



# KOREAN HERITAGE

SPRING 2021 VOL. 52

**Date of Publication**

March 31, 2021

**Published by**

Cultural Heritage Administration Republic of Korea

**Publication Management**

Jo Dongjoo, Director of International Cooperation Division

**Content Coordination**

Kim Byung-yun, Moon Suree

**Advisory Board**

Jo Sang-sun, Kim Young-beom,  
Lee Hee-young, Pang Inah, Park Su-hee

**Translation**

Park Jung-eun

**Copy Editing**

Bill Sharp

**Coordination by**

Ch121

**Editorial Assistant**

Choi Min-young

**Printed by**

Daehan Printech Co., Ltd.

**Cultural Heritage Administration**

189 Cheongsa-ro, Seo-gu,  
Daejeon, Republic of Korea

**Tel** 82-42-481-4737

**Fax** 82-42-481-4759

**Contact** suree@korea.kr

**Website** www.koreanheritage.kr

**KOREAN HERITAGE** is also available on the website  
(www.koreanheritage.kr) and smart devices.

You can also download its PDF version and subscribe to  
our newsletter to receive our latest news on the website.

\* The articles featured in this magazine only reflect the  
contributing authors' opinions.

\* Photographs in this issue that are not marked with their  
providers are stock images.

Cultural Heritage Administration, 2021

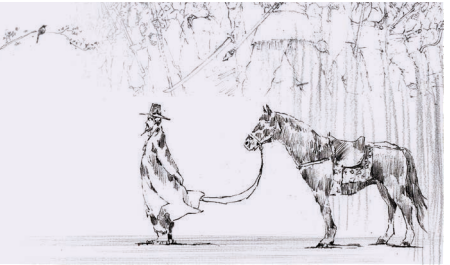
This publication is copyrighted. No part may be  
reproduced by any process without written permission.

Copyright © Cultural Heritage Administration

# Featured



**02** CULTURAL SPACES  
Social Networking  
among the *Yangban*



**08** TRADITIONAL SOCIAL RELATIONS  
*Seonbi*,  
a Joseon Middle Class



**12** CULTURAL ROOTS  
K-Stories  
Koreans and Their Stories



**22** LOCAL HERITAGE GUIDE  
Korean Mountain  
Monasteries

# Contents

<b>32</b>	<b>KOREAN ENTERTAINERS</b>	<i>Byeolgam</i> , the Party Planners of the Joseon Era
<b>38</b>	<b>HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE</b>	Building and Utilizing Data for Cultural Heritage
<b>44</b>	<b>CHANGING TIMES</b>	Commercial Aspirations in the Early Modern Art Market
<b>48</b>	<b>HERITAGE ISSUES TODAY</b>	Toward the Integrated Management of Repair Records
<b>52</b>	<b>CHA HEADLINES</b>	Korea's Lantern Lighting Festival Wins Global Recognition Korean Heritage Overseas Gains a New Face







Imagining the *yangban* class of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) calls up an image of a scholar neatly attired in a wide-brimmed black hat and long white gown while deep in the study of a book. However, this scholarly archetype is not the full story of the *yangban*, a term literally meaning “civil and military officials” but more generally referring to the ruling class of the Joseon Dynasty. They were no different from contemporary Koreans in seeking to forge a wide social network. Just as people today communicate through various internet-based social networking services, the Joseon-era *yangban* actively participated in diverse social clusters. With no duty to provide labor, the *yangban* could take advantage of various social opportunities to expand their political influence and appreciate cultural activities. The social groups in which they took part broadened the boundaries of their social spheres. Although accounting for only a small portion of the population, the *yangban* were able to efficiently regulate Joseon society. Their entitlements to land and slaves underpinned their leadership, but their strenuous efforts at social networking were an important component as well.

**Text by** Kim Jong-sung, History Columnist

**Photos by** the National Folk Museum of Korea



Part of *The Customary Cleansing of the Body on the Third Day of the Third Lunar Month* by Yu Suk

The painting depicts a gathering of 30 scholars assembled at a riverside to write poems in 1853. The event was organized in honor of a gathering the Chinese writer Wang Xizhi organized at the Orchid Pavilion in 353.

## Social Networking among the *Yangban*



# Influencing Local Governance through an Exclusive Yangban Club

First of all, *yangban* participated in a *hyanghoe*, or “local assemblies.” These were regional advisory bodies formed at the county level. No one could not claim *yangban* status without membership in a *hyanghoe*. Within the context of a *hyanghoe*, the term *yangban* meant the ruling group of a particular locality. Credentials for attaining membership in the *hyanghoe* varied across different areas. There were, however, four main common requirements:

- (1) Living a *yangban* lifestyle.
- (2) Family members who passed the civil service examination or became prominent scholars.
- (3) Membership in a clan that has lived in the area for several generations.
- (4) Having a spouse from a family meeting the other three criteria.

The “*yangban* lifestyle” referred to such practices as observing ancestral rites, offering hospitality to guests, and practicing academic and mental cultivation. The longstanding residence of members of a particular clan in one area usually meant extensive local landholdings. These criteria all include elements open to subjective interpretation, and terms such as the “*yangban* lifestyle,” “prominent scholar,” or “several generations” could be defined differently. Some people who seem to fit the definition

of *yangban* according to today's understanding were not awarded *yangban* status in their hometowns. Some of the high-level civil and military officials in the Joseon central government were not actually treated as *yangban* back home.

One clear example of this is the civil servant Song Sun (1493–1582). After passing the civil service examination at age 26, he eventually advanced to high office over his career. He was once selected as emissary to China, an official posting usually assigned to high-ranking officials. Despite his success as a civil servant, Song was initially denied *yangban* status in his hometown of Damyang. The *hyanghoe* there pointed out that his maternal family was not native to the area and there were no renowned scholars in his family. It was only years after he was appointed to the office of Inspector-General that the Damyang *hyanghoe* finally admitted him as a member. The example of Song Sun demonstrates how closed these *yangban* assemblies could be.

As a privileged club of local leaders, *hyanghoe* wielded great influence over regional society. They made decisions regarding a range of local issues and had a strong voice in the selection of advisors for the local magistrate. The magistrate would rely on the local leadership to combat people’s resistance to taxation and support the collection of duties. A local government led by a magistrate dispatched from the central bureaucracy could not fully function without cooperation from the local leaders' club. It would not be too

Tuho, or “pitch-pot”

In this traditional game, players standing at a set distance toss arrows into a lugged cylindrical jar.



Black hat

This horsehair hat was worn by the Joseon-era *yangban*.

As a privileged club of local leaders, *hyanghoe* wielded great influence over regional society.

exaggerated to state that it was the local leaders’ club rather than the office of the magistrate that held the real power in local governance.

# Spending Time with Other Would-be Civil Servants

Another networking avenue for the *yangban* was a *samaso*, a private association of local scholars. Distinct from other local scholarly organizations such as a public school (*hyanggyo*) or private academy (*seowon*), a *samaso* was comprised of people who had passed one of the two primary civil service examinations respectively testing candidates’ understanding of the Chinese classics or their literary abilities. These classics licentiates (*saengwon*) and literary licentiates (*jinsa*) assembled at a *samaso* to prepare for the final level of the civil service examination. The average age of successful candidates at this final level during the Joseon era was roughly 37. While there were candidates in their 20s and 30s, there were of course those in their 40s as well. This indicates that many Joseon scholars spent a considerable portion of their lives in these local scholars' associations. It would be difficult to imagine that they always did nothing but study. These future civil servants certainly gathered for other purposes as well.

They held assemblies for entertainment when the weather was pleasant in the spring or autumn, inviting entertainers and appreciating their dancing and music. A skilled kite flier might be called in to perform aerial feats. They also rolled



up their sleeves and played games themselves. One common game featured at these scholars' picnics was *tuho*, or "pitch-pot." Players standing at a set distance tossed arrows into a lugged cylindrical jar. Pitch-pot was often held at the sidelines of a drinking party. Those who failed at the arrow tossing were forced to drink wine as punishment. As much as throwing skills, the ability to compose poetry was critical for winning the game. Players would be required to create poetry on the spot after throwing an arrow. If they failed in this literary skill, they also faced the penalty of drinking wine.

### Sharing Feelings with Like-mined Poets

At the highest level of the civil service examination, skill at composing poetry was considered more important than knowledge of the Chinese classics. Those who had taken the literary examinations were generally more successful at getting promotions within the officialdom compared to those from the classics track. In response, poetry became a critical element in the education of the *yangban*. Children born into a *yangban* family leaned about composing poetry from an early age. There were even five-year-old *yangban* boys known for their poems. After this childhood education, poetry writing often became entrenched as a habit among many *yangban* adults. They might

find inspiration in anything new they came across on the road. A good example is Jeong Mong-ju, a Goryeo scholar who died in 1392 but was a respected figure among the literati throughout the Joseon period. In the poem "Drinking Wine," he admonished, "Don't blame yourself for spending all the money on the road / You gained a handful of new poems in your silken pocket." Jeong considered composing poems to be a boon, even if it meant having no money to get by.

