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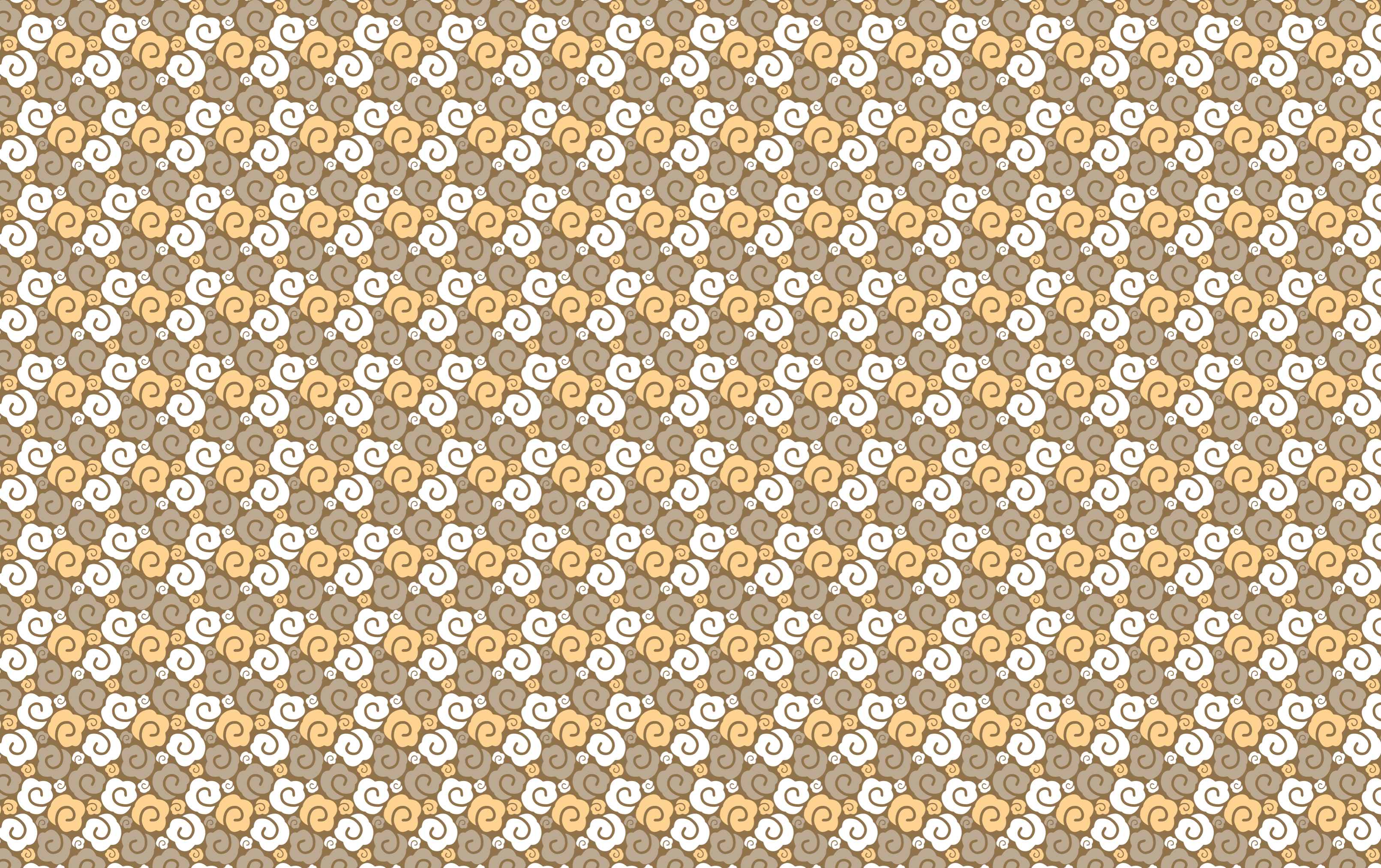
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The Winter Gatherings of Joseon Literati

Text by Yoon Duk-no, Food Culture Columnist

Images by the National Folk Museum of Korea, the National Museum of Korea

Koreans love to wine and dine together. Family, friends, colleagues, or people with a similar hobby gather together to share food and drinks on any pretext they can find. Koreans' fondness for social gatherings goes far back in time. Confucian scholars in the Joseon era (1392–1910) would join various kinds of assemblies as a means to eat, drink, and talk together. Their penchant for get-togethers lasted year-round. The biting cold of wintertime could not drive them to abandon their social habits. Let us explore the social gatherings that Joseon-era scholars enjoyed in winter.



Outdoor Feast after a Snow The painting shown here is a later reproduction of an original work by the 18th-century artist Kim Hong-do. In it, Joseon scholars wearing winter caps gather under snow-covered pines and enjoy sliced meat being cooked on an iron frypan. (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)



Outdoor Gathering

In this picture, the 19th-century painter Seong Hyeop depicts a *nallohoe*, or a “brazier assembly.” The painter wrote on it that it was good to have delicious foods together, but that he should guard against craving it too much. (Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Korea)

Meet, Eat, and Talk

In traditional Korean society, the first day of the tenth lunar month was considered to mark the start of winter. People kicked off the winter season by building a fire in a *hwaro*, a form of brazier that was placed in a room to keep it warm. They celebrated this seasonal shift with a *nallohoe*, or a “brazier assembly.” They invited over family and friends and grilled beef or cooked a hot pot over the fire in the brazier. The mid-19th-century compilation *Dongguk sesigi* (Seasonal Customs of the Eastern Kingdom) includes an entry on these brazier assemblies as a seasonal custom of the tenth lunar month.

In Seoul, people make a fire in a *hwaro* with charcoal, place a gridiron over it, and grill beef marinated in sesame oil, soy sauce, eggs, green onions, garlic, and peppers. They enjoy the beef as they cook it over the open fire. This occasion is called *nallohoe*. This beef barbecue is a seasonal food for winter and begins to be consumed in this month.

Brazier assemblies are also featured in *The Jehol Diary* (*Yeolha ilgi* in Korean), a travelogue written by the scholar Park Ji-won (1737–1805) after his visit to China.

I remember I had a *nallohoe* with Mr. Kim on a snowy night. We sat face to face eating grilled meat from a *hwaro* placed between us. The room was heated up with the smoke from the *hwaro*, and we were soaked in the smell of grilling meat and all the other seasonings. Mr. Kim walked up to the window and cooled himself with a handheld fan, and said, “It is really refreshing here. It feels like I am not far away from the paradise of the Daoist immortals.”

Kim’s contemporary Yi Deok-mu (1741–1739) depicts a brazier assembly he had with his friends in his anthology *Ajeong yugo*.

A heated-up pot has consoled my hungry stomach.
The bright moon hanging over the hill shines silently on the house.
With the bridge glistening with frost,
My clothes are freezing on my way home at this late hour.

Brazier assemblies were held mostly in the *sarangbang*, the room that served as the study and salon for the master of a household in a traditional Korean house. After a session of eating and talking around the burning charcoal in a brazier, a strong draft by the window and the freezing cold outside must have felt refreshing.

Joseon scholars also held *nanhanhoe*. The first two syllables—*nan* and *han*—respectively mean “the cold” and “the warmth,” so this gathering was understood as meaning an “assembly to relieve the cold with warmth.” It might seem like too obvious a name for a winter get-together. The story related to its origins may be a little more interesting than the name itself.

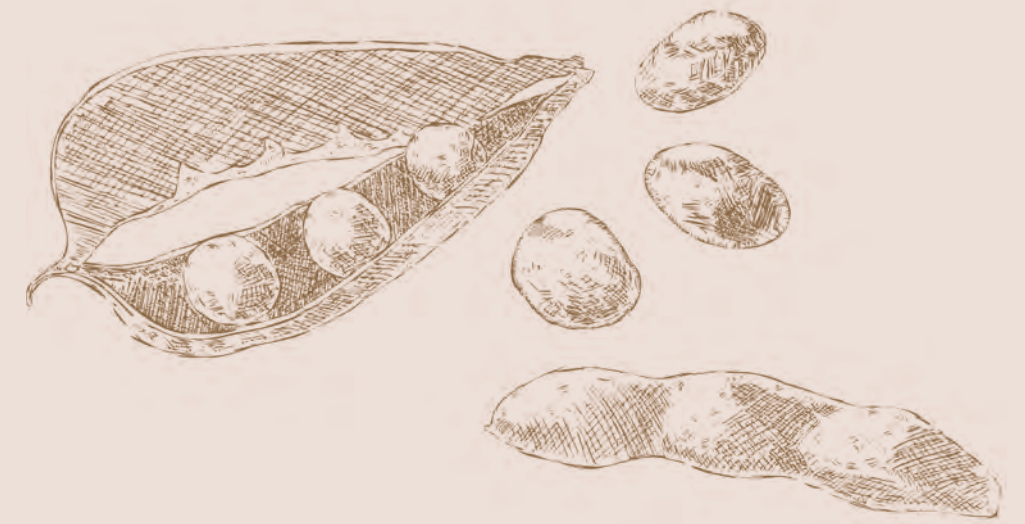
Nanhanhoe meetings originated in China during the Tang Dynasty. One winter day in those years

the first snow of the season was falling heavily. A heavy first snowfall was considered a sign of a good harvest in the coming year in China and other parts of East Asia. With this heavy first snow, a rich man called in his friends and neighbors and asked them to shovel the snow in the neighborhood. He then treated them to good food and drinks so that they could recover from the labor and the cold. This rich man from Tang China called this gathering a *nanhanhoe* and Joseon scholars borrowed the idea. They would bring their friends together on the first snow of the season or a particularly heavy snowfall, share grilled beef, drink wine, and compose poems. They called these snowy assemblies *nanhanhoe*.

It should be clear by now that pretty much any event could be an excuse for Joseon scholars to



A *hwaro*, a form of brazier that was placed in a room to keep it warm (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)



hold a get-together. It might be the starting of a fire in braziers, a snowfall, or just about anything else. Confucian scholars of the Joseon era were no different from today’s Koreans in wasting no opportunities for eating and drinking together.

There was also a winter gathering called *danhyanghoe*, literally a “birch-scented assembly.” The poet Jo Su-sam (1762–1849) introduced *danhyanghoe* as a New Year custom dating to the Unified Silla period (668–935) in his anthology *Chujaejip*. The king and his courtiers would come together to make a fire with charcoal and grill skewered beef on the Lunar New Year. The name “birch-scented assembly” was derived from the wood from which the charcoal was made. In the book, the barbecue eaten at a birch-scented assembly is referred to as *seolyamyek*, or “beef on a snowy night.” These birch-scented assemblies were mostly held out of doors. Winter can be cruel on the Korean Peninsula, making it hard to believe that Joseon people held outdoor gatherings in the wintertime. However, they actually did wine and dine outside on harsh winter days. A painting by the foremost late-Joseon artist Kim Hong-do depicts Joseon scholars wearing winter caps enjoying sliced meat being cooked outdoors on an iron frypan. This painting is titled *Outdoor Feast after Snow*.

