. The gold crown from Geumgwanchong Tomb (National Treasure No. 87) was fashioned in the shape of a flying bird.

The second section highlighted the dynamism of Silla’s external exchanges. Despite its location in the southeastern rump of the Korean Peninsula, Silla was not an isolated kingdom: it never stopped welcoming new cultural influences from outside and disseminating its own outwards. Its reach extended not only to neighboring China and Japan but also to far-flung countries in Western and Central Asia. Uninterrupted contact with other countries enriched Silla culture. The dagger excavated from Gyerim-ro (Treasure No. 635) and Roman glass vessels that were on display at the exhibition are evidence of cultural exchanges with Western and Central Asia. Uninterrupted contact with other countries enriched Silla culture. The dagger excavated from Gyerim-ro (Treasure No. 635) and Roman glass vessels that were on display at the exhibition are evidence of cultural exchanges with Western and Central Asia. Adorned with impressive motifs, the golden dagger was crafted in the style which was popular in Central Asia incorporating Roman cloisonné technique in the fifth century.

Royal burial sites invariably yielded glass vessels along with a gold crown, which is interpreted by scholars as evidence of the symbolic significance of glass vessels to the ruler. Also included in the exhibition were stone and earthen human figurines with Western features, further indications of far-reaching exchanges after the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Tang sancai ceramics, imported from China, were part of the exhibition. Dating to the early period of the Tang Dynasty during the seventh to the eighth centuries, sancai ceramics were triple-glazed, distinctive for their greenish, yellowish, and reddish colors. These luxurious Chinese ceramicware characterized trade between Silla and Tang after the seventh century.

The third section focused on Buddhist art from the era after unification. After being adopted as the state religion during the reign of King Beopheung in 527, Buddhism wielded a significant influence on social customs, material culture, and burial practices, becoming a driving force for the creation of a new aesthetic tradition. Buddhist arts in Silla blended the artistic styles of China and India with Silla’s unique aesthetic, leaving a splendid legacy imprinted with the pan-Asian characteristics of Buddhism. Displayed in the exhibition were a gilt-bronze bodhisattva statue seated in the pensive pose, green-glazed bricks, Buddha plates excavated from Anapji Pond on the royal gardens in Gyeongju, floral patterned burned bricks, the reliquary from the west pagoda of Gameunsa Temple, and a cast-gold Buddha statue excavated from the three-story stone pagoda on the Hwangboksa Temple site in Gyeongju.

The stars of the exhibition were the gilt-bronze sculpture of a pensive bodhisattva (National Treasure No. 83) and the iron seated Buddha sculpture. Estimated to originate in the eighth century, the 150-centimeter-high iron Buddha sculpture has not yet been designated by the state, but its artistry and aesthetic are comparable with the gilt-bronze pensive bodhisattva sculpture. Iron Buddha sculptures are hard to find in Japan and China, and iron craftsmanship came into being as late as in the 18th century in Europe.
It is more difficult to work with pure gold than bronze, which explains the rarity of the cast-gold statue of the seated Buddha excavated from the Hwangboksa Temple site (National Treasure No. 79).

It was the third time for the gilt-bronze pensive bodhisattva statue to be exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; it was earlier shown there in 1957 and in 1981. For this third exhibition, the Cultural Heritage Administration had earlier refused to allow taking this bodhisattva statue to New York out of concern about possible damage, but ultimately, approval was given at the last minute. Security was beefed up for the protection of this object during the exhibition.

**Ancient Arts and Digital Magic**

A notable aspect of this exhibition was the deployment of digital technology in displaying ancient art works. On entering the exhibition hall, visitors immediately found themselves in the middle of video projected images of Hwangnamdaechong Tomb, as though they had time-travelled 1,500 years back and stood in front of the ancient tomb in Silla. In addition, a range of modern technologies were used to aid understanding of ancient culture, including the three-dimensional magnifier that rotates 360 degrees to enable one to look at every detail of the golden earrings and a 3-D film on the aesthetics and science of Seokguram Grotto, the crowning achievement of Buddhist art by the Silla Kingdom at the peak of its flowering.

**Rapturous Media Reception**

The Wall Street Journal commented with wonderment on the pensive bodhisattva, “But though he is seated, the figure is not static ... It is as though we have happened on him just as he was responding with his body to an insight that filled his mind.” The newspaper also observed, “... there is no identifiable Silla “look” except for the goldwork. This probably explains why Silla is less well-known in the U.S. than Korea’s later Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), with its strong association with porcelain, buncheong pottery and Confucian-themed court paintings. “Silla: Korea’s Golden Kingdom” will help change that.”