Jeong was not alone in living surrounded by poetry. Whenever there was a gathering of *yangban*, there was writing and reciting poetry. Those with a particular passion for the pleasures of poetry composition made it a regular event by establishing a *sihoe*, or "poetry society." One example is the poetry society set up by the civil servant Chae Je-gong, who spearheaded a renaissance in art and culture during the reign of King Jeongjo. A member of the Namin (Southerners) minority political faction, Chae brought together junior scholars from his group to create a poetry society. Chae helped the members in preparing for the civil service examinations and entering politics. Poetry composition could be enjoyed by female members of the *yangban* class as well. Lady Kim (penname Geumwon) from the late Joseon period travelled across the country composing poems. She assembled other female poets at her pavilion, Samhojeong, along the Hangang River. Her poems

#### Black leather shoes

A male *yangban* in the Joseon era wore black leather shoes as part of his daily outfit. Shoes were considered a marker of status at the time.

#### Inkstone

Inkstones were an important part of the writing utensils required by Joseon *yangban*. They ground an inkstick on an inkstone before writing or painting.



*The real power of the ruling class did not stem from reading books in solitude, but from maintaining extensive networks with others.*



were published in the compilation *Hodongseorakgi*.

These are some leading examples of the social groups the *yangban* class joined in order to expand and strengthen their social networks. Through them, they could participate in central politics or local governance. They could also make friends and have fun together. This is not to say that these exclusive *yangban* clubs were only positive. Their main purpose resided in building up internal networks and solidifying social status. They enhanced the benefits of the privileged members of society and undermined social equity. They also assisted the state and landlords in exploiting people through heavy taxes. When the traditional social order showed signs of crumbling after the Japanese invasions of the late 16th century, people rose up and established opposing social groups composed of members of the lower classes. This indicates how people believed that they needed to form their own groups in order to bring more justice to the world.

However, *yangban* clubs such as *hyanghoe*, *samaso*, and *sihoe* definitely had positive impacts on Joseon society as well. Their literary and artistic productions are one example. These activities made great contributions to the cultural advancement of Korea. The social groups formed by the *yangban* were a foundation of their continual leadership throughout the Joseon era. The real power of the ruling class did not stem from reading books in solitude, but from maintaining extensive networks with others.



# Seonbi,

## a Joseon Middle Class

The Chinese Confucian philosopher Mencius counseled King Xuan of China's Zhou Dynasty on good governance: "A constant mind without a stable livelihood can only be achieved by the *shi* [*sa* in Korean, "scholars"]. For commoners, they can lose a constant mind when they lack a stable livelihood." Mencius explained that the starting point of good governance is to guarantee people a stable livelihood. Only when freed from material neediness can most people be guided to practice Confucian virtues. Mencius's theory sounds similar to the modern concept of the welfare state.

**Text by** Jang Jin-youp, Research Professor at the Institute of Korean Studies, Yonsei University

**Illustration by** Yoo hwan-young

### Economic Standards Vs. Social Responsibility

Something that merits particular attention in his idea is the *shi* who are suggested as being capable of maintaining a constant state of mind (*hangsim*) even without a stable source of support (*hangsan*). During the Warring States period in which Mencius lived, the *shi* referred to a particular class of society. However, the term was used widely across East Asia until the early 20th century as a common noun referring to male members of the ruling class equipped with certain abilities and entitled to

participate in politics. The Joseon version of the *shi* was the *seonbi*, or the literati class. The *seonbi* were members of society who took up academic and literary study as their occupation. These scholars were mainly of *yangban* status, the ruling class of Joseon-era society. However, people from the lower classes could also be considered scholars depending on the depth and breadth of their scholarly knowledge. In the Confucian society of the Joseon period (1392–1910), these professional intellectuals were called upon to maintain a constant mind even when they lacked a stable livelihood.

In contemporary society, the concept of a middle

class has been defined from social, cultural, and economic perspectives. The *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* published by the Academy of Korean Studies defines the middle class as "a social group that falls around the center of the population in terms of economic and sociocultural means and has the self-perception of being part of the middle class." The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s definition focuses on income: Those falling within 50–150 percent of the median income make up the middle class. There are other definitions available that focus on cultural factors such as education level and leisure activities.

In a recent opinion poll, Korean office workers listed a series of attributes they considered to define the middle class. They include owning an apartment of more than 100 square meters without a mortgage, earning a monthly salary of more than 5000 USD, owning a sedan with an engine of 2000 cc or larger, maintaining 100,000 USD in savings, and enjoying international travel more than once a year. These are mostly economic criteria.

In contrast, Oxford University includes in its definition of the middle class such characteristics as holding their own opinions and beliefs and standing up for the weak against the strong.





Advocating for social justice is also incorporated in the common definition of middle class in French society. These current definitions in Europe place a sense of social responsibility at the heart of middle-class identity. This understanding is tied to the historical role of the bourgeois in overthrowing feudalism and establishing civic freedoms for themselves. This middle class was at the forefront of the social revolutions of early-modern Europe.

As seen in the above-mentioned opinion poll, Koreans’ perception of the middle class hinges on how they gauge middle-class income and lacks the historical context that surrounded the emergence of the middle class in Europe. As modernization was not an autonomous process in Korea, it can be difficult to identify the historical roots of the Korean middle class as a distinct social group.

## Raising Their Voices for the Nation

One group of people from Joseon society matching this European understanding of the middle class would be the *seonbi*, the literati class. Joseon society was unique in that the entirety of its ruling class was supposed to dedicate itself to nothing but study. The late-Joseon scholar Park Je-ga (1750–1805) vehemently criticized the *yangban* ruling class in his book *Bukagui* (Discourse of Northern Learning) for their lack of capacity for making a living. Although the number of *yangban* members increased toward the later Joseon period, the government posts available to them were limited. A perception developed based on this that the *yangban* formed a useless surplus within society and even a source of social ill.

However, this literati class underpinned Joseon society for the more than 500 years spanned by the dynasty. As the late-Joseon scholar Park Ji-won (1737–1805) satirically described in his novel *Story of the Yangban*, they could be pompous individuals who prioritized such impractical qualities as social etiquette and upholding their dignity. Although all

were addressed under the sweeping designation *seonbi*, there were some from families of great wealth and renown and others wholly dependent on their wives’ meager daily earnings. This means that the *seonbi* as a social group cannot be defined by economic standards. What bound them together as a particular social class was their ever-present concern for the nation and its people.

The Joseon literati devoted themselves to study in order to offer contributions to governance. While scholars holding government office naturally participated in national affairs, those with no office did not neglect their responsibility of speaking out for the state and its people. Scholars outside the government partook in matters of governance through petitions and books. Writing in academic and literary forms about social ills and people’s difficult living conditions was their daily duty. They did not do this for economic benefit or social fame. They believed that it was the core reason for their study and their very existence.

Yi Ik (1681–1763) is a Joseon scholar who halted his pursuit of government office in his 20s after his brother experienced a tragic death in prison. He chose instead to live in seclusion for the rest of his life. He wrote a book titled *Gwagurok* (Presumptuous Worries) in which he presented policy suggestions to resolve a series of problems facing the state. The official Jeong Yak-yong (1762–1836) was forced to live in exile for 20 years for his association with Christianity. With no prospect of holding office, Jeong wrote prolifically about rules for governing during his banishment in such books as *Mongminsimseo* (Admonitions on Governing the People) and *Gyeongseyupyo* (National Management). Jeong also composed diverse literary works that offer vivid descriptions of the many troubles faced by the people of the era.

Park Je-ga compiled his Discourse of Northern Learning upon returning from travels in Qing China and offered the book to the Korean king. It conveyed his arguments on reforming Joseon based on examples from the Qing Dynasty, a state

*Scholars outside the government partook in matters of governance through petitions and books. Writing in academic and literary forms about social ills and people's difficult living conditions was their daily duty.*

Joseon had so far dismissed as barbaric. Born to a concubine of a *yangban* man, Park’s rise within officialdom was inherently limited and he always lived in poverty. Park was not alone in suffering from such chronic poverty. Although scholars sometimes had to sell their books and clothing for food, they never shunned their responsibility to participate in politics. Their suggestions were not always reflected in government policies, but the literati class observed their duty to offer their input no matter what.

Their constant concern for the nation could be translated into a sense of responsibility for protecting the nation. Numerous literati sacrificed their lives to pull the nation out of a crisis over the history of Joseon. A major example is their role during the late 16th-century Japanese invasions of Korea. Scholars mobilized militias called *uibyeong*, or “righteous armies,” and rose up against the foreign invaders. Famous righteous army leaders include Gwak Jae-u (1552–1617), Jo Heon (1544–1592), Go Gyeong-myeong (1533–1592), and Kim Cheon-il (1537–1593). None of them held high office or were skilled in military affairs at the time of the invasions. They were simply teaching junior scholars in their hometowns or serving as magistrates for small townships. When the nation fell into crisis, however, they took up arms as an expression of their collective consciousness as *seonbi*. The scholar Hwang Hyeon (1856–1910) left a poem when he killed himself in wrenching grief over the annexation of Korea by Japan. He declared in his poem “End of Life” that “It is difficult to live

as an intellectual in this world.” Without other means of available resistance, the literati of Joseon chose death as the last resort for making their voices heard. It was a clear expression of their sense of ownership for the state.