A *yeonpohoe* is another kind of winter meeting enjoyed by Joseon scholars. A *yeonpohoe* means an “assembly to have *yeonpotang*.” *Yeonpotang* refers today to octopus soup. However, it originally meant a tofu soup made with the addition of radish and beef or chicken. *Yeonpo* literally means “soft tofu.” Many mentions can be found in historical documents of Joseon scholars savoring *yeonpohoe* at Buddhist temples. Why did they have tofu soup at Buddhist temples?

During the Joseon Dynasty, Buddhist temples functioned as tofu producers. They provided tofu for the royal household and for ancestral rites at royal tombs. Would Joseon scholars really hold social gatherings within a Buddhist temple complex? It is unlikely. They probably secured the tofu from a Buddhist temple and enjoyed the tofu soup somewhere nearby. They must have enjoyed the warmth of the soup while feeling the full force of the harsh winter, just like Parisians might drink hot coffee at an outdoor table in wintertime.

The practice of gathering to eat and talk together among the Joseon literati has similarities to the concept of a symposium. Currently referring to a conference, the word “symposium” is derived from an ancient Greek word meaning “drinking together.” Joseon scholars’ love for a good “symposium” has been transmitted to today.

The Gwageo,

the Primary Mission of Joseon Scholars



There are still words in the everyday Korean lexicon that trace their roots in the civil service examinations of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) known as *gwageo*. The person who took first place in a civil service examination received the title *jangwon*, literally “the prime.” The terms *geupje* and *nakbang* respectively referred to passing and failing these examinations. Civil service examinations were also called *deungyongmun*, literally “dragon gate,” a reference to a mythological gate that a carp could leap over and become a dragon. All these words associated with the institution of *gwageo* maintain a strong expressive power in contemporary Korean when used in any context related to an important test.

Text by Cha Mi-hee, Professor at the Department of Social Studies Education at Ewha Womans University College of Education

Illustration by Yoo Hwan-young



The Pathway to Leadership

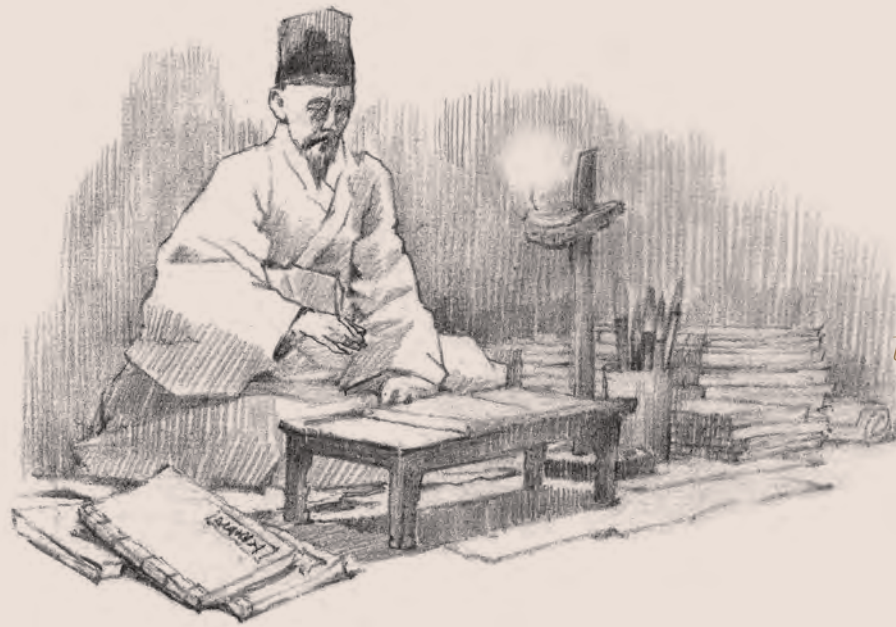
The Confucian society of Joseon-era Korea was controlled by civil officials. They held leadership positions in the political field, and in the cultural and economic sectors as well. The *gwageo* was used to select future members of this power elite. Its position in Joseon society as a vehicle for accomplishing personal goals and fulfilling social duties is unparalleled by any of the contemporary school or employment examinations in South Korea, or even by all of them combined.

Given the prestige ascribed to success at the *gwageo*, it required great ability in a range of fields. It goes without saying that a candidate had to be well versed in the Confucian classics. He was also required to prove his capacity for writing literature and for understanding and resolving practical issues. Mastering this list of needed abilities demanded long years of unswerving dedication. It follows that those who were born into a social environment free from the obligation of labor gained a much better chance with the *gwageo* examinations. This was why only members of the *yangban*, the highest social class of Joseon outside the royalty, who applied for the civil

service examinations even though commoners were also legally eligible to take the tests.

For members of the *yangban* class, passing the civil service examinations was the ultimate purpose of their lives. Most of them dedicated themselves to preparing for the *gwageo* examinations and took every opportunity to take them. When a scheduled examination drew nearer, the entire nation bustled with candidates on their way to the capital Hanyang (now Seoul) to sit the exams. Earnestly wishing them good luck, friends and family would treat them with special foods or raise their spirits with auspicious gifts.

Candidates could sit the *gwageo* examinations regardless of age, level of education, or number of previous applications, but only a limited number of people could pass each examination and the competition was cut-throat. The proportion of successful candidates could reach as low as one in several thousand, and candidates who had been preparing for well over ten years could still easily fail. However, the harder it got to “leap over the dragon gate,” the stronger the social belief became that passing the *gwageo* was the greatest success any Confucian gentleman could achieve.



*The more difficult
the passing exam in
the past, the more
widespread the idea
that it is the greatest
success and glory
one can enjoy in the
human world.*

Personal Glory and Family Pride

The importance to *yangban* families of the civil service examinations is demonstrated by a late-Joseon collection of stories on Confucian figures called *Gimun chonghwa*. One of the episodes related to the *gwageo* examinations is presented here.

Saengwon Yi Deok-jung (1702–1748), a resident of Hanyang, had passed the *saengwon* examination three years before in 1727 and had just one day before the civil service examination. The *saengwon* title Yi Deok-jung held was one of the two titles awarded by the national higher education institution Seonggyungwan to those who passed its entrance examination. The other was *jinsa*. The *saengwon* and *jinsa* examinations respectively tested potential students' understanding of the Confucian classics and their literary abilities. After some education at Seonggyungwan, these *saengwon* and *jinsa* holders advanced to take the civil service examinations. Yi Deok-jung had not accomplished this final goal for three years after successfully passing through the first step in joining the Joseon power elite and was looking

forward trying again the next day.

The issue was that Yi's family was very poor. His wife had to borrow rice from a neighbor to feed him the next morning. She carefully placed the rice in a wooden bowl so as not to lose a single grain. The amount of rice was too small to fill the bowl. Relieved that she would be able to offer her husband a proper breakfast, she went to sleep. A few hours later, she awoke from a dream that every grain of the borrowed rice had turned into a small dragon and filled the wooden container to the brim. Thinking that the dream was auspicious, she hurried into the kitchen and cooked the rice for her husband.

Just then there was a knock on their household gate. It was Yi Tae-jung (1694–1756), Deok-jung's elder third cousin who lived in the Gyeolseong area of Chungcheong-do Province. Tae-jung had passed the *jinsa* examination in 1717 and had been taking the civil service examinations for 13 years. Living outside the capital, Tae-jung had to travel all the way up to Hanyang for the examinations. This year as before he had walked for four full days and finally arrived at Deok-jung's house on the morning of the examination. He looked visibly worn out from the days of walking and had developed blisters on his feet.

After receiving Tae-jung into his study, Deok-jung asked his wife how much rice was available. She confessed that there was only one portion. Deok-jung asked his wife to bring the breakfast to his study, intending to share it with Tae-jung. Upon this request, his wife urged Deok-jung not to share the rice with Tae-jung. Asked why, she revealed her auspicious dream from early that morning. Her explanation was met with a stinging admonition from her husband. Deok-jung rebuked his wife, saying that it was unthinkable to fill his own stomach while Tae-jung was hungry. He told her, "If I let my brother go hungry for the sake of my success, the heavenly god would never be on my side in the examination."

Deok-jung's wife had no choice but to prepare a breakfast table and bring it to the study. She peeped through the window at the two sharing the precious bowl of rice. She must have felt broken-hearted. It is not that she did not understand that it was the humane and moral thing to share whatever food that was available with kin. However, she struggled with it that particular morning because to her it was not just rice in the bowl, but small dragons.

After sharing the breakfast, Deok-jung and Tae-jung entered the examination site and they both ended up passing. In that year, 1730, 20 people passed the exam. Deok-jung ranked 12th and his cousin Tae-jung came in 18th. Entering officialdom, they assumed a series of important posts and enjoyed great success.

It is not certain from this story whether Deok-jung's wife was reassured by her husband doing better than his cousin. What is clear is her earnest wish for Deok-jung's success in the examination. The resolute refusal of her somewhat selfish request by Deok-jung demonstrates that the Confucian teachings he studied for the civil service examination did not stop at the theoretical level, but had been transformed into actual behaviors in his everyday life.

As this anecdote shows, Joseon-era scholars regarded passing the *gwageo* examinations as their greatest mission in life and the highest glory they could achieve. Their aspirations were always shared and fully supported by their families.



K-entertainment

K-pop and Its Cultural Origins

Interviews with Shin Hyun-gyu, Professor at Chung-Ang University,
and Park Hee-a, a freelance popular culture columnist



Text by Choi Min-young

Photos by the National Folk Museum of Korea, the National Hangeul Museum, and Jung Meen-young

Korean popular culture has been sweeping the world. Korea's leadership is unquestioned in fields including film and video games. At the heart of the growing popularity of Korean cultural efforts is K-pop, or Korean pop music, which has become a truly global phenomenon. The spikes in global K-pop fandom may feel quite sudden to many, but the artistic sophistication of K-pop can be traced back to traditional Korean entertainment. For the winter issue of *Korean Heritage* we listened to professor Shin Hyun-gyu at Chung-Ang University and popular culture columnist Park Hee-a as they explored the past and present of Korean entertainment.



A photo from the 1940s showing a revue performance at the *gisaeng* training institute of Pyongyang (Giseong Gwonbeon) (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)

Professor Shin Hyun-gyu at Chung-Ang University

Gisaeng as Performing Artists

Thinking about Korean popular culture today, you might wonder who was there at its early formation. Professor Shin Hyun-gyu at Chung-Ang

University answers that the progenitors of Korean popular culture were definitely *gisaeng*, or “female entertainers.” According to Shin, *gisaeng* played a critical role in transmitting and popularizing traditional performing arts through the tumultuous transitional period of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945).