Earlier than the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times raved about the Korean Buddhist artworks on display: “They obviously learned from Indian and Chinese examples, but the leap from the comparatively primitive works to these pieces of world-class sophistication is dumbfounding.” The Times added, “Here, a fascinating short video gives a tour of [Seokguram Grotto] and shows, by digital animation, how it was put together. After seeing it, you might experience an irresistible urge to book a trip to Gyeongju.”

The Metropolitan Museum of Art confirmed that about 200,000 people came to see the cultural objects of the Silla Kingdom, the highest attendance among its exhibitions held in the autumn and winter seasons. Even more astonishing is that more than 80 percent of the exhibition visitors were Americans, not Koreans living in the United States.
Hwaseong Fortress : A Great King’s Legacy
Sought to Build Strong Royal Power

Text by Kim Dong-hun, Professor, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Design, Hongik University
Photos by Joo Myung-duck & Lee Dong-Jun

The biggest force that drove Great King Jeongjo to build Hwaseong Fortress was his desire for strong royal power. Construction was carried out guided by three principles set down by the king: he emphasized deliberateness—going slow, a modest profile, and strong construction.

Born out of Adversity

A hero does not live for himself, but sacrifices himself for others. When he is the ruler, we call him a “great king” and strive to emulate his lessons. Throughout Korean history, there are four monarchs who have come to be called great kings: Great King Munmu, the 30th ruler of Silla, who achieved the unification of Korea; Great King Gwangaeto, the 19th ruler of Goguryeo, who recovered the Liaodong Peninsula and expanded the kingdom’s territory; Great King Sejong, the 4th ruler of Joseon, who invented the Korean alphabet, Hangeul; and the 22nd monarch of Joseon (1392–1910), Great King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800), who can be regarded as a mentor for enlightened governance for the contemporary generation.

Named Yi San (adult name Hyeongun; pen name Hongjae), King Jeongjo was born to Crown Prince Sado and Lady Hyegyeong. As a child, he witnessed his father’s tragic death—an unjust death, locked inside a rice chest—and realized that chronic conflicts between different political factions were what put his father to death. This is why he made life-long endeavors to mind his words and acts. Striving to sharpen judgment through indirect experience from reading the classics, King Jeongjo protected himself from political turbulence. He took every caution in dealing with people and never stopped making efforts to be agile both mentally and physically.

Construction of Hwaseong Fortress

Succeeding his grandfather to the throne, King Jeongjo posthumously promoted Crown Prince Sado and Lady Hyegyeong. As a child, he witnessed his father’s tragic death—an unjust death, locked inside a rice chest—and realized that chronic conflicts between different political factions were what put his father to death. This is why he made life-long endeavors to mind his words and acts. Striving to sharpen judgment through indirect experience from reading the classics, King Jeongjo protected himself from political turbulence. He took every caution in dealing with people and never stopped making efforts to be agile both mentally and physically.

King Jeongjo had several reasons in mind when he embarked on the construction of Hwaseong Fortress. He wished to put an end to political partisanship and to usher in an era of political innovation by building a new seat of power in the fortress. Easy access to the transferred site of his father’s tomb, Yungneung, was also one of the reasons. But what propelled the king the most was his desire to strengthen royal power. Capital politics had been dominated by the political faction backed by powerful merchants; therefore, the king wished to build a new commercial stronghold in Hwaseong, a traffic hub which could...
Principles of Construction

King Jeongjo set down his primary principles to guide the construction of Hwaseong Fortress: first, be slow; second, be modest; and third, be strong. He emphasized that fortress should not be built in haste and not be made splendid, and must be based on a solid foundation. The king also cared about the welfare of workers who were mobilized for the construction. People were scrupulously paid wages for their labor, and it is recorded that those who worked only half a day also received money. Laborers were ordered to take days off when it was too hot or too cold. To encourage them, the king used to give them gifts of alcohol and snacks. He also gave away fans and hats for protection against heat and sun and invigorating medicines on hot summer days. These measures were an innovative practice at that time, when people mobilized for state construction were callously treated and never dreamed of paid labor.

What is notable is that laborers were granted not only rights but also given duties and responsibilities. For each construction area, information on who did what and who was responsible for supervision was marked on stone, so that the person in charge faced due punishment for problems with the construction.

