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KOREAN HERITAGE



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WINTER 2022 VOL.59

CONTENTS

04

FEATURE STORY

Yut Nori and Its Profound
Cultural Symbolism



10

SPECIAL

A Spherical Sundial on the Move



16

HERITAGE REDISCOVERED

Dolmens Offer Rare Glimpses
into the Lives of Prehistoric
Humans



24

KOREAN HERITAGE AND THE WORLD
The Power of Hageul



30

HERITAGE AND PEOPLE
KOREAN HERITAGE
meets with
Ambassador Ismailova



38

HERITAGE CREATIVE
Talchum, Mask Dance Drama
in the Republic of Korea



44

HERITAGE ISSUES TODAY

First Working Committee Meeting for
ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation

48

CULTURAL HERITAGE
ADMINISTRATION
HEADLINES

Talchum Inscribed as
Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
CHA signs LOI with France



Yut Nori and Its Profound Cultural Symbolism

Text by Jeong Hyeong-ho, Member of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee of the Seoul Metropolitan Government

Photos by Jeong Hyeong-ho, Topic



A Distinctive Korean Boardgame with a Long History

Yut or *yut nori* is a traditional Korean boardgame played by two opposing players or teams tossing four tokens made by splitting wooden dowels into halves. Players cast the *yut* sticks, and the resulting combination of sticks facing up (round side up) or down (flat side up) determines how many spaces a token can advance on a *yut* board with 29 stations. The team who runs all four of its tokens through the course first wins. Games using some form of dice are common across the globe. However, the Korean boardgame of *yut* is distinguished by the profound symbolic meaning it carries in the traditional Korean consciousness.

The origins of what is known as *yut nori* today are estimated to trace as far back as the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE–668 CE). It is recorded in a Chinese document that people in Baekje, one of the three ancient kingdoms occupying the Korean Peninsula, played *jeopo* (*chupu* in Chinese). The ancient Chinese chess game *chupu* differs from *yut nori*. It has a four-token system with tokens in black and white and a board consisting of 360 stations. It is thought that the Korean version was mistaken by the Chinese for the more familiar *chupu*. The eighth-century collection of songs known as *Manyo syu* from Japan contains, in its discussion of the ancient Korean kingdom of Silla, phrases thought to describe different combinations of *yut* sticks facing up or down. Some Korean documents from the Goryeo era (918–1392) include records on a *yut* board and its 29 stations. In the Joseon period (1392–1910), the term *yut* or *yut nori* was widely used along with synonyms such as *sahui* and *cheoksa*. *Yut nori* came to earn enormous popularity as an inter-neighborhood competition on Jeongwol Daeboreum (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month) during the 20th century. Playing *yut* on Seollal (Lunar New Year) and Jeongwol Daeboreum has been actively transmitted to the present as an important aspect of traditional Korean culture. Contemporary Koreans throw *yut* sticks at family gatherings, community events, and in the school curriculum.

Astronomical Knowledge Embodied in the *Yut* Board

Historical documents from the 17th and 18th centuries contain drawings of a *yut* board in the form of a circle dissected by a cross along with written accounts. According to these records, the outer circle represents heaven and the inner space divided into four sections by the cross symbolize the land. The central station on the *yut* board refers to the pole star, and the remaining 28 stations are the 28 asterisms as defined in traditional East Asian astronomy. It can be said that the *yut* board epitomizes the entire celestial sphere.

In addition, the four courses a token can take on the *yut* board signify the length of the day: The longest and shortest courses respectively represent the summer and winter solstices, and the two middle courses refer to the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. There are four *yut* sticks for each team because there are four seasons, and the flat and round sides of each stick symbolize the opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*.

The configurations into which the *yut* sticks fall after a throw are further associated with five different species of livestock. There are five different combinations, each with its own name: *do* (one stick facing down), *gae* (two sticks facing down), *geol* (three sticks facing down), *yut* (all four sticks facing down), and *mo* (all four sticks facing up). The number of sticks facing down equals the number of steps a token can move on the board, except for *mo*, which is worth five steps. These five configurations—*do*, *gae*, *geol*, *yut*, and *mo*—are believed to refer to the pig, dog, goat, ox, and horse.