“It is hard to succinctly describe the social role



A photo postcard capturing a scene from a singing class at the *gisaeng* training institute of Pyongyang where students learn traditional Korean narrative songs (*chang*) to the accompaniment of an hourglass drum (*buk*) (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum of Korea)

of *gisaeng* in Joseon-era society. If I may, I would describe them as a social group possessing a paradoxical identity—they were loved as talented artists excelling in poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music on the one hand, but on the other they were assigned to the lowest class in the strict social hierarchy of the time.”

Today, the term *gisaeng* includes negative connotations of promiscuity or even prostitution. However, it was originally used to refer to female

entertainers who registered with the royal court and local governments during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). These government-affiliated performers sang, played instruments, and danced at royal feasts and other official occasions. They supported the governing philosophy of the dynasty through music and dance. The *gisaeng* institution gradually dissolved in the final years of the dynasty after the abolition of the social class system in 1894. The female artists who lost their affiliation with the

Curriculum at Giseong Gwonbeon in 1934

1st grade	<i>gagok</i> vocal music, painting/calligraphy, ethics for <i>gisaeng</i> , <i>changga</i> singing, Korean, math, Japanese
2nd grade	<i>ujo</i> melodic mode, <i>sijo</i> vocal music, <i>gasa</i> vocal music, Korean, math, music, Japanese, painting/calligraphy, ethics for <i>gisaeng</i> , <i>changga</i> singing, dance
3rd grade	<i>gasa</i> vocal music, dance, <i>japga</i> singing, <i>changga</i> singing, Japanese singing, Korean, Japanese, Western and Eastern music, painting/calligraphy, ethics for <i>gisaeng</i> , <i>changga</i> singing

Timetable for third-year students at Giseong Gwonbeon in 1939

Class	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	Japanese	Japanese	composition	conversation	Folk music	Folk music
2	painting / calligraphy	painting / calligraphy	painting / calligraphy	painting / calligraphy	painting / calligraphyw	painting / calligraphy
3	<i>gagok</i> vocal music	<i>gagok</i> vocal music	<i>gagok</i> vocal music	<i>gagok</i> vocal music	<i>gagok</i> vocal music	<i>gagok</i> vocal music
4	Japanese singing	Japanese singing	Japanese singing	Japanese singing	Japanese singing	conversation
5	<i>japga</i> singing	Buddhist dance	<i>japga</i> singing	vocal music	<i>japga</i> singing	
6	singing practice	music	singing practice	Buddhist dance	singing practice	

government entered the private sector and joined together in *gisaeng* associations, which gained the name *gwonbeon* in 1917.

“*Gwonbeon* operated training institutes to nurture future *gisaeng* through systematic education. They offered a three-year curriculum designed to train students in diverse artistic skills. The most famous *gisaeng* training institute was the one in Pyongyang called Giseong Gwonbeon. It opened in 1926 and taught about 250 girls at a time. These trainees aged between 13 to 15 not only studied traditional music, dance, and calligraphy, but also Western dance forms and jazz music.”

Students at *gisaeng* training institutes would specialize in an artistic area among poetry, singing, playing instruments, or dance, and they also trained in such subjects as Japanese language, Chinese characters, etiquette, calligraphy, painting, and more. The training programs at these institutes for future entertainers were rigorous. Students could spend a month to learn a single step in a dance class or reduce their consumption of food for an extended period to be capable of

reaching certain vocal tones. Their skills were continuously assessed through regular tests. They could only advance to the next grade and eventually graduate after passing examinations.

“After graduation, *gisaeng* were invited to perform at celebratory events or at high-end restaurants. Top-class entertainers could be paid triple the fee of an average *gisaeng*, and there were cases where their fee could reach as high as one hundred times the average. And of course, the time of renowned *gisaeng* entertainers had to be reserved months in advance.”

The 1920s and 1930s saw the organization of an endless chain of singing contests. The most prominent figures at these contests were the *gisaeng*, many of whom used them to rise to stardom. Award-winning singers would release phonographs, the foremost medium for popularizing music in Korea, with songs they had mastered at *gisaeng* training institutes. It can be said that the era of popular music was ushered in by the *gisaeng* in Korea.

“Around this time, *gisaeng* female entertainers became highly visible through mass media such

The *gisaeng* Wang Su-bok became a popular singer in 1933 with the release of her first record. The photo on the right shows Wang from a pharmaceutical advertisement, and the one on the left is a record she released on Polydor Records. (Photo courtesy of the National Hangeul Museum)



as radio, cinema, theater, and newspapers. On the one hand, people looked down on these entertainers from the lowest social class, but on the other hand they revered them and imitated the way they looked. *Gisaeng* entertainers already functioned as public idols everyone wanted to emulate.”

Valuable Carriers of Traditional Performing Arts

In the early 20th century, Korea underwent a dramatic cultural transformation. Novel ideas and goods gushed in with the opening of ports in the late 19th century, but traditional culture was systematically erased by the Japanese colonial authorities. At the forefront of Japanese cultural policy on its peninsular colony was the royal court. The Japanese colonialists disparaged and dismantled the existing royal culture.

“During the colonial era, royal performances were

discontinued. With no performances to give, the dancers, singers, and instrument players affiliated with the royal court were dispersed and lost their means of practice and transmission. Under these circumstances, students at *gisaeng* training institutes took over the transmission of the tradition of royal performances. They were taught by the top performing artists of the era to master diverse forms of royal performance. What is known as *gugak*, or ‘traditional Korean music’, today was handed down thanks to *gisaeng*. If it had not been for these entertainers, we might no longer have what we now understand as traditional performing arts.”

This period coincided with the emergence of large theaters in Korea. This public entertainment venue required different skills and approaches than those for the relatively small private spaces long familiar to *gisaeng* entertainers. To satisfy their new audiences, they experimented constantly with new ideas and practices. The free access to these theaters where anyone with a ticket could enter allowed performers



Professor Shin Hyun-gyu emphasizes the critical role that *gisaeng* entertainers played in transmitting traditional performing arts and sparking the phenomenon of pop culture in Korea.

to garner popularity among the wider public.

“Photos from this period show *gisaeng* performers on stage in Western dress doing non-traditional dance forms. They would also play musical instruments along with a Western band. The way they performed on stage at the time looks similar to that of K-pop idols today. *Gisaeng* entertainers went out of their way to adopt new artistic forms. They did so since it was what the audiences of the day demanded.”

Professor Shin expressed deep regrets about the association contemporary Koreans are quick to make between *gisaeng* and sex workers. The female entertainers who were collectively called *gisaeng* were more like performing artists than people selling sex for money.

“I think that what underpins the global appeal of K-pop today is our traditional culture. The enormous popularity of Korean popular culture around the globe owes a great deal to this group of entertainers called *gisaeng*, not

only for their role in transmitting the traditional performing arts but also for their strong spirit of artistic experimentation and their passion for performance. The contributions they made to the success of K-pop should be recognized.”

Wang Su-bok (1917–2003) was a *gisaeng*-turned-singer who enjoyed enormous popularity during the colonial era. At the peak of her career in her late teens, Wang boarded an airplane for Japan with the lofty purpose of making Korean music better known beyond its borders. This *gisaeng* singer going abroad to find a larger stage is not much different from K-pop idols appealing to international audiences. Korean singers made their first inroads into the international entertainment industry in the mid-2000s. However, it took time before their efforts gained traction on the global scene. In 2012, Psy’s “Gangnam Style” smashed records in many countries around the world, and now we are seeing the boy band BTS topping the Billboard Hot 100.



Popular culture columnist Park Hee-a

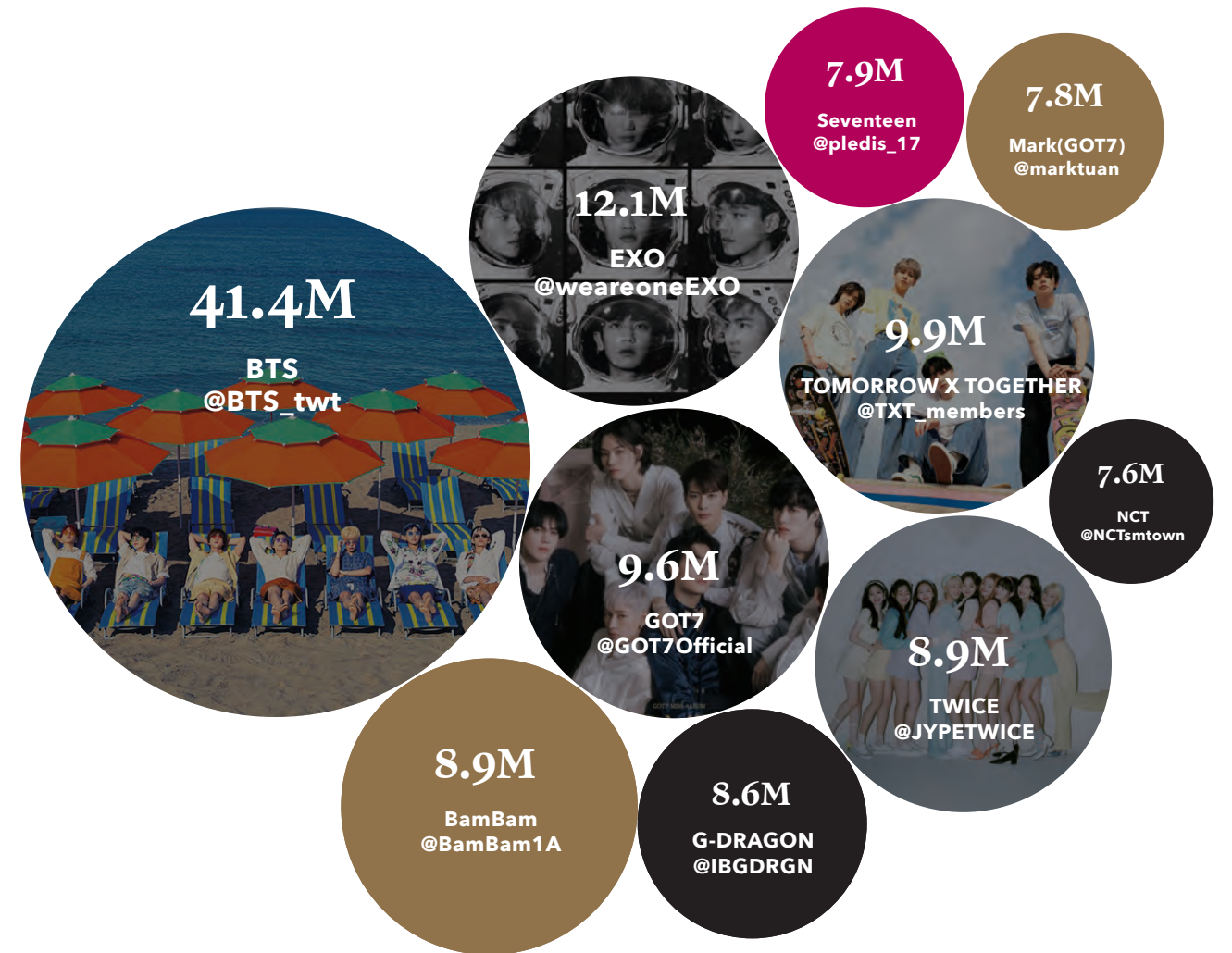
K-pop and the Power of Online Platformst

Popular culture spreads through the media of its day. In the past, it was transmitted by records, radio, and TV, which have now been replaced by social networking services. These online platforms carry content around at alarming speed and with no boundaries. A feed that is uploaded now on this side of the world can be immediately viewed on the other side. Today, a new song released by a Korean singer on YouTube can easily reach the 10-million-view mark in a few days. Columnist Park Hee-a raves about the massive popularity of K-pop idols in the global market.