Of course, not all Joseon scholars lived up to their social responsibilities. Some exploited whatever power they could gain in order to frantically accumulate personal wealth. Others attempted to bribe their way up the hierarchical ladder within the government. However, these morally deficient examples were exceptions rather than the rule. A greater proportion of the *seonbi* made sincere efforts to act on their social duty through whatever social means were available for them.

The social and economic structure of Joseon differs both from today’s South Korea and contemporaneous European nations. It is hard to find parallels between them and set out a clear-cut definition of the middle class in Joseon society. When focusing on a sense of social responsibility, however, the *seonbi* fit the bill perfectly. They constantly worried about the socially deprived and exerted a strong sense of responsibility for the nation when it was in trouble.

Their sense of social responsibility compares to that of any other middle class in history. It is often lamented that Korean society lacks a sense of *noblesse oblige*. To find a model to follow, one needs not look farther than the *seonbi*. These Joseon literati armed with a constant state of mind have lessons to offer contemporary Koreans.



# K-Stories

## Koreans and Their Stories

Viewers around the world have fallen in love with Korean stories. Korean movies and TV series are rising in popularity on international video-on-demand services, and Korean cinema is winning awards at renowned film events. What exactly is it about these Korean stories that appeals to global audiences? To explore this question, this issue of *Korean Heritage* presents Lee Jeong-won, an expert on classic Korean novels, and Lee Hee-youn, who identifies standout comics and stories on the Web and turns them into movies and TV shows.

**Text by** Choi Min-young  
from the *Korean Heritage* publication team

**Photos by** the National Folk Museum of Korea,  
the Heo Gyun Heo Nanseolheon Memorial Hall,  
Naver Webtoon, Netflix, JTBC, and Jung Meen-young

*The Story of Hong Gil-dong*,  
written in Korean script

(Photo courtesy of the Heo  
Gyun and Heo Nanseolheon  
Memorial Hall)



**Lee Jeong-won**

Professor of Korean Literature at Sogang University

Traditional Stories  
as a Carrier of National Identity

All Koreans are familiar with the name Hong Gil-dong. It is the example they find in civil forms to indicate the fields for filling in a name. Hong Gil-dong is the protagonist of the classic Joseon-era (1392–1910) Korean novel *The Story of Hong Gil-dong*. Hong is a Korean Robin Hood who steals from corrupt wealthy aristocrats and shares his gains with the poor. He ultimately establishes a paradise and becomes its king. Among the Korean people, however, Hong Gil-dong is better remembered as an unfortunate baby born out of wedlock. He is a son of a nobleman and his low-born concubine. In the rigidly patriarchal society of Joseon, Gil-dong grew up carrying the contempt and injustices thrown at him for his illegitimate birth. He is famous for the lament, “I am not entitled to address my father as father or my brother as brother.” Lee Jeong-won explains:

“Hong Gil-dong is a character obsessed with the question ‘Who am I? There is a man who fathered him, but he has no one to call father. He strives to win recognition from his biological father throughout his life. This life-long struggle for recognition is closely related to the human need for self-respect and self-identity. Hong Gil-dong represent the issue of self-discovery in the minds of Koreans.”

Lee believes that the stories being told among a particular people are a window into their collective consciousness and identity.

“Narratives from traditional Korean literature are filled with human desires, practical concerns, and mythical imagination. They illustrate a Korean way of resolving the universal human problems that arise everywhere. One of the most popular subjects for traditional literary efforts is family. It is commonly understood that traditional Korean society in the Joseon era was strongly influenced by Neo-Confucianism and upheld filial piety as the ultimate value in familial relations. However, in the narratives circulated outside of official circles, family relations could be more freely explored from





Five segments from an eight-part painting of *The Story of Chunhyang* mounted as a folding screen. They describe major scenes from this Joseon-era novel. (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)

diverse ideological perspectives. For example, *The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon*, a tale of two daughters persecuted and eventually killed by their stepmother, touches on such modern questions as the roles a mother and father should play within a family and what kind of interpretive lens should be used to understand family conflict. This classical story was turned into a movie in 2003. Family is also an important theme in the stories being created today. The Oscar-winning film *Parasite* is also widely based on family relations.”

The traditional Korean tale “Kongji and Patzzi” is similar to “Cinderella” in its narrative structure. While Cinderella triumphs through her eventual marriage to a prince, the Korean protagonist Kongji does not turn to anyone else for her happiness. She creates a cathartic ending by

taking revenge on the stepmother and half-sister who bedeviled her. This Korean version of “Cinderella” delivers the message that true happiness can be attained when people authentically accept their feelings.

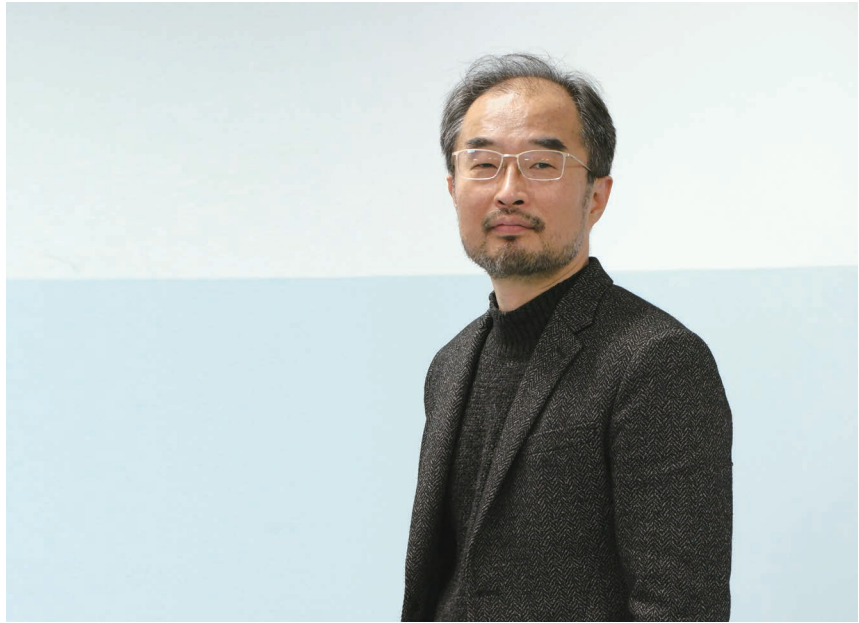
“There are many daring female characters in Korean literature like Kongji. One telling example is Chunhyang, the protagonist in the late-Joseon novel *The Story of Chunhyang*. She rejects a sexual request from the local magistrate, an act sure to provoke grave consequences, in order to pursue her true love. Chunhyang can be understood as a defiant woman who stands up against an unjust social system. It is hard to find such female characters in contemporaneous stories from other countries. In these stories there are many women who

are rescued from their troubles by others, but they rarely face up to a challenge and actively resolve it. Many female characters in classical Korean literature risk their lives to take on the establishment and act on how they truly feel.”

*The Story of Sim Cheong*, novel from the late Joseon period, is widely known for its vocal manifestation of filial piety. The story is about a teenage girl who throws herself into the sea to earn the 300 sacks of rice that her blind father has promised to the Buddha in order to regain his eyesight. Lee Jeong-won, however, interprets this Sim Cheong narrative through the lens of morality. Lee relates that here the primary source of self-esteem is not one’s physical appearance or financial status, but living up to moral standards. This universal lesson is reflected in *The*

*Story of Sim Cheong* where the virtue of morality is emphasized in the sacrifices by Sim Cheong and in the way that her father finally recovers his vision.

“Sim Cheong voluntarily sacrifices her life to restore her blind father’s sight. In the late Joseon period, numerous different versions of precisely how her father regained the ability to see were created. It shows how people at the time carefully considered what would be a proper method for restoring his vision. In the dominant form that has been transmitted to the present, he regains his eyesight only after sincerely repenting for the irresponsible promise that led his daughter to risk her life. The plot of *The Story of Sim Cheong* is an attempt to relate that you can only obtain true happiness when you are morally whole.”



Lee Jeong-won relates that traditional stories are a carrier of national identity  
(Photo by Jung Meen-young)

Read It Your Way

The stories described so far account for only a fraction of Korean narratives. There are many more fascinating stories from classical literature waiting to be discovered.

“There are various attributes of traditional Korean stories that would be attractive to different groups of people around the globe. Korean movies and TV series featuring zombies are popular these days. Traditional Korean literature also has a large reservoir of stories about mythical creatures—such as an immortal animal called *bulgasari* who can chew steel, an adventurous journey to find a monster called a *jomagu*, or saving a woman from a creepy underground giant.”

Lee stresses that the best way to enjoy a story is to do so in your

own way without framing it with an established interpretation.

“It is best to freely explore a story in reflection of your own tastes, practical concerns, and personal history. Don’t set out to discover what has already been said. Just let the story take form in your imagination.”

Stories evolve over time. Today’s narratives reflect life as we live it and feature various lifestyles, idiosyncratic preferences, and expanded worldviews. The list of videos available on the Netflix platform testifies to a wide and colorful spectrum of stories enjoyed by global viewers. Korean movies and TV shows are gaining popularity among these diverse stories from many parts of the world.