Yut Board Petroglyphs to Appeal to the Divine

Petroglyphs believed to represent a *yut* board have been found across the Korean Peninsula. These rock carvings range widely in time from the late Bronze Age to the late Joseon era. To date, 281 *yut*-board petroglyphs have been discovered at 85 sites on the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria. There is another reported to be in Ji'an, an area belonging to China today that was once ruled by the ancient Korean kingdom of Goguryeo. Rock carvings of a *yut* board mostly occur in mountains, but there are also examples found within the complex of a Buddhist temple, on the foundation stone of a building, and on the capstone of a dolmen.

Given the locations in which these petroglyphs are found, they would not have been used for *yut* games. It is estimated that a *yut* board was carved in these places to deliver people's prayers to heaven.

The *yut* board petroglyphs are generally understood to express four sets of the seven stars forming the Big Dipper, with the pole star in the middle. According to this interpretation, the seven stars of the Big Dipper run counterclockwise from the pole star. The direction that tokens move on the *yut* board is similarly to the left. The left side has long been associated in Korean culture with the opposite of the quotidian. For example, a straw rope was twisted to the right-hand side for everyday purposes, but it was made by twisting the straws leftward for hanging in a household expecting a baby or at a shrine housing the tutelary god of the community. Various forms of traditional performing arts feature movements toward the left, such as in farmer's music (*nongak*), mask dance (*talchum*), and the *ganggangsullae* circle dance. A turn to the left signifies a break with the everyday and symbolizes the sacred.

A stone-piled tomb in Ji'an bears a carved representation of a *yut* board. There are also Goguryeo-era tombs with a mural of the 28 asterisms. It is inferred that Koreans of the past carved the stars in the celestial sphere in the form of a *yut* board to express their wishes to the heavens. These rock carvings can be interpreted as part of a religious ritual rather than a game object.



Left A drawing of a *yut* board produced by Kim Mun-pyo in 1648

Right A petroglyph representing a *yut* board at Chilpo-ri, Pohang City

Desirable Characteristics as a Game

Besides its extended history and rich symbolism, *yut nori* has many advantages as a form of entertainment that has sustained its vitality to the present.

First of all, *yut nori* is heavily dependent on luck, so those with little experience have no less chance to win than skilled players. There are, of course, elements of skill in *yut nori*, but the bottom line is that there is no way to control how many *yut* sticks will land face up or down. This predominant aspect of luck enhances the expectations of victory by every player and involves them strongly in the game.

Secondly, *yut nori* is competitive. There are rules making the results unpredictable and enhancing the fun of the game. The tokens of one team can overtake or be overtaken by those of the opposing team, and the overtaken tokens are removed from the *yut* board to start again from the home station. Tokens can either move separately or collectively along the course. The route a token can take comes in four types: moving in a full circle, moving along the lines of a semicircle in the right half of the board, a semicircle in the lower half of the board, or a quarter in the lower-right of the board.

Third, *yut nori* is not restricted by the availability of game pieces. *Yut* sticks are normally made from wood, but beans can also be used. Beans are cut into halves, placed in a small dish, and thrown from it. Beyond these, anything can be used, such as small stones, go beads, or pieces of wood. *Yut* games can be played indoors and out. A *yut* board is usually drawn on paper or cloth, but it can also be scratched into the ground.

Fourth, there are diverse variants of *yut nori*. The game can also be played with retreating one step. To do this, one of the sticks is marked on the flat side. When the marked stick lands facing down and the others face up, the player must move one space back rather than one space forward. There is a form of *yut nori* that goes with a mental image of the board without its physical presence or that is designed for the specific needs of those without sight. A version of *yut* can be played by tossing and catching *yut* sticks like in jackstones.

Fifth, *yut nori* enhances communication and boosts a sense of belonging within the community. *Yut* games take place among family members, within communities, and between neighborhoods at both the individual and group levels. The rules of play are not difficult and therefore draw people in, and there are no limits on the number of participants. People

playing as a group have to constantly engage in conversation to create a strategy for how to move their tokens. From the start of the new year to the first full-moon day, many Korean families and neighborhoods are buzzing over *yut nori*.