“A good indicator of their popularity is their social media followers and YouTube view counts. Years back, there were just a few Korean singers with high numbers. Today, however, most K-pop artists hover in the high numbers. A case in point is BTS. They started with only a thousand followers eight years ago, but the number of people following their social media has topped 40 million.”

Park attributed the global success of K-pop to the power of stories. K-pop artists not only appeal to audiences with their music, but also keep intriguing them with evolving stories that are told through diverse media including music videos and short films. For example, BTS has its own realm it calls the BTS Universe. They tell stories about this imaginary universe through the songs they release and other promotional videos. BTS fans have fun identifying

#Ten most followed K-pop artists on Twitter as of November 23, 2021



the symbols and metaphors hidden in the songs and videos and interpreting their meanings. Beyond BTS, many K-pop idols have adopted this story-ridden promotion strategy. The development of YouTube and other online platforms contributed to disseminating these videos widely across the world, evoking interest in K-pop among global music listeners.

“It was a smart choice for Korean entertainment companies to turn their attention to social media

as the foremost marketing vehicle. Whenever a new online platform emerged, they were quick to tap into it. To be honest, it was an unavoidable choice for them as well. It was too competitive for management to get their artists on TV, and they had to find another medium to advertise their songs. The timing was just fortunate. Their need to find an alternative promotion tool coincided with the rise of online platforms.”

Regardless of how captivating the promotional

materials might be, the true secret of a musician's success always lies in their music. In this regard, Park emphasizes that K-pop idols are beloved around the world for—above all—their artistic achievement.

“When BTS first appeared on the Billboard Hot 100, listeners around the world were drawn to this Korean boyband for the sake of their music. They then developed an interest in the stories they tell and in their ‘universe’. This is how they gradually fall in love with BTS and come to crave more of their songs and performances. The superb skills of BTS and other K-pop idols in singing and dancing are largely attributed to the distinctive Korean training system adopted by the entertainment industry.”

Intensive Training to Nurture Stars

The Korea entertainment industry has its own method of developing pop stars. Korean entertainment companies select children with artistic potential and put them through years of

grueling training in singing and dancing. All the trainees go through countless hours of demanding training sessions, but only those who prove to have all the qualities needed to become a star finally get to make a debut. There is no doubt that they will be good on their first performance since they have been preparing for it over so many long years of training.

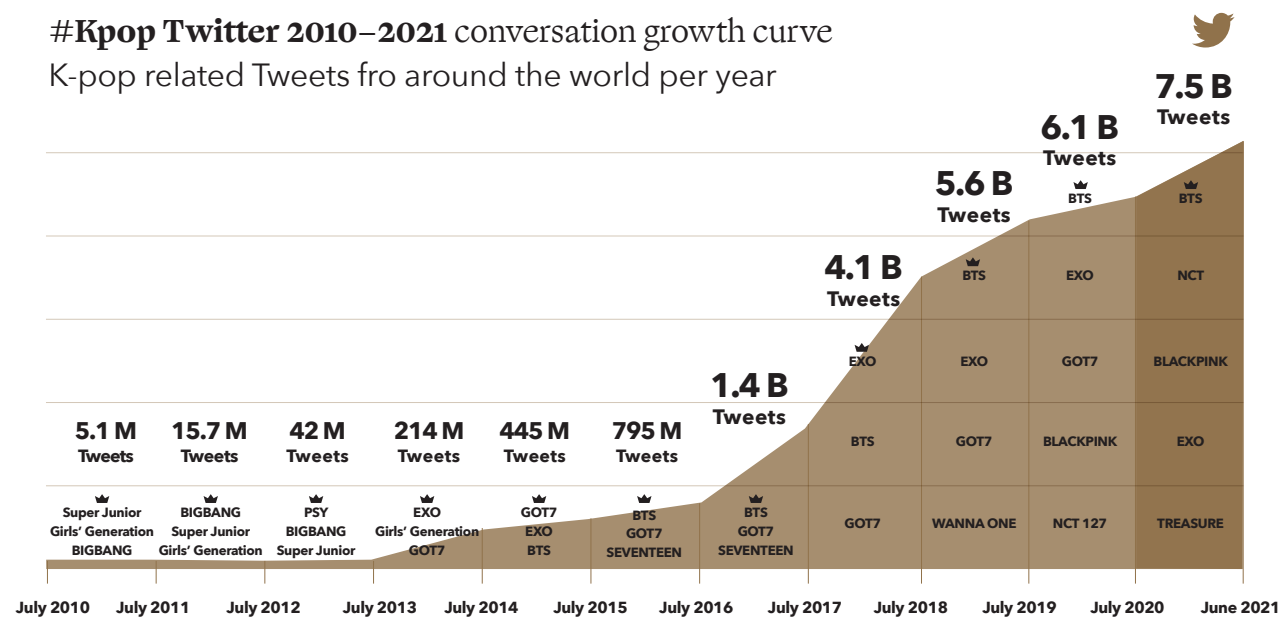
“These trainees range in age from their early to late teens. Their daily routine consists of dance and singing classes and practicing what they have studied. They need to show improvement on monthly tests as well. This intensive process of learning and practicing for the purpose of achieving a final goal is similar to what other Korean teens must do to achieve high scores on the university aptitude exam. As this grueling learning system is relatively familiar to Korean youngsters, these K-pop hopefuls usually do well within the system without too much resistance. However, the highly competitive achievement-centered training model adopted by Korean entertainment companies definitely has a



Columnist Park Hee-a relates that the musical artistry of K-pop idols has been combined with the communicative power of online platforms to boost the popularity of Korean music around the globe.

#Kpop Twitter 2010–2021 conversation growth curve

K-pop related Tweets from around the world per year



Conversation keywords include K-pop musicians' names, related hashtags, mentions and artists' Twitter accounts
 Research results released by Twitter Korea

negative impact on the trainees. We have to give serious thought to ways to improve it.”

These days, there are increasing voices for the need to revamp the training system in favor of better respecting the rights of trainees. Many argue that the very system that contributed to the global success of K-pop may hinder its future development if it does not correct its internal problems.

“Nowadays, no one seems to question the quality of Korean music in the global market. There is a growing number of renowned international labels approaching Korean artists for collaborations. I think that what lies behind the global success of K-pop is our remarkable ability to take in things from the outside and sublimate them into something uniquely Korean.”

There were times when Korean musicians were busy copying the music of foreign pop artists and when people believed that traditional culture had to decline in the face of emerging popular culture. Now, we are watching songs containing quintessentially Korean elements breaking records and snatching awards internationally. The popular saying “What is most Korean is most international” feels right to most Koreans these days.

Dancheong

Paintwork for
Philosophical Expression

Geunjeongjeon Hall at
Gyeongbokgung Palace

Dancheong, a form of decorative art applied to Korean architecture, is the painting found on the woodwork in traditional buildings. *Dancheong* literally means “red and green,” but it metaphorically alludes to the color combination of a tree or forest, which is mostly brownish red in the lower section and greenish in the upper part. *Dancheong* woodwork painting borrows colors and patterns from nature and uses them to create systemized and sophisticated works of art.

Text and photos by Roh Jae-hak, Photographer

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1. Aeryeonjeong Pavilion at Changdeokgung Palace

2. Daeseongjeon Shrine at Samga Hyanggyo Confucian School



Korean architecture is not alone in taking motifs from nature, of course. Gothic buildings in Europe were lavishly decorated with oak leaves, and acanthus provides the defining element for the capital of a Corinthian column. Although based on natural hues and shapes, *dancheong* paintwork goes beyond the realm of nature to express an ideal form of beauty and a sense of the sacred.





1. The east gate of Gyeongbokgung Palace is painted with a motif of a dragon, an imaginary animal symbolizing the east.
2. The south gate of Gyeongbokgung Palace has a *jujak*, or "vermilion bird," a mythical animal representing the south.
3. The west gate of Gyeongbokgung Palace is decorated with a white tiger, the guardian deity of the west.
4. The north gate of Gyeongbokgung Palace bears the painted image of a *hyeonmu*, "black tortoise," a legendary animal protecting the direction north.

Although the name includes only two colors, *dancheong* actually applies in five—green, red, yellow, white, and black. These five colors reflect *ohaeng* (*wuxing* in Chinese) theory, a foremost conceptual scheme in Confucian philosophy. *Ohaeng*, or "five phases," is not only associated with colors, but also with, among others, concepts, directions, seasons, and temperaments. For example, green symbolizes spring, the east, and a benevolent character. The five colors used in *dancheong* paintwork are related to philosophical questions such as how things emerge, develop, and decline, how different phenomena interact with each other, and how change takes place. In the Confucian society of Joseon Korea, the *ohaeng* concept enabled philosophy to spill over to the realm of arts, and vice-versa.