Western technology and knowledge were benchmarked for the construction of Hwaseong Fortress; equipment for lifting and transferring heavy materials was invented, helping reduce the days needed for construction. The most important material, stone, was quarried from the adjacent mountain Sukjisan; roof tiles and bricks were produced in a kiln built near the construction site; and timber mostly came from Anmyeondo Island on the western coast of the Korean Peninsula and some from Gangwon-do Province in the north.

Driven by his passion to establish a secure and safe city, King Jeongjo took another innovative measure: an attempt to establish a self-sufficient city. State-run paddy fields called danjeon were created in the vicinity of the fortress to supply rice to those residing in the fortress. To provide water to irrigate the fields, reservoirs were built to the west and to the south of the fortress, named Chukmanje and Mannyeonje. It is recorded that a reservoir was made to the east of the fortress as well, but its site has not been confirmed. This may explain why Korea’s Rural Development Administration had been long based in Suwon until recently. King Jeongjo was known to directly take care of ordinary people’s concerns: people lined the street where the king passed on his visits to his father’s tomb in order to speak to him about their personal concerns, and the king listened and addressed them.

In 1801, Hwaseong seongyeok uigwe (Royal Protocol on the Construction of Hwaseong Fortress) was compiled. Encompassing details on the construction plan, methods, and equipment, personal details on laborers, salary calculation methods, budget, the sources and uses of materials, and methods of processing materials. These records serve as a milestone in architectural history and have intrinsic historical value. Recognition was given by UNESCO when the royal protocols of Joseon including the volume on the construction of Hwaseong were registered in the Memory of the World in July 2007. The fortress itself was inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in December 1997 and has been under national management as Historic Site No. 3, Paldalmun Gate and Hwaseomun Gate, the south and west entrances of the fortress, are also designated National Treasure No. 402 and National Treasure No. 403. €}
An Incised Meander with a Breathtaking Landscape

Hoeryongpo Village

Hoeryongpo Village lies enclosed in the crook of a meandering stream, renowned for its natural beauty, painted with different colors with each change of seasons. The beauty of the village is completely revealed from the nearby hillside observatory Hoeryongdae Pavilion, which presents an unparalleled view of the village.

Originating in Mt. Taebaeksan, the Nakdonggang River runs south to reach Gyeongsangbuk-do Province in southeastern Korea and starts to flow slowly from thereon, freely meandering through the variable topography. Called **muldori**, literally meaning “curving waters,” meandering streams form snaking patterns and at times cut a portion of land off from the mainland, creating an island. Thus was formed Hoeryongpo Village in Yecheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do, which is encircled by a widely meandering stream, except only for a narrow strip of land connecting the village to the mainland. The name **Hoeryong** (回龍), literally meaning “a winding dragon,” comes from the shape of the curve that surrounds villages like this. Hahoe Village also took its name from the form of the encircling waters, meaning “a curving stream.”

The Korean Peninsula abounds with mountainous areas, where long-lived rivers have cut down riverbeds, forming incised meanders. Incised meanders exist in abundance on the Korean Peninsula; there are several in the vicinity of Hoeryongpo Village, including Hahoe Village located in the upper stream of the Nakdonggang River, Gyeongcheondae Terrace in Sangju, and Museom Village near the Naeseongcheon Stream in Yeongju.
Breathtaking Landscape with No Parallel

The landscape around a meandering stream is beautiful: a view of Hahoe Village from Buyongdae Cliff, a look at the Nakdonggang River from Gyeongcheondae Terrace, and the sight of Museom Village from Tansan-ri are all lovely. But Hoeryongpo as seen from Hoeryongdae Pavilion is by far the most breathtaking. The sight of the curving stream and surrounding scenery viewed from Hoeryongdae Pavilion has no parallel in its natural beauty.

The landscape of Hoeryongpo cannot be described in just a few words. Coming from the northerly environs of Bonghwa, the Naeseongcheong Stream flows down from a mountain at the back of the village and runs to the east, forming a wide curve on the right, completely surrounding the village and eventually dashes towards the left, almost cutting the village off from the mainland. The waters do not run alone; they carry white sandy sediment it deposits on the inner side of the stream, creating a sandy beach around the village. The stream also creates floodplains in the village, which become fertile fields for growing crops. Hoeryongpo is gorgeous year-round, changing colors with each change of season.