Finally, *yut nori* incorporates artistic and educational elements. There are traditional songs adopting the different configurations of *yut* sticks as the main theme, and *yut* games often invoke spontaneous dances out of excitement. *Yut nori* is recently being deployed as an element in local festivals and as part of the school curriculum. All of these features of *yut nori* have conspired to maintain the robust popularity of the game into the present. 🌍



... A Spherical Sundial on the Move

Text by Lee Yong-sam, Professor Emeritus at Chungbuk National University

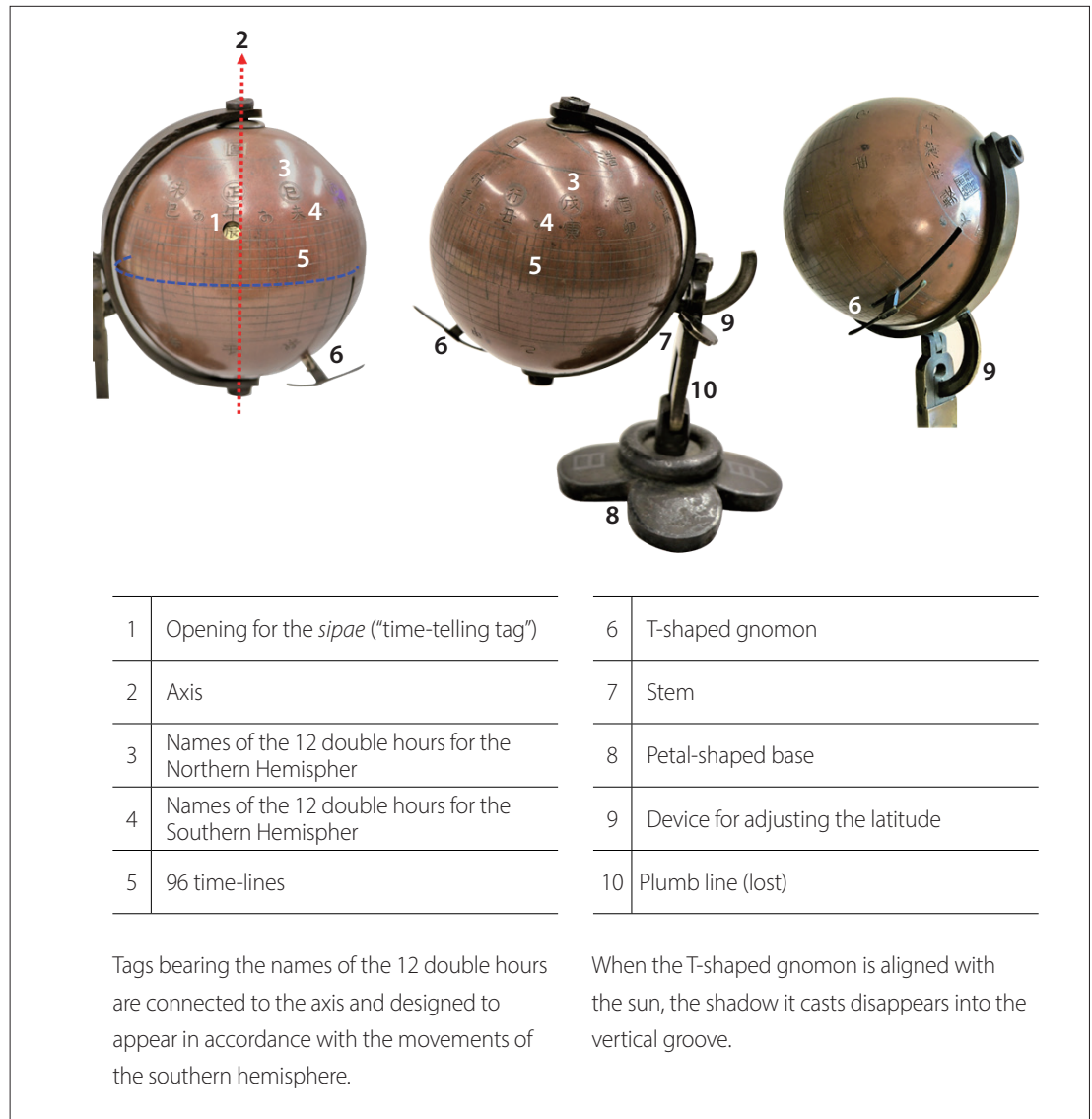
Photos by Lee Yong-sam, Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation

A Korean sundial that was long held overseas was acquired by the Cultural Heritage Administration earlier this year. Known as the Iryeongwongu, or “spherical sundial,” it was crafted in 1890 during the reign of King Gojong (the 26th monarch of the Joseon Dynasty). The form and design of this device set it apart from other sundials both at home and abroad. Besides its rare globular shape, it is uniquely designed to indicate time by moving the gnomon from side by side. It also has a device for adjusting the latitude to allow time to be measured anywhere in the world it might be used.



Two Hemispheres Along the Same Axis

The Iryeongwongu is rendered in the shape of a globe. The sphere consists of two separate hemispheres assembled along a single axis. The globe measures 11.2 centimeters in diameter, and the entire device including the base and stem is 23.8 centimeters high. The north hemisphere, marked by Chinese characters and lines indicating time, is firmly affixed to the axis, while the south hemisphere featuring the gnomon can spin independently.

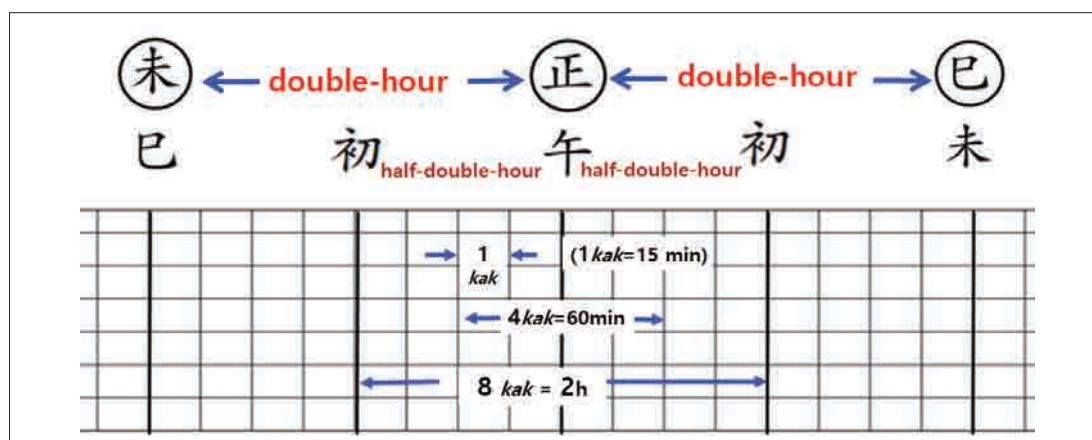


Structure of the Iryeongwongu



CT-scan images of the Iryeongwongu(National Palace Museum of Korea)

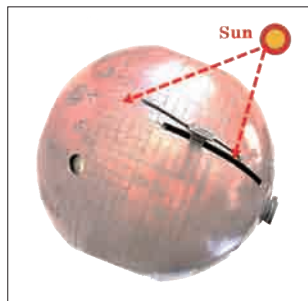
The northern hemisphere contains time markers following the same time-telling method as conventional Korean sundials. It is marked by 96 vertical lines and Chinese characters referring to the 12 double hours. During the Joseon era, the day was divided into 12 divisions (*sjjin*), or double hours, which are known by the names of the twelve animal symbols of Earthly Branches. Each of the 12 *sjjin* is further divided into eight sub-divisions (*gak*). The day was thought to consist of 96 *gak*, with each *gak* measuring 15 minutes.



Each double-hour is divided into two divisions as in modern practice.