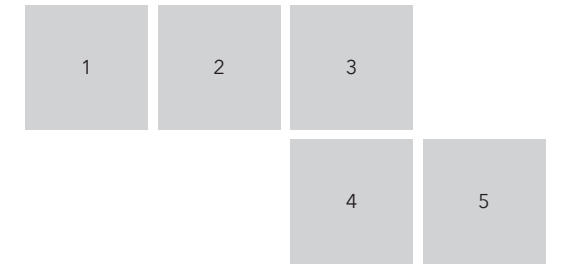
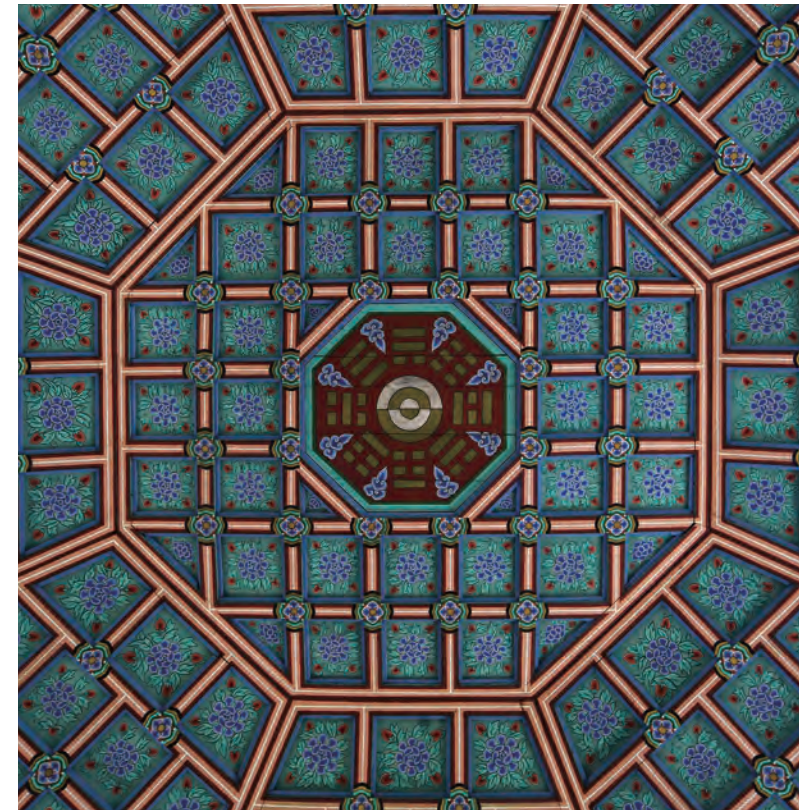
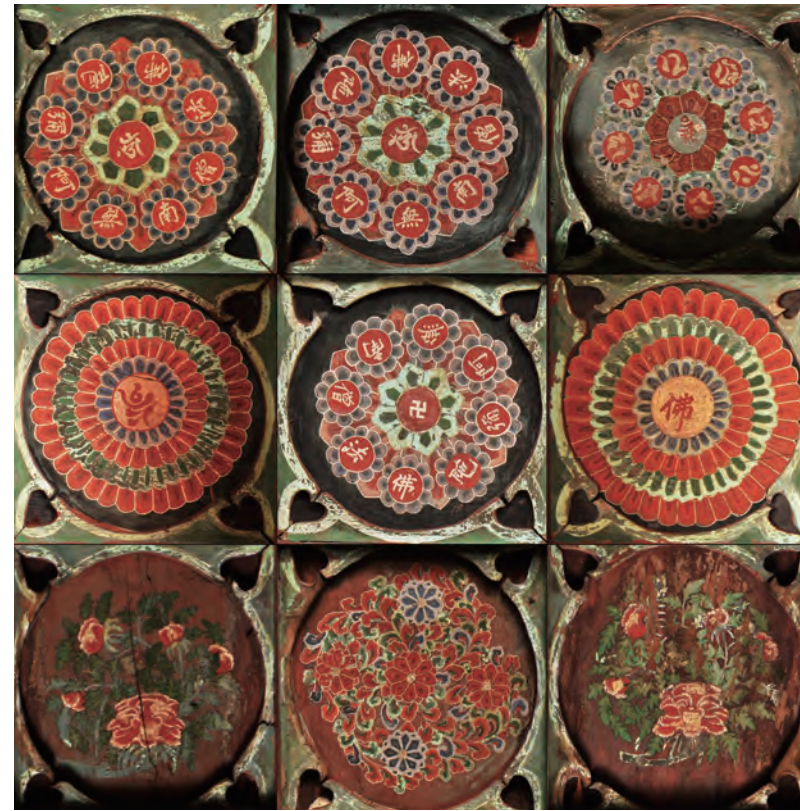


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1. Myeongjeongjeon Hall at Changgyeonggung Palace
2. Daeungjeon Hall at Ssanggyesa Temple

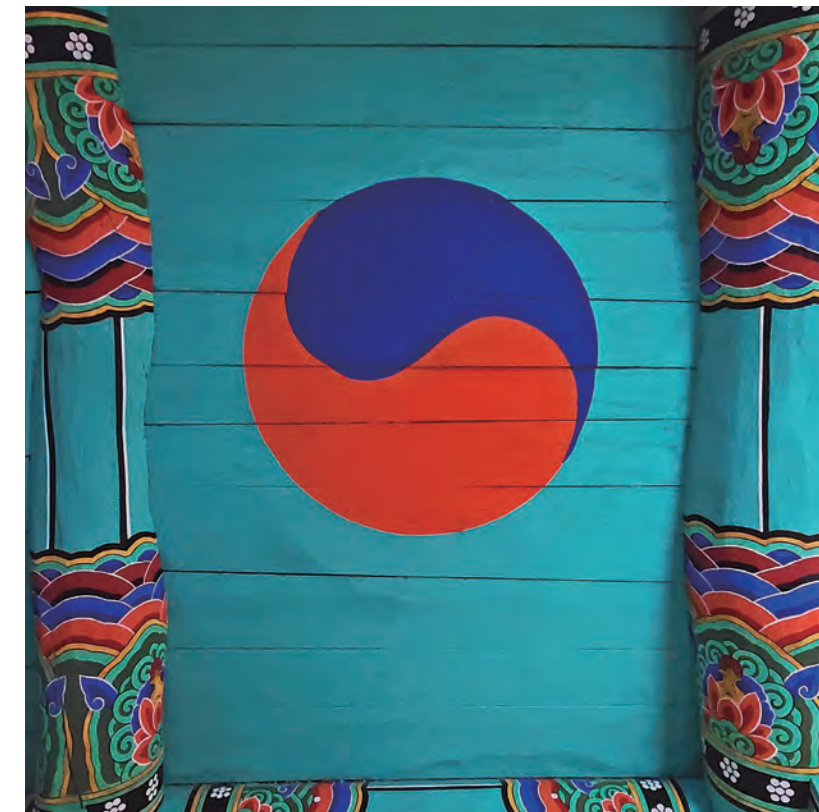
Although immediately pleasing to the eye, *dancheong* painting is not only about aesthetic enhancement. The paint also increases the durability of wooden or earthen surfaces. *Dancheong* serves a triple purpose of achieving philosophical, aesthetic, and functional aims. The pigments used in *dancheong* paint were crafted out of materials from nature, such as minerals, clay, leaves, and roots. *Dancheong* pigments, particularly those obtained from minerals, were rare and expensive. This is part of the reason why painting woodwork was restricted by law during the Joseon era. *Dancheong* was allowed only on buildings in the royal palaces, the main halls of Buddhist temples, and buildings where Confucian figures were enshrined at schools. Buildings enshrining the spirit tablets of ancestors, stele houses commemorating filial piety and marital fidelity, and some pavilions such as Gwnghallu Pavilion in Namwon and Yeongnamnu Pavilion in Miryang were also given exceptions to the ban on *dancheong*.



1. Daeungjeon Hall at Tongdosa Temple
2. Daeungjeon Hall at Bulguksa Temple
3. Parujeong Pavilion at Gyeongbokgung Palace
4. Sinseonwonjeon Hall at Changdeokgung Palace
5. The ancestral shrine of the Yim family's house in Geochang

Diverse motifs were adopted for *dancheong* painting—for example, lotus, peony, vines, dragons, phoenix, the yin and yang symbol, the swastika, and repeated geometric patterns. Different motifs were applied in different parts of wooden architectural members and in particular styles. These patterns transformed a building into an artistic space brimming with auspicious energies.

Using pigments and motifs obtained from nature, *dancheong* artistically expressed the religious and cosmological underpinnings of the nation. Embodied in the *dancheong* paintwork are the idealized character of a Confucian gentleman, Buddhist teachings and its paradise, and everyday prayers for peace and prosperity. *Dancheong* painting was applied to wooden surfaces in order to materialize metaphysical symbols. Korean woodwork painting can be considered philosophy in an artistic form.



Korean Shamanism & *Mudang*

Text and photos by Yang Jongsung, Director, the Museum of Shamanism

Shamans, known as *mudang* in Korean, have long played an important role in the religious lives of Koreans. Political leaders would double as religious figures, or shamans, in ancient times. It is recorded that King Namhae (r. 4–24 BCE), the second leader of the ancient kingdom of Silla, was addressed as a *chachaung*, a title that refers to a shaman. The history of shamans in Korea and the religious rites they have led dates back to ancient times, long before the arrival of foreign belief systems such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Throughout its long history, shamanism has contributed greatly to shaping the religious beliefs and practices of Koreans.

The Goddess Dosan and Rice Milling, a *gut* tradition from Hwanghae Province





The Goddess Dosan mimics the male genitals with the offering she stole from a ritual table.

Mediator between Humanity and Divinity

The Chinese characters used to represent the term *mu-dang* are a good place to think about what shamans do. *Mu* (巫) consists of an upper horizontal stroke signifying the heavens, a lower horizontal stroke meaning the earth, and a vertical stroke standing for a divine tree connecting the heaven and the earth. The components on either side of this “divine tree” symbolize shamans, who receive messages from the godly realm and deliver them between these worlds. *Dang* (堂) refers to a spatial entity that receives energy from supernatural beings and deploys it for the perpetuation of humanity. Shamans not only serve as messengers between the divine and profane worlds, but contribute to humanity’s continued wellbeing.

The primary means of religious expression for a *mudang* is a *gut*, a form of trance ritual. During a *gut*, shamans entertain people with a wide range of feats and skills. They also play numerous divine characters. The list of godly characters shamans can take on goes on and on, encompassing not only figures from the social, natural, and celestial worlds but also from Buddhist and Daoist beliefs. They include, but are not limited to, the Mountain God, God of the Earth, Dragon God, Tree Deity, General God, Tutelary Deity, God of the Seven Stars, and King Sakra. While giving ecstatic performances in these various divine characters, shamans soothe the spirits of the dead and call down good luck for the living. Their acts and dialogs are not only entertaining, but also artistic. They sing songs, perform dances, enact theatrical dramas, and offer witty banter, all at high levels of artistic accomplishment. All of these forms of art can be synthesized and augmented by shamans, developing into a more comprehensive and sophisticated form of art.

The Goddess Dosan and the Rice Milling Ritual

The following is an example of a *gut* that clearly demonstrates both the entertaining and artistic functions of shamanistic performances. It is a *gut* tradition from Hwanghae Province called the Goddess Dosan and Rice Milling. By imitating the act of milling in this *gut*, the shaman delivers wishes for material affluence and an abundance of offspring. The content and meaning of this shamanistic practice from Hwanghae are explored below.