Nature’s Gifts to a Beautiful Village

The best observation point for viewing the landscape of the village is Hoeryongdae Pavilion located halfway up a ridge on Mt. Biryongsan, which overhooks the village. A scenic site has to be beautiful on its own but its aesthetic value is doubly and fully appreciated when the site comes with a perfect observation point. Compared with others observation points, Hoeryongdae Pavilion is preeminent in its location.

Rising as high as 240 meters, Mt. Biryongsan is located in front of the village. The part of the mountain that faces the village is cut steeply by the curving waters of the Naeseongcheon Stream. From a geological perspective, this region consists of schist or gneiss formed in the Precambrian era, which is conducive to the development of meandering streams. Meandering streams keep eroding and depositing sediments, creating unique landscapes like the one in Hoeryongpo. The amazing landscape of the village consists of the curving stream that shaped it, the deeply gored mountain, accumulated layers of sandy sediment, and rice fields and the village that are nourished by the alluvial soil.

Hoeryongpo’s topography features diverse landforms such as river terraces, an alluvial island, and point bars. River terraces are terraced areas that flank the sides of floodplains. An alluvial island consists of fine-grained fertile soil deposited by flowing waters. A point bar is made by deposits of sand and gravel that accumulate on the inside bend of the stream.

Renowned for its outstanding landscape, Hoeryongpo was previously called Uiseongpo. The original name, however, was dropped; outsiders used to mistakenly assume the village belonged to the administrative district of Uiseong-gun County. Therefore Yecheon-gun, which has the village under its jurisdiction, renamed the village Hoeryongpo.

Treasure Carved by Nature for Thousands of Years

Hoeryongpo had remained untouched until late in the Joseon period thus maintaining its pristine beauty. It was only 150 years ago when people started to inhabit this place. It is said that an ancestor of the Gyeongju Kim clan first moved in from Samak Village in Pungyang-myeon and thereafter the village has been established as a clan village of the Kim family. Another story has it that the settler from the Gyeongju Kim clan came from Uiseong, located about 40 kilometers away from Hoeryongpo, hence the original name of the village Uiseongpo.

Arguably the most beautiful landscape created by a meandering stream, Hoeryongpo is a priceless national asset. Years ago, an attempt was made to operate a rail-biking tourism business by building a railway along the river bank. Although the plan was aborted, even thinking about such an unconditional developmental project sends shivers down the spine. This unique landscape, carved by natural forces over thousands of years, must be preserved as a valuable national legacy.
The Imjingang River, a historically significant water channel, runs northeast to southwest in the heart of the Korean Peninsula, crossing the Demilitarized Zone before joining the Han River north of Seoul. Originally called Pyoroha or Sinjigang, the river gained a new name, *Imjin* (“reaching a ferry port”), when King Seonjo (r. 1567–1608) said here, “I returned back to this ferry port,” on his way back to the capital after being chased far north to Uiju—in present-day North Korea—during the Japanese invasions of 1592–1598. The river area is home to a diverse range of cultural heritage. Untouched during the 60 years of truce between North and South Korea, the Imjingang River is also a treasure trove of wildlife.
Photo Gallery

Old ferry port at Imjingang.

The lower Imjingang River with a distant view of North Korean territory.
The Hanhgang River meets with Imjingang in Yeoncheon, Gyeonggi-do Province.
The “Freedom Bridge,” so named for the return of prisoners of war to South Korea after the Korean War in search of freedom.

The “Bridge of No Return” crosses the Military Demarcation Line between the two Koreas. Beyond, the long-idled inter-Korean railway bridge spans the Imjingang River.
The monk Hyesim (1178–1234) writes:

No wind, no swell,  
such a various world unfolds before my eyes.  
No need for a lot of words;  
to look is to see.

Sniff a flower, say nothing: that’s the ultimate choice.

‘In Jamsil’

A vagabond for ten years; I’ve traveled east and west.  
I’m like mugwort on a hill.  
My way and the world’s way offer bumpy alternatives.  
Sniff a flower, say nothing—that’s the ultimate choice.

For Hyesim seeing is central, seeing with the heart not with words. Kim Si-seup (1435–1493) tells us to sniff a flower and say nothing, reminiscent of Seamus Heaney’s famous line, “Whatever you say, say nothing.”