A Moving Gnomon

In contrast to conventional Korean sundials with a fixed gnomon, the Iryeongwongu has a movable version. The T-shaped gnomon on the south hemisphere is supposed to be moved from east to west through the day following the apparent path of the sun in the sky. The gnomon extends from a long narrow vertical groove on the surface, under which it is attached to an axis. When the T-shaped rod is aligned with the sun, the shadow it casts disappears into the vertical groove. The sun is positioned slightly south of the gnomon, so the northernmost tip of its shadow is always cast on the surface to point at specific time lines. A user of this spherical sundial could tell the time by moving the southern hemisphere and, by extension, the gnomon, until the shadow of the rod is hidden in the groove.

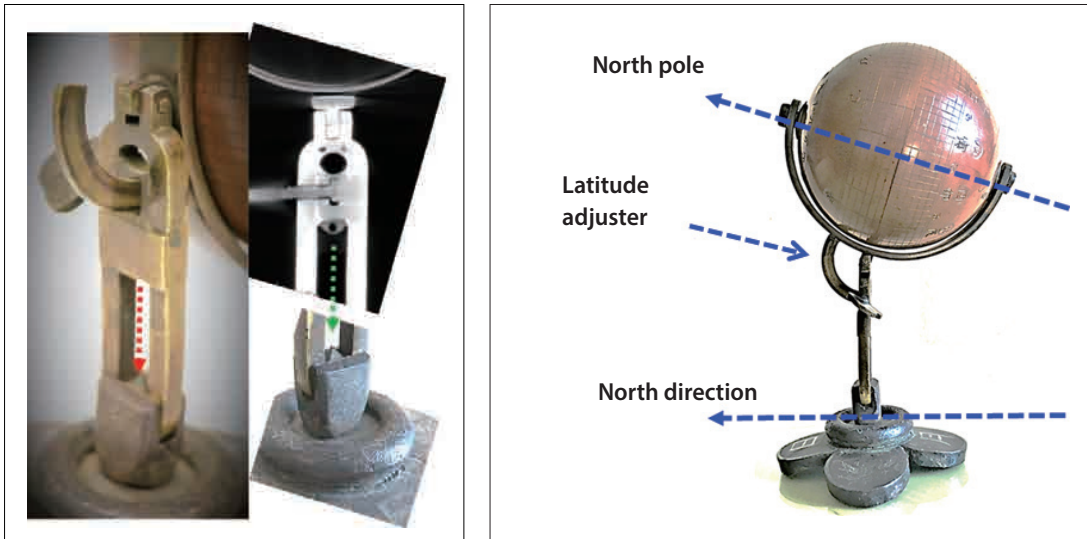


- Left** When the T-shaped gnomon is aligned with the sun, the shadow it casts disappears into the vertical groove.
- Right** The Iryeongwongu also has an automatic time-telling mechanism known as a *sipae*, or “time-telling tag.”

Besides reading the time line indicated by the shadow of the gnomon, there is another time-telling mechanism embodied in this sundial. It is known as *sipae*, or “time-telling tag.” There is a circular opening below the noon marker, where the names of the 12 double hours automatically appear every double hour. Tags bearing the names of the 12 double hours are connected to the axis and designed to appear in accordance with the movement of the southern hemisphere. This automatic time-indicating device can be thought of as a shared element between the Iryeongwongu and modern digital clocks. The *sipae* system can also be found in other Joseon-era stationary clocks such as the 15th-century clepsydra Jagyeongnu and the 17th-century armillary clock Honcheon Sygye. This 19th-century sundial is understood as being in line with Joseon’s timekeeping traditions, but innovatively adopted a portable mode.

Sundial Setting

It was necessary to place the Iryeongwongu in the right setting before it could be used to measure time. First, the plumb line was leveled. Although the plumb bob and the string from which it was suspended are now lost, the features to accommodate the plumb line still remain, such as a hole the string must have run through and a sharp projection used to check the perpendicularity of the plumb line. The axis was then directed toward the North Pole with the help of a compass and a latitude adjuster.



Left Although the plumb bob and the string from which it was suspended are now lost, the features to accommodate the plumb line still remain.

Right Users of the Iryeongwongu needed to direct its axis toward the North Pole and adjust the latitude to align with where it was being used.