A shaman and an instrumentalist playing an hourglass drum become ready for the *gut*. The shaman takes on the character of the Goddess Dosan (Dosan Malmyeong) and starts with an exchange of humorous dialog with the instrumentalist. The Goddess Dosan crisscrosses the ritual area while making amusing movements. She nimbly steals the ritual offerings, places them in her basket, and covers it under her skirt. The drummer takes on the role of Great Grandmother and stops the music to chide her for stealing. The Goddess Dosan rejects the admonition, explaining that she did not steal the ritual offerings, but just dropped by the Seven Stars Shrine to foretell the future regarding the birth of offspring and their longevity. She continues to explain that she visited the Princess Shrine to learn about the marriage of a man and woman, the General Shrine to find out about the endowment of good energy, and the Ancestors Shrine to learn the wellbeing of the ancestral spirits. Holding out her hands, the Goddess Dosan shouts to Great Grandmother that someone with such lovely hands could not steal. At the same time, she takes out the bar of rice cake from the basket and places it to her crotch. Waving and touching the bar of rice cake, the Goddess Dosan exclaims in delight, “Where has this been!”

Shamans have been involved in Korean society from time immemorial, serving as the source of stability and continuity in people's lives.

She continues on that she is proud of herself for having 99 husbands and that she wants to find one more to reach 100. Great Grandmother asks what all these husbands are for. The Goddess Dosan replies that every single one of them is useful as, for example, a sex partner, flute player for a *gut*, housekeeper, luggage carrier, and errand runner. She now confesses that she stole the ritual offerings to feed all these husbands. While saying this, the Goddess Dosan touches the long bar of rice cake attached to her crotch while explicitly expressing her sexual desire. The Goddess Dosan scene is followed by the entrance of the Brother from Bongsan (Bongsanne Orabai). He takes to the street to mill rice. After a series of events, he finally treads on the milling device to power the pounder as it moves up and down removing husks from the rice contained in the mortar. Wishing them luck, the Brother from Bongsan gives out the rice to the people.

In this *gut* performance, the Goddess Dosan epitomizes abundant fertility by means of her many husbands. The form of a rice mill featured here is not one of the types powered by water or an animal but uses a pounder and a mortar, respectively symbolizing the male and female genitals. The milling in this performance, therefore, not only represents the act of producing rice, but also simulates sexual intercourse, expressing wishes for abundant offspring. This milling activity further delivers prayers for good harvests and great luck. The Goddess Dosan and Rice Milling ritual is a religious event through

which the living appeal to the spirits of their ancestors and other gods to bless them with abundant offspring for their perpetuation and to endow them with bountiful grain. Through the performance of this ritual, all conflicts between divine and humanity, between humans and nature, and among people are resolved to bring about fertility, prosperity, and happiness.

Shamanism for Stability in Life

According to Korean mythology as recounted in the 13th-century history *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), the foundations of early Korean kingdoms such as Gojoseon, Goguryeo, and Baekje were all closely associated with shamanism. The third-century Chinese history *Sangouzhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms) contains accounts of rituals for heavenly gods that were carried out by ancient Korean states as well. Ancient Koreans attempted to communicate with the gods by hanging bells and drums from a wooden pole, observing rites accompanied by dance, and holding days-long drinking and feasting events. All of these efforts to deliver their messages to supernatural beings were invariably mediated by shamans. Shamans have been involved in Korean society from time immemorial, serving as the source of stability and continuity in people's lives.



Above_ A shaman is holding a *gut* ritual to call for good luck.

Below_ A *gut* starts with a rite requesting the gods to descend.

Outreach Efforts for the Vision Impaired

Last year, the Natural Heritage Research Division of the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage published *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals*. This book of tales featuring animal species designated as Natural Monuments was not only designed for average readers, but also for those with impaired vision. Descriptions are provided both in written text and braille. The illustrations of the animals are outlined in raised dots. All of the descriptions and the cry of each animal can be produced in sound as well with just a touch of the electronic pen that accompanies the book. Taking the publication of this multi-function book as a starting point, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage has embarked on an effort to offer more services for people with disabilities. Kang Jung-hoon from the Natural Heritage Research Division of the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage had an online chat with Kim In-hee, Director of the National Education Center for the Visually Impaired to discuss these significant efforts, their meaning, and future directions.

Transcription by Kwon Da-in from the *Korean Heritage* publication team
Photos by National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

Kang Jung-hoon,
Natural Heritage Research Division, National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

Kim In-hee, Director,
National Education Center for the Visually Impaired

A Braille Book for All

Kang Jung-hoon: The Natural Heritage Research Division was installed at the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in 2007 together with the launch of a natural heritage museum called the Natural Monument Center. As the managing entity for the Natural Monument Center, the Natural Heritage Research Division analyzed the demographics of visitors to the museum two years ago and learned that people with disabilities rarely

visited. Remarkably, no people with visual impairments had ever visited the Natural Monument Center—not a single person. We wondered if this was connected to how we were operating the museum and took a look at the visitors to 15 other museums or exhibition places. We found that

the situation was similar across museums: The proportion of visually impaired visitors was less than one percent and, in many cases, was zero. This awakened me and my colleagues at the Natural Heritage Research Division to the need to do something to bring natural heritage closer to those with impaired vision.

With support from private companies and members of the public, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage published the braille book *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* last year. This multi-function book offers descriptions in both written text and braille, as well as illustrations of animals outlined with raised dots and voice recordings of animal cries and relevant songs.



Kim In-hee: The National Education Center for the Visually Impaired opened in 2018 as an affiliate of the Seoul School for the Visually Impaired. People with reduced or no vision need a range of skills to manage everyday life, and we offer education and training in skills such as reading and writing in braille and dealing with a screen reader or a magnifier for reading from a computer. We focus particularly on vision impaired students attending mainstream schools who have few opportunities to train in these abilities. We offer them education programs on Saturdays and during school vacations. After receiving the invitation to this meeting, I talked with students at the center and discovered that they do not have a positive impression of heritage sites or exhibition spaces. I remember one student talking about their experience at Seokguram Grotto in Gyeongju. It was too dark to see inside the grotto and the important part was all blocked off by glass, preventing them from appreciating the heritage site at all. Other students shared similar impressions about heritage sites and museums. All of these experiences seem to have cemented their perception that heritage sites and museums are “boring.”

Kang: That was our biggest concern in our project to publish a book for the visually impaired—how to deliver information effectively. Another important factor we took into consideration was that books for

blind or otherwise visually impaired people are mostly written only in braille, so they exclude sighted people from the potential readership. We wanted our book to be equally pleasing to readers with or without vision impairment. This is why we made a book that not only contains text, but also supports presenting the text in sound. The information on each animal centers on stories to reflect the opinions we heard from experts that the conventional approach to explaining animals based on their colors and shapes is not as relevant for the visually impaired. When the page with the textual information is touched by an accompanying electronic pen, the book vocalizes the information. Some of the pages were read by celebrities, including the soccer player Son Heung-min and the actor Song Joong-ki. They were willing to take part in this meaningful effort to publish a book for blind or visually impaired people. When the pen touches the page showing the illustration of an animal, the sound of its cry is produced. There is a QR code that can also provide sound services in case readers lose the electronic pen.

Kim: I think using the voices of celebrities was a really good approach. Getting kids interested in the book is the first step, and these familiar voices will definitely motivate them to start the book. I have seen a lot of books published for blind or visually impaired readers, but they are mostly created from



The braille signs were produced using braille beads made from natural materials.

the perspective of sighted people. I believe *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* is a happy exception to this practice. It is well suited for the benefit of readers with visual impairment. The one thing that could use further improvement is the font. Many people may think that all visually impaired people use braille. However, the people who are collectively categorized as “people with visual disabilities” are mostly not completely blind, but suffer different levels of visual impairment. They can read large, thick letters. There are many people with visual difficulties, particularly among those

attending mainstream schools, who do not have literacy in braille. It would have been much better to adopt a larger and thicker font for this book.

Kang: Publishing *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* was a learning process for me and all my colleagues. I came to realize that our perceptions of visually impaired people are framed by many false prejudices, and one of them is our understanding of braille as a universal means of writing. I believe that the books that will follow in the coming years will be

an improvement over the current book. Just like we corrected many of our misunderstandings about visual impairment through the publication process, I hope that this book will give the wider public an opportunity to do the same. One thing to note here is that the publication of *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* was only possible through the voluntary participation of the public. There was no budget set aside for this project. We started out by putting together savings from our research projects, and the rest was collected from the public with the support of private companies.

We launched a public fundraising scheme co-funded by the AIA Group and the SK Group allowing all members of the public to donate 1 KRW for every 100 steps they walked. The illustrated images and voice recordings for the book were all produced with the participation of the public.

Kim: It is not really fiscally justifiable to publish a book targeting just the visually impaired, who make up only nine percent of the total number of people with disabilities. Tactile books cost more money to produce than ordinary books.

It is estimated that one visually impaired person will spend about 200 million KRW just for buying textbooks. This is why active support from the public and from private companies is indispensable to allow the visually impaired their right to read. There are many companies who are willing to step up and donate funds. However, it is a pity that these commitments are generally one-off efforts. I hope that the publication of *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* will lead to more ongoing government support for the production of quality tactile books.

This tactile book is suitable for sighted people as well since it also offers textual descriptions.

Additional Efforts for More Visually Impaired Visitors

Kim: People with extensive living experience in countries known for their consideration for people with disabilities have said that South Korea does not fall far behind in terms of the quality and quantity of services available to the visually impaired. One thing they always recommend is greater attentiveness to universal design, which allows access to all people regardless of age, disability, or other factors. Things do not have to be exclusively for the visually impaired, but it would be ideal if they are suited to anyone. For example, we can adopt a larger and thicker font in leaflets at heritage sites that would be equally friendly to people with vision impairment and senior visitors. Heritage panels that incorporate tactile information

would be more appealing to the visually impaired and children alike. These days some public libraries carry large-font books, a real benefit for visually impaired people.

Kang: My colleagues and I are very happy that *Stories of Nationally Designated Animals* has been positively received by a wide public. With the strong call for sequels, we are preparing another volume on archaeology. It is expected that there will be further follow-ups in the coming years on diverse heritage areas, including works of art and built heritage. I believe that the thoughts you have shared today can be fed into the volumes to follow. Besides our publication endeavors, we would like to make the Natural Monument Center a friendlier space for people with disabilities.



The children's choir from a local museum participated in producing recordings for the book.