Sniff a flower, say nothing; this is the heart of Korean poetry experience, and it makes for extraordinary poetry. It is, of course, a dictum of symbolism, hundreds of years before the theory that underpins so much of contemporary English poetry was developed at the end of the 19th century in France. French symbolism sprang from disillusion with language as a vehicle for conveying truth; Korean symbolism is just the way Korean poets traditionally saw the world. It is a poetry of inner vision, what we call Seon (Zen) today. It’s a view of poetry that says the poem is independent of the words; that the poem is lodged in a complex mass of feelings in the poet’s heart; that meaning refuses definition in words, and that the symbol is never exhausted. The poem means different things to different people at different times. That’s why we can read Hyesim and Kim Si-seup with such pleasure today.

‘Figure in the Distance’ by Jeong Jak (1533–1603) paints a symbolic landscape of exceptional sensitivity and power.

At first I wondered  
if the figure  
on the distant sands  
were a white heron,  
but to the sound  
of piping on the wind  
the vast expanse of sky and river  
faded into evening.

The moment of evening—and the moment of seeing—are captured in a painting. Sand, sea, sky and heron merge into a single entity, a symbol of the inner harmony the poet feels—a moment of enlightenment.

In a lecture in Seoul many years ago, Philip Hobsbaum, the celebrated English poetry teacher, said that the poem is a construct of words not concepts, and that it begins with a rhythm, a tapping of the fingers. This is a commonplace of modern English poetry practice, but at the risk of being accused of heresy, I would venture to suggest it is not the Korean tradition at all. The earliest Korean poetry consisted of songs of ritual worship and songs to accompany work; these songs were invariably linked with music and the dance. Korea has two poetry traditions, and they are totally different: hansi, poetry in hanmun, which follows all the rules of Chinese prosody and is meant to be read and contemplated, and Korean vernacular poetry, a performance mode, which is unique in world poetry because it has no rules at all. It is the perfect medium for poetry expression; the poet has total freedom to create a new form for every new poem. The line is not central; position in the line has no semantic significance; there is neither meter nor rhyme; nor is there assonance or dissonance. Korean is unique in that the language of poetry and prose is the same. I’m not sure Korean poets know what a wonderful creative freedom they enjoy. The poet is released from the shackles of the iamb and the sheer weight of Western prosody. For a Zen man, it is the perfect poetry language, freedom personified. The breath group is the only controlling device.

The notion of a poetry to be read and contemplated indicates a poetic practice that begins with an image or a concept rather than a word; the very nature of the Chinese character lends itself to this approach. Further, the notion of a poetry where “song” controls the rhythm is at odds with the idea of the word as controlling device. This
idea of a poetry to be read and contemplated is crucial: it pinpoints what has been a source of friction in the Korean modern tradition, namely, the problem of grafting the native Korean tradition onto a western tradition that is fundamentally different. I think it is a problem that Korean poets are not really consciously aware of. When they set out to write a poem they tend naturally to write in the read and contemplate mode, the hansi mode. The Chinese approach to poetry: gi, seung, jeon and gyeol (theme, development, twist, and conclusion) is embedded deeply in the heart. When Korean poets compose, they do not usually go back to the sijo or gasa mode which is the only traditional vernacular mode they know.

Korean poetry tends to be abstract: it moves toward universals rather than particulars; it concerns itself with the essence of all mountains rather than the beauty of this mountain, the essence of all flowers rather than the beauty of this petal. Poets are not so much interested in physical beauty as in the moral beauty symbolised by things that are physically beautiful. They look to nature as exemplar of harmony, healing principle for man in a troubled world. Lee O-young tells us that point of view and perspective are Western concepts. Korean poets, he says, are never constrained to a single point of view: it’s as if they were hovering in a helicopter encompassing all possible points of view simultaneously. Again the universal rather than the particular. Korean art has never been the slave of form. Korean pottery and furniture curve and bulge in a mismatch of perfect harmony, what Hopkins would call inscape of loveliness. Why should Korean poetry be any different?

Korean poets today tend to be caught in an inexorable tug-of-war between the older poem-to-be-read hansi tradition and the newer, western poem-to-be-spoken tradition. I think it is a tug-of-war Korean poets are not even aware of. We see it, for example, in Seo Jeong-ju, Korea’s finest twentieth century poet. The prose poems, in particular, often throw together discrete material; there can be a casualness at the start and end of a poem reminiscent of the irregular lines so often found in Korean art objects. Seo Jeong-ju seems at times to throw the materials together almost at random and call out to the reader: make your own poem! Then there is the other Seo Jeong-ju, experimenting with craft, creating a three column, five syllable line as he does in “Poetics:”

Deep down in the sea, Jeju diving girls
dive for abalone, their lovers come home,
leaving the best shells to pick on the day
to the rocks beneath.
fastened as they were for once all picked
best left there too, to the sea I long for.
best left in the sea,