This sundial could function well beyond the geographical limits of Korea. When it was deployed away from home, the latitude simply needed to be adjusted. The Iryeongwongu has a component to accommodate for the latitude of its geographical position on the globe. This Joseon-era sundial can be used in the Southern Hemisphere as well. In this case, the axis must be pointed toward the South Pole. Its potential use in the Southern Hemisphere explains why two sets of the 12 double hour names are marked on the surface in opposite

directions. Given the ship and sea images appearing on the petal-shaped base, it is assumed that this spherical sundial was intended for use both on land and at sea.

Known Date and Producer

The globular body of the Iryeongwongu bears an inscription confirming its date of production. The inscription reads “Produced at the start of the seventh lunar month in the 419th year since the foundation of the Joseon Dynasty,” corresponding to 1890 (during the reign of King Gojong). The seal of its producer, Sang Jik-hyeon (1849–?), is also evident. He was a military official affiliated with the garrison known as Chongeyeong that was responsible for escorting the king and protecting the capital. Before joining the Chongeyeong garrison, Sang had visited Japan and China as a member of diplomatic missions dispatched by the Joseon government.

An aesthetic Scientific Artifact

The Iryeongwongu is a rare artifact embodying both creative design and precise science. This movable sundial with its unusual globular form remains in good condition. The floral base is inlaid in silver with various motifs that adds an aesthetic elegance to the timekeeping equipment. All of these qualities manifested in this unique artifact recently returned home are expected to make it a precious source of information for historical research in the country. 🌐

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Dolmens Offer Rare Glimpses into the Lives of Prehistoric Humans

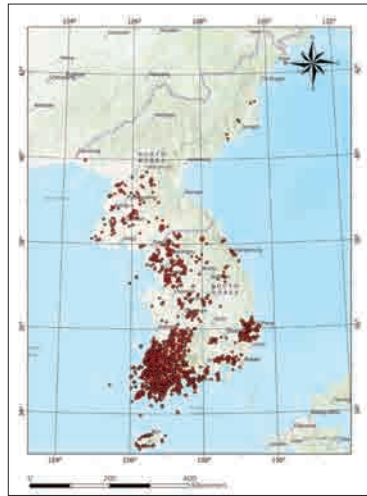
Text by Kang Dong-seok, Professor in Archaeology and Art History, Dongguk University

Photos by Cultural Heritage Administration, Ganghwa County Office, Gwangju National Museum, Hwasun County Office, Maeul Institute of Cultural Heritage, Woori Institute of Cultural Heritage



Megaliths from the Bronze Age

Distribution of dolmens on the Korean Peninsula



Dolmens epitomize the megalithic culture of the Bronze Age on the Korean Peninsula. They occur around the world from Northern and Western Europe, through the Mediterranean, and across Asia. However, nowhere else in the world shows the concentration of dolmens found in Korea. An estimated 40,000 dolmens were constructed here over the course of the 15,000 years from the 15th century BCE to around the start of the Common Era.

Diverse Forms

Dolmens in Korea generally come in three forms. The first is known as table-type dolmens. These structures consisting of two or more upright stones supporting a large horizontal stone look similar to the Poulnabrone dolmens in Ireland. Table-type dolmens are mostly scattered in the western reaches of present-day North Korea, but a small number of examples have been found in South Korea (mostly on Ganghwa Island and the Imjingang River basin). In the second type, a large stone is set on top of smaller stones over a tomb.



Left A table-type dolmen at Jeom-gol Village in Ganghwa County



Center A go-table type dolmen at Yuri Village in Changyeong County



Right A stone covered type dolmen at Naedong-ri in Daejeon City



Dolmens in Gochang County

organizing them into megalithic structures. In addition, dolmens suggest how people on the Korean Peninsula came together as members of a community and formed collective identity by constructing these monumental structures. Building a dolmen meant creating a new landscape, a sociocultural act that was driven by the ideas held by Bronze Age people regarding their lives and their relationship with the environment. While fundamentally facilities for the dead, dolmens help us to understand much about life.