Covers of *The Story of Sim Cheong* and *The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon*, published in 1978  
(Photos courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)

**Left\_** The Korean TV series *Sweet Home* immediately rose to the top of Netflix's daily streaming chart in eight countries after its release in December 2020. It is based on the digital comic of the same name published in 2017. (Photo courtesy of Netflix)

**Right\_** *Itaewon Class*, a recent Korean series that enjoyed great popularity in South Korea, is also based on a digital comic of the same (Photo courtesy of the Korean broadcasting company JTBC)



**Lee Hee-youn**

from the Naver Webtoon IP Business Team

‘Webtoons’ as a New Reservoir of Stories

The Korean TV series *Sweet Home* was released on Netflix in December 2020. Right after its release, the horror series topped Netflix’s daily streaming chart in South Korea and seven other Asian countries. It reached as high as eighth in the United States. The apocalyptic series had been viewed by more than 22 million Netflix subscribers across the globe within three days of its release. While global popularity is nothing new for Korean films and TV shows, *Sweet Home* was unprecedented in the speed and extent of its popularity. Lee Hee-youn explains.

“*Sweet Home* is the first Korean original series to receive such an explosive response on Netflix. The series is entirely Korean, not only its actors and creators, but also the setting and thematic focus. A Korean series gaining global popularity

is something that merits particular attention. Part of the explanation for the massive response is the genre. It is a creature-feature, which are in vogue these days. A bigger attraction, however, are the quintessentially Korean feelings spotlighted by the series, such as strong maternal love, warm attachment between people, and a sense of willing sacrifice for others. The general interest in South Korea and its culture has done no harm as well. All of these factors have come together to create a snowball effect.”

*Sweet Home* is based on the digital comic of the same name published in 2017 on Naver, the dominant Korean web portal. There is a trend in South Korea of creating movies or TV series based on “webtoons,” or digital comics and novels. The list of successful examples is expanding rapidly, including *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*, *True Beauty*, *Hell is Other People*, *Cheese in the Trap*, *Itaewon Class*, and *What’s Wrong with Secretary Kim?*. The practice of adapting comics and novels into a video format has a long history. Right now, however, it is taking place at an entirely different level.





Images from the digital comic version of *Sweet Home*

The TV series and digital comic *Sweet Home* are both about how ordinary people become monsters due to greed, but they have different endings. (Photos courtesy of the Naver Webtoon)





Lee Hee-youn relates that Korean stories are known for solid plotlines and high narrative plausibility. (Photo by Jung Meen-young)

“While video technologies were developing at breakneck speed, people in the industry were struggling to find interesting stories to present. It was during this effort that they stumbled upon digital comics and novels, like spotting an oasis in a desert. Every day huge numbers of writers upload a vast volume of stories with greatly diverse plots. It offers an extensive selection for film or TV series that producers can freely choose from. Combined with the advanced imaging technology in Korea, this bountiful supply of stories has created a beneficial environment for the development of the industry.”

The Naver webtoon platform is actively making inroads into global markets. A stunning 1.3 million titles are accessible there, and up to 72 million people from home and abroad visit the platform every month. The markets for digital comics and novels are expected to grow in 2021

to be worth 1 trillion KRW and 600 billion KRW, respectively. Lee Hee-youn ascribes the exponential growth in these markets over the last few years to the development of online platforms. They allow people to freely publicize their writing and read what they want regardless of place or time. Creating and consuming stories has become an integral part of everyday life for many people.

“It used to be that only those somehow recognized for their qualifications could make their works available to the public. Writing was considered a privilege granted only to a chosen few. These days, however, anyone who can write a story can be considered a writer. Everyone has at least one story to tell, and now they have platforms where they can write what they want. This explains how we come to have so many stories available online.”

## Storytelling in Everyday Life

Stories can be fully understood by people who share the outlook they express and the sociocultural background against which they are set. Those lacking such shared thoughts and experiences might not follow the plots to the end. However, Korean stories are gaining popularity with international audiences. Lee Hee-youn talks about the charms of Korean movies and TV shows.

*Today's success in the global content market is accredited to the nation's time-honored cultural tradition of storytelling. It is like Koreans are all creators.*



“The stories in Korean films and TV series can be very complex, but their plotlines are solid. Koreans are obsessed with narrative probability. They want good reasons why the people presented in a story have come to develop their characters. If a story is made up with 20 characters, Korean viewers expect there to be 20 individual life stories. All of these personal narratives should be well connected with each other and give rise to a strongly coherent whole. In addition, Koreans like twists and turns. They want a series of hurdles to be planted across the unfolding of the story, making the ending unexpected and all the more spectacular.”

Lee Hee-youn adds that Koreans are good at making stories since they like stories. They grow up continuously telling and listening to stories. This is likely to be part of the reason Korean storytelling has come to appeal to people around the world.

“Koreans may all remember being told folktales by their mothers or grandmothers when they were a child. Koreans love stories. They think hard about how to turn their daily anecdotes into interesting stories to tell to others. Today's success in the global content market is accredited to the nation's time-honored cultural tradition of storytelling. It is like Koreans are all creators.”

Stories have changed their media of delivery over time, from oral transmission to written records and on to moving images. This evolution will only continue into the future. If anyone would like to know more about the Korean nation, the best place to look is in stories. The stories made by Koreans will tell you about who they are.



Seven Korean Buddhist monasteries dispersed around the country were collectively inscribed as a World Heritage property in 2018: Tongdosa Temple in Yangsan, Bongjeongsa Temple in Andong, Buseoksa Temple in Yeongju, Seonamsa Temple in Suncheon, Daeheungsa Temple in Haenam, Magoksa Temple in Gongju, and Beopjusa Temple in Boeun. They joined three other traditional Korean Buddhist monasteries already represented on the World Heritage List, Bulguksa Temple and Seokguram Grotto in Gyeongju and Haeinsa Temple in Hapcheon. Although accounting for a considerable portion of the Korean sites registered on the prestigious global heritage list, these inscribed mountain monasteries are just a tiny fraction of the more than 1,000 Buddhist monasteries counted in the official statistics in South Korea, and there may be even more that have gone uncounted. Buddhist monasteries can be found across all the named mountains of South Korea.

**Text and photos by** Roh Jae-hak, Photographer

# Korean Mountain Monasteries





- 1. Yeongsanam Hermitage at Bongjeongsa Temple in Andong
- 2. Samcheonggak Hall and Uhwaru Pavilion at Songgwangsa Temple

Deeply integrated into the lives of their local communities, mountain monasteries perform functions beyond simply religious practices. They can be a primary locus for cultural and economic activities in a local community. Regardless of their personal religious orientations, Koreans often feel at least partially linked to a Buddhist monastery. When they find themselves longing for an absence of speed and noise, they point their feet in the direction of a mountain monastery. Koreans share a nostalgia for mountain monasteries that is deeply seated in the culture.

This nostalgia can be partly explained by the time-honored history of these monasteries within Korean society. Despite dynastic

changes and countless military conflicts, Buddhist monasteries have been present for the Korean people since the introduction of Buddhism more than 1,600 years ago. The temples' natural surroundings are also inspiring. Traditional Korean Buddhist monasteries are commonly nestled in the mountains and surrounded by well-preserved woods and streams. For those tired of the hustle and bustle of urban life, this environment can offer much-needed tranquility and a valuable source of refreshment.

Buddhist monasteries also present a treasure trove of traditional Korean art and culture. Most mountain monasteries have been repeatedly damaged and restored into the present day. Through this

endless cycle of demolition and reconstruction, the forms of art and culture manifested in Buddhist monasteries have been transmitted by traditional artisans. Besides traditional architecture, mountain monasteries feature artistic forms ranging from *dancheong* woodwork painting to mural paintings, carvings, pagodas, statues, and Buddhist bells. It would not be far-fetched to describe mountain monasteries as art museums in their own right. Every single component of a Buddhist monastery is both a religious item and art at the same time.

When people need a pause in their lives, mountain monasteries are just the place to visit.







- 1
- 2

1. The Diamond Altar of Tongdosa Temple in Yangsan  
2. Gakhwangjeon Hall at Hwaeomsa Temple in Guryeo and red plum blossoms in its front courtyard



1  
2

3

- 1. Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju
- 2. Seounam Hermitage at Tongdosa Temple covered in snow
- 3. Seonamsa Temple in Suncheon