This is extremely clever. The divers are top of the middle column, nicely poised on top of the water. They begin the dive which is represented by the down columns of the text; the abalone poem is three down, right column, stuck neatly to a rock at a convenient depth. The poet is on the bottom, far right, surveying his marine poetry world, preoccupied with the ultimate prize abalone. He knows it means death for him as a poet to pluck this ultimate poem. The idea of the poem as crafted entity takes over the format of the poem itself. But the craft is not the craft of the declaiming voice, though I hear the declaiming voice more in Seo Jeong-ju than in most other contemporary Korean poets. Craft here is the seeing eye reading the written word: it is the appearance of the poem on the page.

Other Korean poets, Yi Sang, for example, also experimented with the line, but I don’t think this kind of writing is the mainstream of the Korean tradition. The heart of Korean poetry is much closer to Han Yong-un’s celebrated sijo, “Looking for the Cow:”

I haven’t lost any cow:
it’s silly to look for it
Were I to find it,
would it be finders keepers?
Better not look at all;
that way I won’t lose it again.

Korean poetry celebrates freedom.
Editor’s Note:
This section features a four-part series on historic villages in South Korea.
Throughout the one-year series, cultural and historical aspects of those villages are presented, including their spatial and geographical features, natural environment and community traditions.

Oeam Village in Asan

Text by the Cultural Heritage Administration
Photos by Lee Dong-Jun & Good Image
Designated Important Folklore Cultural Heritage No. 236, Oeam Village in Asan typifies the residential core that occupied the midsection of the Korean Peninsula during the Joseon Dynasty. The beauty of the natural and built environments of the village attracts many visitors throughout year.

Situated in Oeam-ri, Songak-myeon, Asan-si City, Chungcheongnam-do Province, the historic village of Oeam retains residential characteristics that were typical of the middle portion of the Korean Peninsula during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). A naturally developed settlement evolved into a clan village during the Joseon period, which descendants of the Yean Yi clan mostly inhabited. Residences of Oeam horizontally unfold from east to west at the foot of Mt. Seolhwasan. The spatial composition of the village and the features of houses show that Confucian principles influenced the formation of the village. Oeam is designated Important Folklore Cultural Heritage No. 236, subject to national management and conservation along with other historic villages including Hahoe Village in Andong (No. 122), Seoeup Village in Jeju (No. 188), Wanggok Village in Goseong (No. 235), Hangae Village in Seongju (No. 255), and Museom Village in Yeongju (No. 278). The historic village of Oeam now showcases traditional customs such as traditional funeral processions, traditional weddings, and the making of straw crafts to provide visitors a glimpse of the old life in a typical Korean village.

It is believed that people with the surname Gang and Mok settled in present-day Oeam about 500 years ago. After Yi Jeong moved into the village during the reign of King Myeongjong (r. 1545–1567) in the Joseon Dynasty, the village was transformed into a clan village of Yean Yi families. The offspring of Yi Jeong flourished in the village, and many of them became respected scholars, adding to the village features typical of the nobility’s settlement. The village was named after the pen name Oeam of Yi Gan, a sixth-generation descendant of Yi Jeong.

Residences of the noble class and 50-some thatched houses for commoners mingle together in Oeam, maintaining their original appearance mostly intact. Bearing the characteristics to be found in a nobleman’s house during the Joseon Dynasty, upper-class residences in Oeam feature a spacious front yard and a garden, which indicate the leisurely lifestyle of the nobility. Thatched houses retain their original appearance, which blend in with alleys lined with stone fences and shadowed by thick forests. Streams which run from Mt. Seolhwasan flow into the village and become part of a garden. Combining all these features, the village presents a tasteful ambience and precious material for the study of historic settlements.

Seemingly Natural, but Based on Principles

The composition and placement of residences in Oeam are unique. Across a bridge over the stream at the entrance to the village is found a cluster of houses situated on gently rolling terrain. In the middle of the village is the main road, and up along both sides of the main road small side roads branch off; houses face each other along each side road. Seen from above, the arrangement of residences looks as if borne by a tree, with branches and fruits growing on the tip of each branch.

Although the village had organically developed, the houses were situated according to an invisible, but strong principle. Residences are all placed in a certain space along the axis that connects Mt. Seolhwasan to the northeast of the village with Mt. Bongsusan to the southwest. The village looks oval in shape, longer from east to west. Since Mt. Seolhwasan is located to the east of the village, whose slope becomes gentler at the mouth where houses are formed, the topography of the village is higher in the east and lower in the west. In accordance with the topographical condition, residences mostly face the southeast.