Braille beads being installed

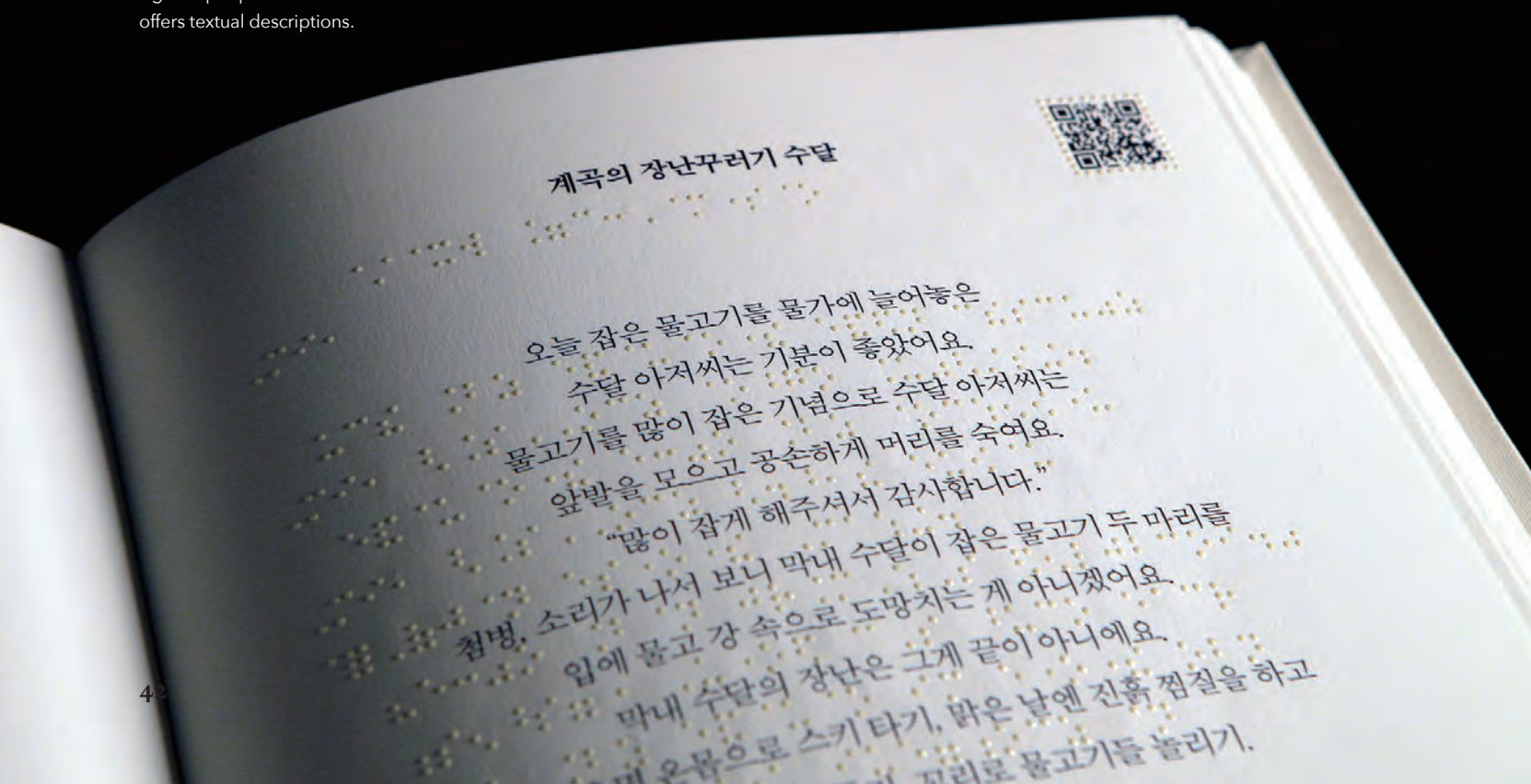
We are planning to allocate roughly two billion KRW next year for this purpose. We are currently toying with diverse ideas to transform the center into a more pleasant and accessible place for disabled people. It would be great to use the published tactile compilation as a textbook and visit schools to provide education. These students may want to follow up their classroom lessons with a physical visit to the center for a more direct experience. Another idea might be a peer docent program. We recently succeeded with a program where children served as docents for their peers. Junior visitors were very satisfied with the experience of being guided by people of a similar age. Although there are no concrete plans at this stage, it could be a good idea to have visually impaired docents guide visitors with the same disability.

Kim: There are actually many visually impaired people who serve as on-site heritage guides. I hope people might someday have

opportunities to play the same role at art museums and galleries. One thing to note is that no two visually impaired people have the same exact needs. It is difficult to develop a particular service that satisfies all the different needs of individual visually impaired visitors. We need to be practical about it. I think a functional audio guide system is a really good idea here. Quality audio guides will give them more freedom to walk around exhibition rooms and make the museum a more attractive place to visit for people with vision impairments. Another thing I want to highlight is that the visually impaired are not digitally illiterate. They are often quite familiar with digital technologies. Information-delivering methods based on technology, such as the QR codes you adopted for the book, are a good way to go. I hope that the Natural Monument Center will incorporate more information delivered through auditory and tactile means.

Kang: Besides working to find effective ways to reach out to visually impaired people, we would like our endeavors to be better known worldwide. For this purpose, we have on our to-do-list for the coming year the production of promotional materials in English, Chinese, and possibly other languages that can be distributed through Korean embassies abroad.

Kim: Whatever you do, I hope that you don't burn yourself out and just keep going steadily forward step-by-step. Regardless of how much you achieve this year, you can always build upon it in the coming years. What matters is you keep working at it and never stop. Before coming to this meeting, I talked with many of our students. They are truly excited about this opportunity to talk about their difficulties and needs in relation to enjoying national heritage. I hope that your efforts will bear fruit and will eventually deliver "tactile" benefits to them.



Eyeglasses Bring Light to Koreans in Need

While eyeglasses have no known inventor, they were already being widely used in Venice by the late 13th century. It is unknown when they were introduced into the Korean Peninsula, but it is estimated that they first arrived around the late-16th-century Japanese invasions. This approximation seems accurate since the oldest surviving eyeglasses in South Korea belong to Kim Seong-il (1538–1593), a civilian official of the time who made great contributions to protecting Korea against invading Japanese forces during the war.

Text by Kang Myeong-kwan, Professor in Sino-Korean Literature at Pusan National University

Photos by the Cultural Heritage Administration, the National Folk Museum of Korea, and Onyang Folk Museum



A portrait of the late-Joseon scholar Hwang Hyeon (1855–1910) wearing round-framed glasses. (Photo courtesy of the Cultural Heritage Administration)

A Sight-refining Tool for Joseon Aristocrats

After being introduced around the late 16th century, eyeglasses were instantly welcomed by Koreans with poor eyesight. Some people were born with blurred vision and others gradually lost their vision with age. Incapable of manufacturing glass, Koreans had no choice but to import eyeglasses from Beijing. This was done mostly through the diplomatic missions sent to China. Over time, people started to craft eyewear using crystal mined from Mt. Namsan in the southern city of Gyeongju. These Gyeongju Namsan Stone Glasses were highly valuable at the time.

Glasses were a precious tool for the *yangban* social class who regarded reading the Confucian classics as one of their major duties. Glasses brought the light back to their dimming eyes. A large volume of records remains concerning *yangban* aristocrats after the Japanese invasions. It is noted that the 17th-century civilian official

Im Sang-won admired the amazing effect of glasses while reading books by lamplight. According to another record, the foremost “Practical Learning” (Silhak) thinker, Yi Ik (1681–1763), remarked in astonishment after trying on a pair of glasses, “Every detail down to the tips of the hair comes into sight. I feel like I have recovered my youth.” He also lauded about glasses by stating, “On behalf of heaven, Europeans practiced great benevolence [for humanity through the invention of glasses].” It is assumed that Yi’s voluminous compilation *Seongho saseol* (Miscellaneous Discussions by Yi Ik) was heavily indebted to his eyeglasses.

By the 18th century, glasses seem to have become established as a necessity for many Joseon aristocrats. According to *Seungeongwon ilgi* (The Diaries of the Royal Secretariat), King Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776) asked Sixth Royal Secretariate Yi Bok-won and

Fourth Royal Secretariate Yi Jung-ho whether their fathers wore glasses as did other seniors of their age. Both replied that they did. It is written in the same record that the renowned aristocrat-painter Jo Yeong-seok (1686–1761) declined a request to paint a portrait of King Yeongjo. The excuse for this unheard-of refusal of royal orders was his failing eyesight. He explained, “My vision is so blurred that I cannot even read newspapers without the help of glasses. With this eyesight, it is impossible to describe things in detail.” It is known from this anecdote that Jo Yeong-seok also relied on glasses for reading.

Glasses and their cases used by Koreans in the early-modern period (Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum)





Eyeglasses with foldable temples or with the temples made of string
(Photo courtesy of the Onyang Folk Museum)

It was not just readers who benefitted from eyeglasses. Practitioners of traditional Korean medicine needed clear vision for acupuncture. Once equipped with glasses, senior acupuncturists with deteriorating vision could again clearly identify the proper sites to insert their needles. Although it was normally forbidden to wear glasses during an audience with kings, an exception was made for royal acupuncturists.

Artists practicing painting realistically also sought help from glasses. For example, the foremost “true-view” (*jingyeong*) painter Jeong Seon (1676–1759) wore glasses. In his travelogue *The Jehol Diary* (*Yeolha ilgi*), the 18th-century Practical Learning scholar Park Ji-won comments on a work of Jeong Seon’s called *Mounting a Spring Mountain*, “Past the age of 80, Jeong Seon puts on his reading glasses to execute a painting by candlelight. The completed work is accurate in every single detail.” The Diaries of the Royal Secretariat includes

an account of Jeong Seon as well. King Yeongjo asked Minister Hong Bong-han, “I have heard that Jeong Seon can still do paintings past the age of 70. Does he wear glasses?” Hong replies, “I understand that he can work on painting even at night if he wears his glasses.” Glasses allowed this elderly painter to carry on with his work. The 18th-century civilian official Sin Gwang-su relates in his anthology *Seokbukjip* that the painter Choi Buk (1720–?) also made a living selling works produced with the help of glasses.

Stonemasons wore glasses as well. Travelling to Mt. Geumgangsan, State Counselor Yi Seong-won (1725–1790) hired a mason to carve his name on a rock to commemorate his visit. However, Yi accidentally dropped the mason’s glasses and broke them. Apologetic, Yi wanted to repay him for the price of the glasses, but the mason in his 60s declined the offer and laughed it off saying, “They were supposed to be broken.”

Entrenched as an Everyday Object

Eyeglasses were increasingly adopted by people in diverse professions over time, including the above-mentioned acupuncturists, painters, and masons. By the 19th century, glasses had become a useful everyday tool that anyone with bad eyesight was willing to use. The renowned late-Joseon artist Gang Se-hwang (1713–1791) describes this in an article entitled “Eyeglasses”:

Glasses serve as an invaluable aid not just for readers, but also for homemakers doing their sewing and 40-something artisans performing works of great precision. However, not many people can distinguish good glasses from bad ones. Plus, quality glasses are pricy and hard to find as well.