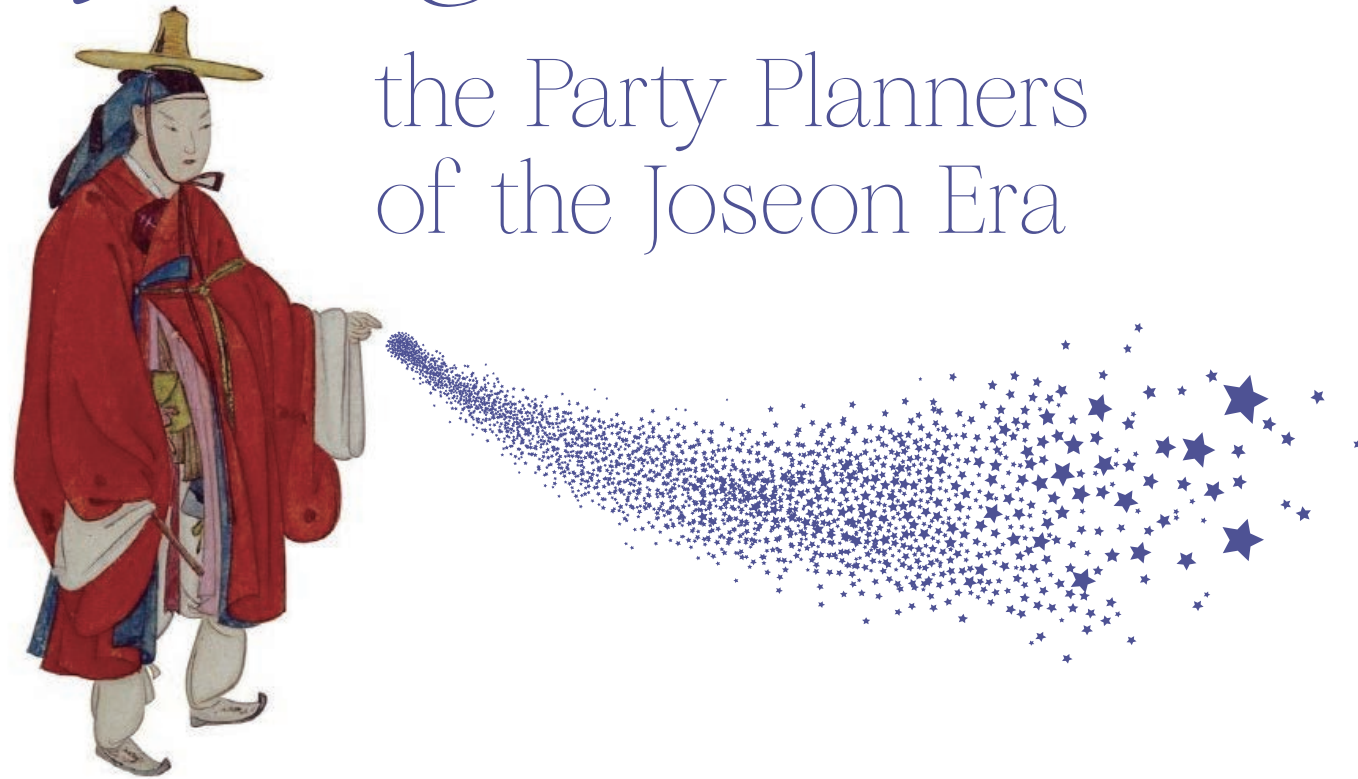


The three-story stone  
pagoda at Buseoksa Temple



# Byeolgam,

## the Party Planners of the Joseon Era



Parties of any kind can help banish the monotony of the everyday routine and spark a refreshing energy. People who organize these revitalizing gatherings lead people locked in tedium into a world of excitement and joy. Party planners are not just a modern phenomenon: During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) there was a group of party planners known as *byeolgam*.

**Text by** Kweon Kyeong-youl, History Columnist

**Photos by** the National Museum of Korea, the Kansong Art and Culture Foundation

**A Banquet for the Governor of Pyongyang** by Kim Hong-do

This painting portrays a feast held to welcome the newly appointed governor of Pyongan-do Province (of which the city of Pyongyang was part). Elaborately dressed women are dancing to the music of the players. (Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Korea)







**Above\_**  
**Dance with Two Swords**  
**by Sin Yun-bok**  
This painting shows *gisaeng* entertainers performing a sword dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments.

**Below\_**  
**Secret Trip at Night**  
**by Sin Yun-bok**  
This painting shows a *byeolgam*, an official with the Royal Palace Management Center. The red-robed *byeolgam* is inspecting a nobleman and *gisaeng* who are out after curfew.  
(Photos courtesy of the Kansong Art and Culture Foundation)

No Shortage of Parties in the Joseon era

Today’s party planners take charge of everything involved in a party from choosing the theme to inviting guests and entertainers, decorating the venue, and serving as the MC. Today’s Koreans think of party planners as an import from the West, but there were people playing this role in Joseon society as well. The numerous kinds of parties held in the Joseon era and the position of *byeolgam* as their organizers is illustrated in *The Song of Hanyang* (*Hanyangga*), a mid-19th century prose-poem describing various aspects of the life in the Joseon capital.

With this level of luxury on display, there are no worries about attracting people.  
From average people on the street to the offspring of state counselors,  
From well-off merchants to self-important minor functionaries  
And officials with various titles such as *byeolgam*, *mugam*, *podogungwan*,  
*jeongwonsaryeong*, and *najang*.  
How colorful is the range of entertainments enjoyed in Hanyang?  
Boating games by people from the Tribute Office and New Year’s Food games by *pogyo* officials,  
Holiday Winning games by scribes from various offices and Bar Visiting games by servants from noble households,  
Archery and Jobless Aristocrats’ games,  
Calling Servants games by high officials and Ancestral Ritual games by commoners:  
With all these entertainments on offer, every corner of Hanyang is bubbling with excitement.

This section of *The Song of Hanyang* lists a colorful array of games and entertainments enjoyed by people from all walks of life from merchants in the market to the nobility. When thinking of the Joseon era, the first thing that comes to the minds of most Koreans is a tedious image of serious scholars in long white robes. In contrast to this perception of a monotonous era, the image of Hanyang captured in this prose-poem is bursting with energy and entertainment. It seems as if everyone in the capital was out having fun.  
*The Song of Hanyang* goes on to explain how Joseon-era people entertained themselves through the example of Seungeon Noreum, or “Show for Delivering Royal Orders.” At the center of this event involving both music and dance was a person holding the office of *byeolgam*. This explains why the event was also called Byeolgam Noreum, or a “Byeolgam Show.”



A Red-robed Entertainer in an Orange Hat

Who were these *byeolgam*? The best place to find *byeolgam* officials was around the king. In illustrations from Joseon and today's history dramas, people in red robes and orange hats are often seen around the king. These eye-catching officials are known as *byeolgam*, the official title for officials belonging to the Royal Palace Management Center (Aekjeongseo).

Their official responsibilities are defined in the *Gyeongguk daejeon* (Grand Code of National Governance) as overseeing “the delivery of royal orders, facilitation of audiences with the king, provision of brushes and ink stones for the king, management of locks and keys for the gates of the royal palace, and installation of various facilities in the yards of the royal palace.” *Byeolgam* were low-ranking officials in charge of these miscellaneous chores. However, what merits discussion here is not these official responsibilities, but their off-duty role in organizing entertainments. The late-Joseon scholar Song Man-jae referred to *byeolgam* in his poem “Watching Theatrical Performances” as “the red-robed entertainer with an orange hat.” A Show for Delivering Royal Orders, or Byeolgam Show, was an extravagant outdoor festivity held under the supervision of these entertainers. The Byeolgam Show was the most popular party in 19th-century Joseon society.

Let's go watch the exciting Show for Delivering Royal Orders!  
It is happening at Gunjaeong Pavilion in the Bugilyeong garrison.  
It has a snow-white cloth pitched high as a canopy.  
Densely spaced lanterns in colorful shades sent from all the garrisons,  
Real and imitation flowers bundled with silk straps and set in glass bottles,  
Spittoons, chamber pots, and ashtrays rendered in nickel, jade, or silver,  
Food containers imported from Japan or China and fancy portable tables,  
And folding screens featuring various themes such as flowers, animals, scenic landscapes,  
or auspicious Chinese characters.

This is from the first part of the Byeolgam Show description in *The Song of Hanyang*. It describes how the arena was prepared for the show. It was lavishly decorated with a white canopy, colorful lanterns, and variously themed paintings. The props were magnificent as well. Even the spittoons, chamber pots, and ashtrays were made from nickel, silver, or jade.



The Chief Supervisor of the Byeolgam Show

The singers and musicians have all gathered,  
Im Jong-cheol on the six-stringed zither, Yang Sa-gil for singing, and Gongdeugi have taken  
the stage for the *gyemyeon* melody in the pansori chant.  
Various *gisaeng* entertainers are also on stage.  
Known for dressing up even for an average performance,  
They have been amazingly adorned for the Byeolgam Show.  
Walking beautifully and flirtatiously onto the stage,  
They come from the Royal Pharmacy, Board of Works, or Office of Benefitting the People.  
There are young and old *gisaeng*, all very talented.

This section describes the entrance of performers onto the stage. Spectators cheered in excitement as renowned singers, musicians, and female entertainers appeared. Among the plethora of performers featured in a Byeolgam Show, the *gisaeng* were the most heartily applauded. These beautifully adorned entertainers were the centerpiece of the event. During the Joseon era, *gisaeng* were celebrities. It was also part of the *byeolgam*'s responsibilities as the party planner to take care of these female entertainers and arrange work for them. It was similar to how today's entertainment management firms oversee their clients.

After taking the stage, the performers were quick to liven up the mood. Losing themselves in the rousing rhythms created by the musical instruments, the spectators were lifted to a state of great excitement. With the cycles of the music, clowns performed jokes to add to the excitement. The atmosphere created by the combination of music and humor emulated that of a classic nightclub.

The unquestionable highlight was the dancing by the *gisaeng*. These stars of the Byeolgam Show would pick up speed in step with the accompanying music. They thrilled the crowd with their upbeat dance moves involving barrel drums and the show finished off with a sword dance. Like a nightclub party of today might feature B-Boying, a Byeolgam Show during Joseon times presented an artistic dance performance by *gisaeng* bearing swords. After watching this thrilling dance, the spectators gradually returned to reality. This journey through the dreamlike experience of a Show for Delivering Royal Orders was all planned and guided by a *byeolgam*.