The water channel in the village is man-made, and it was created for a reason. According to the ancient Chinese thought of wuxing, or ohaeng in Korean, water (水) controls fire (火). The name of the village’s back mountain Seolhwasan (雪火山) contains “fire”; ancient residents of the village desired to control the influence of fire by relying on the power of water. This is why they built a water channel inside the village. Oeam was built making the most of architectural factors from the natural surroundings, sometimes by leaving them as they are and sometimes by artificially remaking them.

2. Sinchangdaek House was previously called Byeongsadaek. The name Sinchang comes from the formation of the lady of the house.
Composition of a Residence

An upper-class house in Oeam mostly comprises the outer quarters (*sarang-chae*), the inner quarters (*an-chae*), the gate quarters (*mungan-chae*), an ancestral shrine, and the affiliated quarters (*busok-chae*). The master's space, which is the outer quarters, consists of a wooden floored space in the middle, flanked by a main room on either side. At times, a small room is added in the back or on the side of a bigger main room, which functioned as a “book room.”

According to Confucian principles, women were not supposed to share space with men. The inner quarters are the ladies’ space. As various female activities took place here such as preparing meals and ritual foods, cloth weaving, and other house chores, the inner quarters are normally wider than the master’s space.

While the gate quarters were occupied by servants in a nobleman’s house, this space was used to accommodate the additions to the family in a commoner’s residence. The gate quarters are most easily accessed from the outside, which were usually connected with a store shed or a cowshed for farm animals.

The shrine is where spirit tablets are housed and ancestral rites are conducted. In a nobleman’s house, a separate space was designated to enshrine ancestral tablets, but in a commoner’s house those tables used to be placed in a niche inside a room. In Oeam, the ancestral shrine is placed on a relatively elevated area of the house site, usually on the eastern side, as a way to express deep respect for ancestors according to Confucian principles. The affiliated quarters were used to store farming implements and tools, which was indispensable for a farming community such as Oeam.

Factors Forming the Landscape of Oeam

The stream that runs at the entrance of the village clearly delineates the outside from the inside: crossing the bridge over the stream means entering the village, and otherwise one is still outside of the village. Guardian pillars (*jangseung*) and totem poles (*sotdae*) stand in front of the bridge, which serve both as boundary markers and religious symbols for the community’s wellbeing and prosperity. The first facilities that emerge in sight after entering the village are a pavilion and a waterwheel. The waterwheel was one of the most significant communal labor facilities, which was also used as a space for residents to take a rest on short breaks from laboring in the fields.

Rustic stone fences, serene gardens, and a pleasant harmony between residences of the upper and lower classes in Oeam Village all present undeniable charm and beckon to visitors year-round.
Buddhist Bells of Korea

Text and photos by Jeong Yeong-ho, Honorary Professor, Korea National University of Education

The Buddhist bell, also called the bronze bell, is a superlative artifact of Korean metal arts. In a temple, the Buddhist bell is rung to mark the hour and to summon people to assemble. Korean Buddhist bells made in different periods demonstrate different characteristics.

Beomjong, One of the Four Buddhist Objects

Bells are made for diverse purposes: playing music, signaling time, or heralding emergencies; beom-jong refers to Buddhist bells. The word beom (梵) denotes its Indian origin. As the creation of a national culture, Buddhist bells are also called “bronze bells” in Korea, which is intended to distinguish them from those bells produced in China, mostly made of iron.

The Buddhist bell is one of the four Buddhist objects along with the dharma drum (beopgo), the cloud-shaped gong (unpan), and the fish-shaped wooden clapper (mogeot) used in the temple. In Buddhism, the four objects are believed to save earthly beings from mundane sufferings and to lead them to the Land of Happiness: the dharma drum, the cloud-shaped gong, and the fish-shaped wooden clapper save four-legged animals, birds, and fish respectively, and the Buddhist bell saves human beings. The Buddhist bell is considered to carry the greatest significance among the four objects; it also carries a great significance as an artifact given its impressive size, and artistry in the execution of its different parts.

The Buddhist Bell, or the bronze bell, is used to bring together people or to signal time in a Buddhist temple. The sounds of the Buddhist bell are supposed to reach out to all kinds of beings in the world and to enable them to enter nirvana. Unlike other Buddhist objects, beomjong are large in size and therefore are hung in a separate shed.