For sewers and artisans, something that allowed them clear vision must have been a true treasure. One thing to note about early-modern Korean glasses is that those worn by women

were called *saelljuk angyeong*, or “oval glasses,” based the shape of their frame. Women’s glasses must have been made in a *saelljuk* form for stylistic purposes.

In the 19th century, glasses became more widely disseminated across Korean society. The 19th century Practical Learning scholar Yi Gyu-gyeong (1788–?) discusses them in his article *The Theory of Glasses*, “Introduced into Korea around the Wanli era (1573–1619), glasses have a great number of users. The number of wearers of glasses began to increase significantly starting in the middle period of the reign of King Sunjo. Everyone ranging from market vendors, butchers, and shop owners to servants and the keepers at horse stations now wear glasses.” The middle period of the reign of King Sunjo (r. 1800–1834) falls in the

early 19th century. It can be inferred from this record that glasses were widespread by that time even down to members of the lowest social class.

With the increase in the numbers of wearers of glasses, production workshops for eyeglasses started to spring up. In its accounts on craftsman’s workshops, the late-19th-century volume *Dongguk yeoji bigo* (Collected References for the Geography of Korea, compiled in 1870) records “there are glasses workshops at several places” in the section on Seoul. From this mention, it can be confirmed that glasses workshops had emerged in Seoul by at least the 19th century. Information is hard to come by concerning how they secured the lenses at these

workshops. They may have imported optical glass from Beijing and processed it at workshops in Seoul, or they may have used locally mined crystal. There must have been many customers in Seoul for the vision-enhancing products manufactured at these workshops. The consumers certainly included women working with stitching, merchants selling items at the market, people slaughtering animals and selling meat, and household servants. For people from all walks of life, glasses were a much-appreciated accessory that enlightened their worlds. Today, glasses are so commonplace that it is hard to imagine a time when they were something special. However, they have passed through all this history to arrive at the present.



Early examples of Korean glasses cases. Eyeglasses cases would be used as a personal accessory and were therefore lavishly decorated, as in these examples.
(Photo courtesy of the National Folk Museum)



Yuhyeondang Hall, a component of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage, serves as a multi-purpose space for giving classes, resting, and enjoying coffee and tea. It is also open to members of the public.

Educational Reform for Well-prepared Heritage Professionals

Text and Photos by Park Chi-kyung, Educational Reform Team, Korea National University of Cultural Heritage

As the education arm of the Cultural Heritage Administration, the Korea National University of Cultural Heritage (NUCH) is the only higher education institution in the Republic of Korea specializing in cultural heritage. Since opening in 2000, the NUCH has been successfully fulfilling its mandate to nurture talented groups of young heritage professionals. Now more than 20 years into its mission, this institution of higher learning is currently working to transform its educational system in reflection of ongoing changes in the social and cultural environments.

Changing Times and the Need for Reform

Korean universities and colleges must all face the issue of the gradually declining number of young people. With the decreasing population, universities are adopting a series of survival strategies to ensure a better future. Selecting areas of specialization and focusing on them is one strategy. Another is to abandon instructor-centered education models in favor of those customized to the needs of individual students. Focus is shifting from discipline-based education and toward more interdisciplinary studies. Education in the liberal arts is gaining in importance. All of these reforms and more are taking place at the Korea National University of Cultural Heritage.

Over the last 20 years, the NUCH has been making continuous efforts to improve the quality of its programs and expand its educational infrastructure. Originally only granting undergraduate degrees, the NUCH launched graduate programs in 2013 in areas including traditional architecture, landscape architecture, city management, conservation, and information technology for heritage. Below are some of the major streams of achievements and ongoing efforts by the NUCH to better prepare for the upcoming changes in society.

Infrastructure Improvement

Approximately 70 percent of the classes at the NUCH are capped at 15 students to ensure that the instructors have room to address individual needs and can experiment with creative pedagogical methods. The annual spending per student reaches an impressive 55 million KRW, more than twice the average among other national universities. Among these investments, the spending on educational materials is done at a level more than triple the average. The university is equipped with enough dormitory space to accommodate all registered graduate and undergraduate students. In addition, there are many other facilities allowing for diverse training projects and after-school activities.

Focus on Practical Experience

The NUCH carried out a curriculum reform in 2017 with a view to strengthening students' practical skills. The proportion of practical education in the school curriculum was doubled, and a new policy was introduced to give academic credit for on-site experience in the heritage field both at the graduate and undergraduate level. NUCH students are currently working at a wide range of organizations affiliated with the Cultural Heritage



The administrative office of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage

Administration and other cultural institutions for a period of four weeks to six months, trying out on site what they have learned in the classroom and acquiring academic credit at the same time. It is estimated that about 80 percent of NUCH graduates successfully land a job in the traditional culture or cultural heritage fields. This high number demonstrates how the university's focus on training and practical experience has been effective in arming students with the skills and knowledge they need in the real world.

Interdisciplinary and Other Reformist Approaches

As with other social sectors, the heritage field increasingly requires interdisciplinary knowledge and skills. Issues are emerging in the heritage field that demand cooperation across disciplines, such as advanced information technology and heritage

conservation, heritage under the impact of climate change, and the sustainability of cultural heritage.

The NUCH is making diverse efforts to fully respond to this trend. First of all, in 2019 the university launched the International Cultural Heritage Education Center and a graduate-level interdisciplinary program to nurture international heritage experts. Through these programs, the NUCH is offering its students greater opportunities to learn about the current international debates and interact with overseas experts. In addition, a project is underway to develop online education materials on climate change.

In 2021, the university opened the Cultural Heritage Human Resources Development Center, one major purpose of which is to offer interdisciplinary courses and programs. It is now possible for students to take interdisciplinary courses on top of their current majors. The recently launched cultural technology program is the first example of these interdisciplinary programs. More are scheduled to be introduced in the coming years.

There are other reforms worth mentioning as well. The NUCH is applying a problem-based learning method to many of its classes. This is a teaching method in which real-world problems are used as a vehicle to promote student learning of concepts and principles. Recently, a studio was opened to support the creation of online lectures and other content. In addition, "flipped learning" has been introduced to allow students to preview lecture materials online and dedicate class time to strengthening their understanding through discussions and practical activities. The university offers administrative and financial support to encourage teachers to more actively deploy this method. In addition, there is a motivation-boosting program that is offered to first-year students in the leadup to the start of a new year.

Living and Learning Together

The NUCH is fundamentally a residential college with all of its registered students staying in dormitories. There is a long list of programs on offer to dormitory residents so they can improve communication skills, enhance their competence as global experts, and nurture creativity. Students actively participate in these programs, particularly on weekends and during vacations. There are other extracurricular programs offered by the International Cultural Heritage Education Center, Job and Business Center, and University and Industry Cooperation Association.

Participation in these extracurricular programs is further rewarded by a "mileage" system that awards "miles" to students who take part. When their accumulated miles reach a certain level, students are awarded scholarships. The problems faced in the heritage field are complex and require skills and knowledge from many different areas. These extracurricular programs are expected to make important contributions to fostering well-rounded professionals.

As explored above, the NUCH is making diverse efforts to nurture heritage professionals who are well-prepared for current and future social changes. Focus is placed not only on teaching in-depth disciplinary knowledge, but also on expanding practical experience, offering wider opportunities for interdisciplinary studies, developing creativity, and understanding global practices. This educational reform will continue well into the future at the NUCH.



Top_ A student in the Traditional Arts and Crafts Department learns traditional weaving by doing it.

Middle_ Conservation science is learned through practical exercises.

Bottom_ A practical exercise in the Traditional Architecture Department

Rice-cake Making Enters the National Heritage List



The Cultural Heritage Administration is inscribing rice-cake making onto the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The newly designated element encompasses all of the knowledge systems and cultural practices related to making and sharing rice cakes.

Various aspects of the tradition of rice-cake making were highly evaluated during the expert deliberation process. Rice-cake making has been transmitted across the Korean Peninsula, and its time-honored history is evidenced in relevant written records dating as far back as the Three Kingdoms period. The rice-cake making tradition features great potential for stimulating diverse kinds of research related to folklore, history, and nutritional

science. The many local variations are diverse and distinctive. There are still diverse practicing communities actively transmitting the associated knowledge. All of these factors favorably contributed to the final decision to register rice-cake making on the national intangible cultural heritage list.

As it is widely practiced across the nation, the designation of rice-caking making was not accompanied by the usual recognition of any particular individuals or groups as the responsible entities for its transmission.

Three Years of Work on Hyangwonji Pond Completed

The Royal Palaces and Tombs Center at the Cultural Heritage Administration has recently completed a three-year project on Hyangwonjeong Pavilion and Chwihyanggyo Bridge at Gyeongbokgung Palace.

Hyangwonjeong is a pavilion standing on an artificial island in the middle of Hyangwonji Pond. Weathered by the forces of time, Hyangwonjeong was first subjected to a precise survey in 2012. After a series of additional safety investigations, repair efforts began in November 2018 and have been recently completed after three years of hard work.

Chwihyanggyo, a bridge in Hyangwonji Pond, was originally constructed to the

north of Hyangwonjeong pavilion leading to Geoncheonggung Residence. After being destroyed during the Korean War, the bridge was reconstructed in 1953, but this time to the south of the pavilion for the convenience of visitors. This project restored Chwihyanggyo Bridge to its original place. The previously flat bridge has been restored to its authentic arch form as well.

This repair/restoration project on Hyangwonji Pond is expected to shed a new light on the historical significance of Gyeongbokgung Palace. The revitalized pavilion and bridge at Hyangwonji Pond will soon be opened to the public.



Arirang

Arirang is a popular body of Korean folk songs and the outcome of the collected contributions made by ordinary Koreans across generations. Fundamentally a simple song, it consists of the refrain "Arirang, arirang, arariyo" along with lyrics that differ from region to region. While dealing with diverse universal themes, the simple musical and literary composition invites improvisation, imitation, and singing in unison, encouraging its adaptation into different musical genres. Experts estimate the total number of folk songs carrying the title "Arirang" to be around 3,600 variations of roughly sixty major versions. Arirang is an evocative hymn with the power to enhance communication and unity among Korean people at home and abroad. Arirang was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2012. Those who wish to know more about this musical tradition of Korea can scan the QR code here. It will connect you to the documentary film *Arirang* produced by the National Intangible Heritage Center.

This image presents a stamp issued by the Ministry of Communication of Korea in 1989. The stamp shows a rocky mountain range alongside lyrics reading, "Arirang, arirang, arariyo; Over the Arirang hill you go; Leaving me, my love, you'd go lame within three miles."