The party-planning role of *byeolgam* was both an invention and eloquent expression of the late-Joseon entertainment culture. This period witnessed an expansion of commercial trade and the development of marketplaces. With newly acquired wealth, demand for cultural activities surged. People found ways to release the pent-up stress of living in a strictly hierarchical society though entertainment shows. *Byeolgam* emerged out of this popular demand for entertainment and took on the new role of party planner.



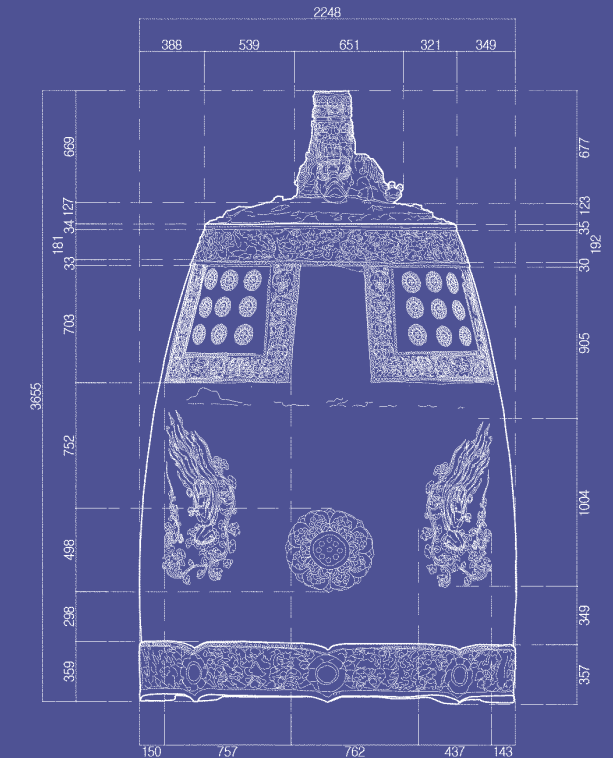
# Building and Utilizing Data for Cultural Heritage

The Cultural Heritage Administration has unveiled a Future Strategy for Cultural Heritage as part of its efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the heritage field and to improve its capacity to respond to future changes. The strategy sets out seven primary tasks, one of which is encouraging a digital transformation in the heritage conservation area. The *Korean Heritage* publication team invited three experts to an online meeting to hear their opinions on the upcoming digital transformation in cultural heritage. Here are some excerpts from their discussion.

**Transcription by** Choi Min-young from the *Korean Heritage* publication team  
**Photos by** Cultural Heritage Administration, the Gyeongju National Museum



A 3D drawing of the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok (Photo courtesy of the Gyeongju National Museum)



**Choi Yeon-gyu,**  
 ICT Management Office, Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea

**Kim Ig-Jae,**  
 Director General, AI and Robotics Institute at the Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST)

**Ahn Jae-hong,**  
 Visiting Professor at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST)

## The Fundamental Necessity of Building Data

**Choi Yeon-gyu:** The digital transformation program known as the Digital New Deal for Cultural Heritage that is being planned by the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) in response to social shifts brought on by COVID-19 consists mainly of two pillars. One is establishing a so-called Data Dam, a reservoir of digital data related to cultural heritage. For this purpose, the CHA will convert existing analog data into digital formats, create

new digital information, and establish a Data Dam by 2030. The collected data will be made widely available so that it can be utilized across society. The other pillar is producing a digital twin, or digital representation, of heritage sites and their settings. Using digital twins, a repair project can be simulated in a virtual space before it is performed on an actual heritage site. The digital twin project ultimately aims to establish a preventive heritage management system equipped with artificial intelligence (AI)-based risk prediction functions.





Choi Yeon-gyu from the Cultural Heritage Administration

**Ahn Jae-hong:** The data the CHA is building is of high quality and contains a satisfactory level of standardization. It spans vast knowledge on various heritage fields and diverse interpretations by many experts. Our accumulation of data on cultural heritage is competitive with other countries in terms of quality and quantity. If the CHA enhances the interoperability between its data and that established by local governments and other institutions, it will greatly facilitate the social utilization of the aggregated information.

**Kim Ig-jae:** In terms of the application of information and communications technology (ICT) to heritage conservation, South Korea is ahead of many other nations. Our ICT is highly advanced and we have actively experimented with its application to the heritage sector. We also maintain a strong commitment to ensuring a digital transformation in cultural heritage. For data building, we need to look



Director-General Kim Ig-jae

at it as a marathon. For example, if we set out to document a restoration project, we have to record every detail from its planning to the final stages, including information on the decision-making process. If we keep accumulating quality data using this kind of long-term perspective, we can expect more benefits from AI.

### What to Collect?

**Choi:** There is a wide range of heritage projects being pursued at the CHA, and each of them produces a great deal of reports. These reports are written and reviewed by humans and are inherently subject to the possibility of human error. There are cases where personnel transfers lead to haphazard mistakes in the recording of heritage. The accumulation of data is as important for its use by future generations as it is for today's application in the decision-making process and other areas.

**Kim:** From the perspective of AI, it is very important that the data we are



Professor Ahn Jae-hong

recording, storing, and managing be high quality. We first have to decide what to record—which heritage sites and what details about them. This task is not just about heritage conservation. It is also about our understanding of the past and present and our vision for the future.

**Ahn:** It is difficult to achieve a high level of sophistication and systematization of data in the heritage sector because we lack a consensus on which attributes of a heritage site should be recorded and how the data should be stored. To reach any kind of agreement in this regard, we first need to define where the aggregated data will be used. However, reaching decisions is not actually possible in many of the cases. Another challenge is error. There are errors incurred during the process of recording and storage. However, there are many cases where we have to work with uncertain information in the absence of thorough research. When deep learning takes place based on such unclear data, it can cause serious subsequent problems. These might

be challenges inherent to the heritage sector.

**Choi:** I think we need to look at this issue within a wider timeframe. I believe what we have to do now is roll back our temporal focus to the data collected in the past and systemize it to align with the information currently being collected based on relatively satisfiable criteria. Incoherencies usually occur when we attempt to apply old data to today's uses. First, tidying up the data from the past should be the way forward.

**Kim:** The significance of digital twins stems from their ability to allow the prediction of the risks that could take place in a given hour, month, or year. It can also tell us what kinds of problems may take place with the application of a particular repair material or method. For these benefits of digital twins to be fully realized and to allow a more sophisticated form of simulation using the system, we need to do things like continuously monitoring changes in a heritage site and its setting through a wide range of sensors, store the recorded data, identify the thematic focus of each heritage conservation area, and systematically collect diverse opinions from various groups of heritage professionals.

**Choi:** Another important task is to establish a data-based decision-making process. At the center of decisions made at the CHA regarding heritage repair or restoration are



A 3D print of the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok . The Cultural Heritage Administration has been publicly releasing accumulated data on cultural heritage to accommodate 3D printing. The data has been used for educational purposes.



A 3D print of the nationally designated horn cup in the shape of a warrior on horseback (Photos courtesy of the Cultural Heritage Administration)

expert opinions from advisors. With the ongoing digitalization of everyday life, there is a growing demand for a paradigm shift in the conservation of heritage including its decision-making process. I believe that making decisions based on precise data and hard evidence is one of the pressing issues for the future of cultural heritage.

**Ahn:** In the medical sector, AI is being applied to the diagnosis of disease. It is true that amassing large quantities of data on heritage is important. However, it is ultimately up to human experts to make sense of the data, identify the nature of the problem at hand, and suggest solutions. The issue is that every expert has a unique own knowledge system and set of personal experiences. What might be considered a simple matter in one heritage conservation area is evaluated as a major challenge in another. This dramatic difference in interpretive yardsticks between individuals and sectors cannot be grasped through data-collecting sensors. Basically, there is the question as to how to incorporate all these different types of expert knowledge into an AI system.

**Kim:** The high accuracy accomplished by AI-based diagnosis in the medical sector is attributed to various factors—image data has been accumulated in large quantities, the collected data is highly standardized, it is easily accessed by relevant users through cloud storage, and experts



steadily correct data errors so that machine learning can take place based on accurate information. What is needed in the heritage sector is ongoing opinion-sharing among experts. Engaging diverse expert groups is essential. Otherwise, the data might be skewed. Data quality can be ensured through free discussions among diverse groups of heritage professionals. We also need a platform where the data can be accumulated on an ongoing basis.

**Choi:** I want to add that digital technology can be utilized to identify new values in a heritage object or site. The recent application of digital technology to a gilt-bronze Maitreya statue is one case in point. The statue was originally evaluated as low in aesthetic quality and poorly finished on its surface. However, technical analysis revealed the superb crafting techniques involved in its creation from just a thin bronze plate. With a wider use of digital technology in the heritage sector, there will be an endless list of heritage objects and buildings whose hidden value can come to light.