Composition of a Buddhist Bell from Unified Silla

Although further research is required to figure out the origin of each part of a Korean Buddhist bell, it consists of such components as the hook (yongnyu), the resonating cylinder (yongtong), square frames (yugwak), and nipples in a square frame (yudu). In a typical Korean Buddhist bell, the resonating cylinder, a unique Korean invention, is attached right beside the hook, and the four square frames whose length is about one fourth of the height of the bell are placed lower on the body with each square
frame containing nine nipples lined in three rows and three columns. The body of the bell bears the pattern of a flying Buddhist deity (biochumjang) and the hitting zone (dangjwa) on the opposite sides. Two of the most exemplary bells embodying these characteristics are the bronze bell of Sungsawon Temple (National Treasure No. 36 in Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do) and the sacred bell of King Seongdeok (National Treasure No. 29 in Gyeongju).

The old Buddhist bells that are remaining in the present are all from the Unified Silla Kingdom (668–935), and the information provided above is based on that period. It is hard to trace the development of the Buddhist bell back to the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.–A.D. 668) without concrete references extant. But it is assumed that the shape of the Buddhist bell from Backje (18 B.C.–A.D. 660) would be similar to that from Unified Silla. A gilt-bronze pungtak, a wind bell hung at the ends of roof eaves, which was excavated in August 1974 from the site of the Backje temple of Mireuksa, serves as evidence for this assumption. Oval-shaped, the gilt-bronze wind bell bears no decorative patterns on the head and the time nor on the square frames, and each square frame has five nipples. The wind bell is marked with the hitting zone inscribed with an eight-petal lotus design, a feature typical of the Buddhist bells from Unified Silla.

Buddhist Bells from Goryeo and Joseon

The style and shape of the Buddhist bells made during the Unified Silla period are the archetypal Korean Buddhist bell; the bronze bell of Sungsawon Temple and the sacred bell of King Seongdeok are exemplary Korean Buddhist bells. Therefore, it is only sensible to take these two Buddhist bells as standards to analyze the development of Buddhist bells in the succeeding dynasties of Goryeo (918–1392) and Joseon (1392–1910).

During the Goryeo Dynasty, Buddhism continued to serve as the national religion protected by the state as in the Unified Silla period. As Buddhism spread its influence from the royal court to ordinary people, the casting of Buddhist bells became more widespread. The bell-making tradition of Unified Silla was reflected as it is in the bells made in the early Goryeo period, but the style and composition of Goryeo bells diverged from Unified Silla towards the later period of Goryeo. In the later Goryeo period, floral patterns newly appeared on the head of the bell, and its overall size became smaller. These changes can be understood in the context of overall artistic development during the Goryeo Dynasty. In Goryeo, craft arts were more emphasized than sculptures. After enjoying its heyday, artistic development slowed down, and at that time Buddhist bells were downsized as well.

Unlike in Unified Silla, many of the Buddhist bells from Goryeo were transported out of the country, but there are still many remaining until the present. The representative bells from the early Goryeo era include the bronze bell of Yongjusa Temple (National Treasure No. 120 in Hwasung-ei, Gyeonggi-do) and the bronze bell of Cheonheungsa Temple (National Treasure No. 280, now at the National Museum of Korea).

During the Joseon Dynasty, Buddhist arts faced decline. A ruling class of Joseon regarded Buddhism as the source of corruption and cracked down on it, and introduced Confucianism as a new governing philosophy. Serving as the national religion for about 800 years throughout the Silla and Goryeo eras, Buddhism was replaced by Confucianism, which wielded a great influence on arts in general and naturally contributed to the deterioration of Buddhist arts.

The Buddhist bells from the early Joseon period are grand in size, as high as 1.5 meters to 2.8 meters, since they were made under the auspices of the royal court. Representative ones from this period are the bronze bell of Heungjeoonsa Temple (Treasure No. 1460 in Seoul) and the grand bell of Bongseonsa Temple (Treasure No. 397 in Namyangju-si, Gyeonggi-do).

The Korean Buddhist bell demonstrates the superiority of Korean metal arts and is highly regarded worldwide. As in the case of the sacred bell of King Seongdeok, which is higher than 3 meters and carved with diverse patterns and inscriptions, Korean Buddhist bells attain their value from a variety of motifs and figures carved on their body—a universe in microcosm, containing a wealth of ages-old Buddhist ideas and learning.