### AI-based Public Services

**Choi:** Once the volume of collected data reaches a certain level, we can apply AI to it and improve public services. Interpretation panels are one of the areas that stand to benefit the most from AI. For example, AI can make it possible to offer explanations customized to each

visitor and promote the understanding of architectural jargon by presenting visual aids in the form of 3D models. The issue of using AI brings our attention back to the problem of ensuring the accuracy of information, and also to the importance of establishing a data-based decision-making process. Another potential area for AI is augmented reality (AR) content. As far as AR content is concerned, success with the application of AI depends on the degree to which we can control the social and natural environment around the heritage site.

**Kim:** As you said, with the accumulation of sufficient data we will see the emergence of AI heritage interpreters presenting explanations reflecting individual needs. I don't think we necessarily need more than good verbal explanations. An audio guide would be greatly helpful for improving people's understanding and appreciation of heritage objects and sites if it could fully accommodate individual demands and needs. Rather than ready-made information for everyone, a heritage interpretation system based on customized explanations would be able to deeply engage people on a tour of a given heritage site.

**Ahn:** In this regard, we can learn from the experience of the Harvard Art Museums. They have been using AI to present the museum's collection. They have so far built an extensive dataset of AI-produced descriptions, and these machine-

generated art reports have been evaluated by the public as easier to understand than those generated by art historians. I think the Harvard Art Museums experience offers a good model we can learn from and apply to the Korean heritage sector.

### Expected Benefits

**Ahn:** We have long thought of public services in the heritage sector as separate from the preservation and management of cultural heritage. However, all these activities we are doing with regard to cultural heritage—whether it is heritage surveys, repair projects, or public programs—all boil down to our commitment to improving the conservation of heritage. Our challenge is to figure out how to use digital technology to the benefit of heritage conservation. AI and other digital technologies have the capacity to deliver services that help us better understanding our past without doing any harm to the materiality of heritage. They can create knowledge and experiences that we have never enjoyed. Just as our ancestors bequeathed to us objects, buildings, and sites, we are leaving a digital form of heritage. I hope we will continue to discuss how to apply digital technology to the heritage sector and many other important issues for the development of this hybrid enterprise. As a final note, I want to stress the importance of ethics. When we talk about ICT applications for cultural heritage, we—traditional



A 3D model of Seokguram Grotto produced using laser scanning. 3D scanning can be used to collect data on a large heritage site, not only its scale and form, but also colors and textures. The data gained from 3D scanning is excellent in terms of precision and resolution. (Photo courtesy of the Cultural Heritage Administration)

heritage experts and technology developers alike—need to think about the accuracy of the information, the potential for misunderstanding, and all other ethical questions, all of which have been long-standing issues in the heritage sector.

**Kim:** At the end of the day, our job is to preserve cultural heritage in good condition and identify value in it. Digital data serves as a useful tool in this regard. We should make efforts at properly managing the accredited datasets and actively analyzing them. We should keep accumulating our results so that they

can be used as reference information for analyzing the significance of new heritage objects, buildings, or sites to be discovered in the future. This will contribute to enhancing credibility across the entire value-accrediting process and to both preserving existing heritage value and identifying new sources.

**Choi:** I hope that the digital transformation projects we are implementing at the CHA will prove to be exemplary endeavors. Government support for and leadership in the digitization of the heritage field is a rare boon

that is little more than a dream in many other parts of the world. South Korea is at the forefront of ICT development, and the CHA is striving to utilize these advanced digital and AI technologies to transform every sector of heritage conservation and eventually bring about better changes for the future of heritage. With the support of the people involved, I believe that the endeavors toward digital transformation we are making at the CHA will certainly generate meaningful results.



# Commercial Aspirations in the Early Modern Art Market



An illustration from the December 4, 1909 edition of the British weekly newspaper *The Graphic*. It depicts a Western man examining a Korean ceramic vessel.

In this picture from early 20th-century Korea, a Western man in a fedora is haggling over a Korean porcelain vessel with his wife standing beside him. Two Korean merchants on the other side of the trade pretend at calmness. They can sense that the man sincerely desires the art and would be willing to pay a high price. The unexpected presence of Westerners in this Korean marketplace has raised a great fuss. Everyone from little children to a woman carrying a load on her head are busy examining this alien couple. This illustration from the December 4, 1909 edition of the British weekly newspaper *The Graphic* clearly reflects the impact on the Korean art market of the opening of ports and arrival of Westerners.

Text and photos by Sohn Young-ok, Cultural Journalist at Kookmin Ilbo



Streetcars running in central Seoul in the early modern period

## Stolen Celadon Vessels Placed in the Market

The scene depicted in the British newspaper would have been unimaginable just 30 years previously. What happened in Korea to create this change? The country opened its ports to the outside world. Following the signing of a treaty with Japan in 1876, Korea began to forge diplomatic relations with other nations, including the United States in 1882, the United Kingdom and Germany

in 1893, and France in 1886. These new relations with the Western world turned Joseon society inside out. Schools opened to teach English language, modern hotels were built, Western medicine was introduced, and streetcars began to crisscross the capital, to name just a few transformations. The opened ports allowed in a flow of Western ideas and goods, and Western people as well. They arrived with diverse purposes as physicians, missionaries, soldiers, engineers, and artists, but they all shared a desire to collect objects while in Korea. By doing so, these newcomers created a new demand in the Korean art market. This particularly impacted Goryeo celadon. The Japanese historian Roysaku Fujita describes the Korean art market of the time:

"As soon as they opened their legations in Gyeongseong [present-day Seoul], some of the European and American diplomats, known for deep passions, started to send Korean specialties back home and collect a wide variety of local artifacts. ... In response, tombs in Kaesong [the capital during the Goryeo Dynasty] and Ganghwa-do Island



were plundered to a great extent in and around the 40th year of the Meiji era [1907], and celadon and white porcelain pieces from the tombs flowed endlessly into the market. Around this time people in the West were developing a taste for the flamboyant aesthetics of Ming and Qing Dynasty porcelain and also for the innocent beauty of the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Celadon pieces from Goryeo were appealing to them as well, and fulfilled their appetite for collection. For the first time, objects from Korea became the subject of artistic appreciation.”

The Western world experienced a popular trend for chinoiserie in the 18th century, a decorative style characterized by the use of Chinese motifs and techniques. Collecting Chinese ceramics came into fashion as well. It was only natural that Westerners entering Korea in the early 20th century possessed a longing for items that could meet their taste for Chinese porcelain. Merchants were quick to respond to this emerging demand. Since the main available source of Goryeo celadon at the time was high-status burials, the tombs of Goryeo kings and nobles were extensively plundered. Celadon artifacts interred as grave goods were looted and traded on the black market. Japanese merchants were also involved in this business involving tomb robbery and illegal transactions. Opening its ports to the West about 20 years earlier than Korea, Japan had already experienced a Western craze for Asian ceramics. With commercial lessons learned at home, Japanese traders came over to Korea and worked with Korean counterparts to trade in Goryeo celadon and profit from this illegal enterprise.



**Above\_** A painting of a Korean funeral by Kim Jun-geun

**Below\_** A scene of punishing a criminal by Kim Jun-geun

## ‘Export Paintings’ Produced for Westerners

There was another phenomenon in this art market sparked by the entrance of Westerners. At the time, Korea appeared to the outside world as a country shrouded in mystery. Since photography remained a rare technology, the everyday lives of ordinary Koreans were turned into paintings for sale to Westerners who wished to learn more about the “Hermit Kingdom.” These genre paintings became known as “export paintings.” This novel demand gave rise to the emergence of a new group of artists who produced such paintings while travelling between the opened ports or from a base in large cities like Seoul and Pyongyang. Some of them came to enjoy enormous popularity. A leading figure in this regard was Kim Jun-geun (?–?). Kim’s genre paintings departed from examples produced in the 18th century. Multiple copies were made for Western customers, and unusual subjects were adopted to satisfy their tastes. In terms of subject, he dealt with farm work, traditional marriage ceremonies, and many other themes common in 18th-century genre painting. However, he also depicted the newly developing cottage industries and other social shifts of the 19th century. Scenes of punishing criminals, observing ancestral rites, and performing funerals were also widely featured since they caught the eye of Western customers.

Kim’s works are collected by 17 international art institutions, including the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities) in Leiden, Museum am Rothenbaum (Museum of Ethnology) in Hamburg, and Musée Guimet (Guimet Museum) in Paris. The combined number of works by Kim in international collections

possibly reaches as high as 1,200. Since people from the West who came to Korea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often served as collectors for ethnic museums back home, many more copies of these works are actually found overseas than in Korea.

Ethnology museums in Europe and the United States collected Korean cultural items through their citizens working in the field. The objects they collected were not limited to genre paintings; they included pretty much anything that could inform on Korea, from hats and clothes to agricultural implements, games, and weapons. The German diplomat Paul Georg von Möllendorff served in this capacity for the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, the American missionary and physician Horace Newton Allen did so for the Smithsonian, and the German merchant Heinrich Constantin Eduard Meyer collected for the Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg.

As with other major social events such as military conflicts or outbreaks of infectious disease, the opening of ports resulted in major ripple effects throughout the art market. Celadon pieces that had been buried for centuries as grave goods attained new status as works of art. With the abolition of the Royal Bureau of Painting (Dohwaseo), royal artists lost their government support and were forced to secure new sources for their livelihoods. These newly independent painters found emerging opportunities among Western customers and developed a new genre of painting to suit their tastes. The opening of ports eventually stirred up the Korean art market and stimulated new commercial desires.





# Toward the Integrated Management of Repair Records

Historic Building Information Modeling, abbreviated as HBIM, refers to an emerging method of modelling historical buildings. It is an application of Building Information Modeling (BIM), a collaborative process that allows stakeholders to design, construct, and operate a new facility through a single 3D model. HBIM provides an integrated approach to information management, not only for geometric data, but for other kinds of information as well, such as repair records. It allows experts from diverse areas of heritage conservation to work together in a shared digital environment.

BIM has been widely utilized in the planning, design, and construction of new buildings and facilities since the early 2000s. It took time for this collaborative methodology to be adopted in the field of heritage management and conservation since the formal complexity of historical buildings can hamper measurement. With advances in laser scanning, 3D modelling, and computer performance, however, BIM is gradually becoming a more easily applicable methodology for the heritage sector.

**Text by** Kim Young-ho, Preservation Technology Division, Cultural Heritage Administration

**Photos by** Cultural Heritage Administration



An example of a 3D model produced using Historic Building Information Modeling (HBIM)

## For a Shift to More Scientific Decision-making

Heritage repair is a broadly interconnected process involving multiple actors, including the Cultural Heritage Administration, local governments, advisory committees, and heritage repairers. A large volume of data is currently produced in various formats, such as design books, repair reports, photographs, project plans, and more. All of this information is stored separately and mainly in analog format, frustrating attempts at integrated data management. The lack of integrated data management has made it difficult to quickly locate information needed in the heritage repair process. Furthermore, decision-making for determining the scope and methodology of a repair project has been heavily reliant on individual experience and knowledge rather than becoming a



*The CHA is establishing a system to collectively analyze data from HBIM models according to the related categories. As a first step toward this end, we are devising an Information Strategy Plan.*

scientific process drawing on accumulated data and statistics.

To promote scientific decision-making in heritage repair, the CHA is planning to undertake a series of projects for systematically collecting and managing information on repair projects.

Integrated Management of Individual Repair Histories

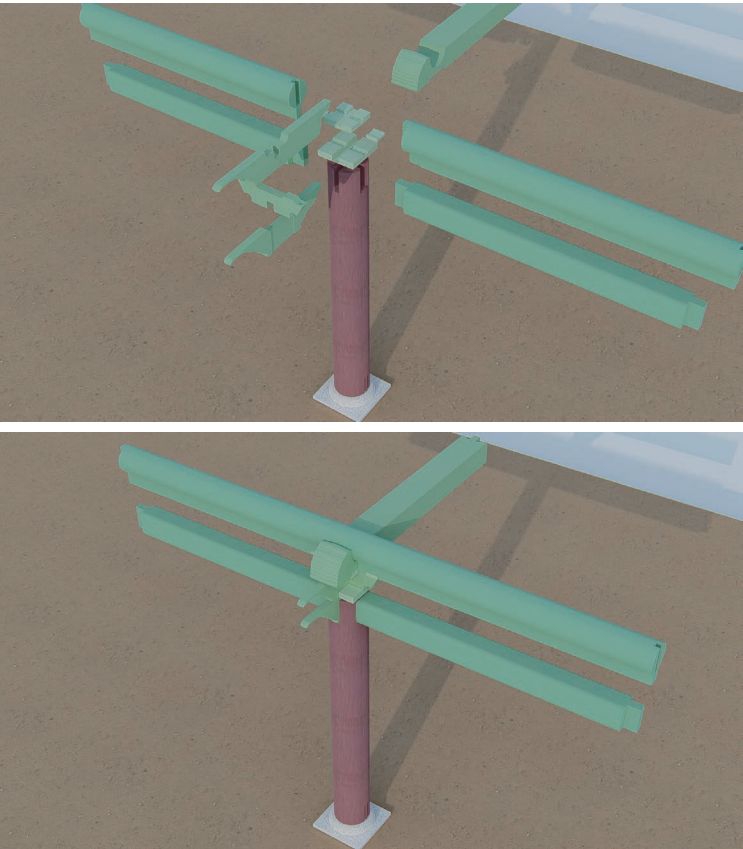
The first effort is the introduction of HBIM into the heritage repair process. With the application of HBIM, a 3D representation of a heritage building can be produced that provides information on architectural elements on both the exterior and interior of the building. Data can then be added and updated for individual elements. As an example, HBIM could be applied to Sungnyemun Gate, the southern gate in the Seoul City Wall. An HBIM model of Sungnyemun would allow the ongoing storage of diverse kinds of information on each individual element, including its form, how it is joined with other elements, and such non-geometric information as the cause of given damage, dates of repair, and repair methods applied. It can also incorporate both textual and photographic information. By providing an integrated view of the repair history of a historical building, HBIM will greatly assist the analysis of information on previous repair projects and consequently with making decisions for a task at hand.

The CHA is planning to build HBIM models for nationally designated historic wooden buildings such as the Paradise Hall of Bongjeongsa Temple in Andong and the Great Hero Hall of Sudeoksa Temple in Yesan. We will start with 27 Treasures and National Treasures this year and plan to complete a total of 221 over the five years until the end of 2025. Starting in 2026, we will expand into stone Treasures and National Treasures. We are also planning to prepare a set of standards for HBIM construction and will encourage local governments to adopt this new methodology for heritage sites at the provincial/municipal levels to allow them to work in a collaborative environment. The HBIM models will be made available to the public in order to stimulate the production of augmented reality or virtual reality experiences for cultural heritage and other forms of digital content by private developers.

Big Data Analytics for HBIM Models

While managing the repair history of individual buildings through HBIM models is important, applying big data analytics to the data sets stored in all HBIM models would also contribute to improving the decision-making process. Big data analytics will allow repair patterns to be identified for each type of heritage—including major causes of damage, repair cycles, and repair methods for stone buildings. For example, if a

HBIM models can show how architectural members are joined.



particular wooden building has a repair cycle of 20 years and the average time for its category is 40 years, it indicates a closer look should be taken at what has been causing the damage and better countermeasures should be devised.

The CHA is establishing a system to collectively analyze data from HBIM models according to the related categories. As a first step toward this end, we are devising an Information Strategy Plan. A comprehensive repair information system is scheduled to be completed by 2023.

This big data system will allow the extraction of necessary repair information for each category of heritage, ranging from the kinds and amounts of materials that have been used for repairing each category of heritage to how often repairs are carried out and what are the major sources of damage. These analysis results will make great

contributions to preparing more customized repair plans for individual heritage buildings.

Ongoing maintenance is the key to success in data management. In this regard, the CHA will establish a systematic maintenance mechanism for updating the repair history of heritage buildings. It will ensure that relevant data is added to HBIM models whenever a new survey or repair project takes place and will also employ staff members dedicated to monitoring the added information for errors. The CHA will work continuously to facilitate this grand shift toward scientific decision-making by drawing on HBIM and big data analytics.



## Korea's Lantern Lighting Festival Wins Global Recognition

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage decided at its fifteenth session, held online December 14–18, 2020, to inscribe South Korea's/ Yeondeunghoe (lantern lighting festival) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The committee took note of the inclusiveness of Yeondeunghoe as it contributes to overcoming social boundaries and expressing cultural diversity. The committee also noted that the lantern lighting festival serves to spread pleasure and enhance social cohesion in difficult times. Most importantly, the committee celebrated Yeondeunghoe as an example of how inscription can contribute to enhancing public awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage.



With the addition of the lantern lighting festival, the Republic of Korea now has 21 elements on the Representative List. The Korean government will continue its

long-standing endeavors to further disseminate traditional Korean culture in a wider world and support cultural diversity and human creativity.

## Korean Heritage Overseas Gains a New Face



**Heritage of Korea**  
대한민국 국외소재문화재

The Cultural Heritage Administration has developed a new brand identity for Korean heritage collected or otherwise situated overseas.

The creation of this collective symbol for overseas Korean heritage was carried out with a view to improving

protection and public awareness. The brand identity will be featured widely on diverse materials—for example in promotional books, guide maps, banners, and invitation letters. It will be also included in plaques for immovable Korean heritage overseas, such as Korean legations, sites holding memories of the independence movement, and places associated with the history of Korean immigration.

The logo for the brand identity

is based on the four trigrams of the national flag. It is designed to show these trigrams connected like a Möbius strip, imparting the meaning that Korean heritage overseas bridges the present with the past and Korea with other parts of the world. After serious consideration of the various options, “Heritage of Korea” was added as a message to highlight the nation's history.

**Nabak Kimchi** by Ha Young-hee Kimchi is a distinctive Korean dish made by salting, seasoning, and fermenting vegetables. The most popular ingredients are napa cabbage, daikon radishes, and cucumbers. Kimchi comes in many diverse varieties depending on the main vegetable and preparation methods used. The kimchi from each region, and even each individual family, can exhibit unique characteristics. Recipes from the cold northern portions of the peninsula are distinguished by modest use of red pepper powder, varieties from the southwestern section are known for their piquant spiciness, and those from the southeast are famous for their salting. The type in the picture above is *nabak kimchi*, a kind of watery kimchi made with Chinese cabbage and daikon radish. Characterized by its refreshing taste, *nabak kimchi* is a common dish on a Korean dining table. It is enjoyed around the year, but its popularity peaks in spring.