Korean Dolmen Sites as World Heritage

Among the many dolmen sites in South Korea, three of the most important ones were selected and nominated for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The three sites found in Gochang, Hwasun, and Ganghwa earned World Heritage status in 2000 when they were recognized for their significance in illustrating the megalithic culture of humanity.

The Gochang site is home to 447 dolmens, most of which are found in the Jungnim-ri neighborhood. This spot boasts the highest concentration in the entire Gochang area and

features diverse types of dolmens. With only a few exceptions, dolmens at the Gochang site distribute in groups along the borderline between agricultural fields and a hilly area. This suggests that Bronze Age people made a conscious choice when selecting a site for building a dolmen. Dolmens were positioned in between the place where they lived and farmed and the area where hunting and gathering took place. Dolmens served as a boundary marker between these two different spaces. Moving between these two territories with their distinct functions, Bronze Age Koreans must have regularly come across the dolmens and been reminded of the leaders buried there. This would have inspired them to think about their currently ruling successors and develop their sense of belonging to a community.

A particularly noteworthy element of the Gochang site is a table-type dolmen in Dosan-ri, the area neighboring Jungnim-ri. There is also a distinctive local form known as pillar-type, a modified version of the *go*-type, which can be found across the Gochang area. The Dosan-ri dolmen is the southernmost table-type example in South Korea. It occurs in isolation on the top of a hill. Its location indicates that its primary function was to mark the territory of the social group responsible for constructing dolmens in the Jungnim-ri neighborhood. Many pillar-type dolmens are also found in isolation on the summit of a hill apart from the dolmen clusters at the foot of hilly areas, suggesting that they played the same role as that of the table-type dolmen in Dosan-ri.



Left A table-type dolmen in Dosan-ri in Gochang County



Right A distinctive local form of a dolmen at Hyangsan-ri in Gochang County, known as pillar-type

The Hwasun site hosts the greatest number of dolmens among the sites in South Korea. There are 596 dolmens here spread across six sub-sites. They are mostly go-type or stone covered type. Among them is a dolmen of outstanding size known as *pingmae bawi*. This go-type dolmen is capped with a grand stone seven meters long, four meters high, and weighting approximately 200 metric tons.

This imposing dolmen is associated with enduring local legends. An old woman named Mago Halmeon (“Witch Grandmother”) carried stones in her skirt to help build a pagoda at a Buddhist temple. The stones that dropped from her skirt became this monumental dolmen. Another story relates to its name *pingmae bawi*, meaning “throwing a stone.” If a person succeeds in throwing a stone onto the top of the dolmen, their wishes will come true. These folktales can be seen as an expression of the respect and awe local communities held toward this megalithic structure.

It is estimated that there are approximately 160 dolmens on Ganghwa, an island near the estuary of the Hangang River. They are mostly found in the northern section of the island. Here, dolmens form small groups on hillslopes or on the summit of a low-rising hill. Large dolmens were sometimes placed here in isolation on flat lands. There are also cases where a group of dolmens are found at high elevations, with one cluster as high as 400 meters above sea level.



A large dolmen in Hwasun County (Right Dolmen known as *pingmae bawi*)



A cluster of dolmens at Osang-ri in Ganghwa County

Dolmens on Ganghwa Island mostly take the form of a table or a single large stone. The table-type dolmens here are typologically the same as those found in Pyongan-do and Hwanghae-do in present-day North Korea, forming the highest concentration of this type in South Korea. The dolmen at Bugeun-ri is a definitive example of the table-type dolmens on Ganghwa. This large table-type dolmen is found alone amid wide stretches of flatland, measuring 2.6 meters high in total. Its capstone is 6.5 meters long and 5.2 meters wide. This massive structure stands along the wide flats connecting the northern section of Ganghwa Island to the south, making it well positioned to serve as a focal point for meetings among the people of the island. Local peoples would have gathered here and collaborated to build this large stone structure. This collective funerary ritual must have boosted their identity, belonging, and solidarity. Ever since its construction, the monumental stone structure has been integrated into the memory of local communities and provided a landmark.

Imposing Evidence of Prehistoric Culture

Dolmens were more than just facilities for burying the dead in Korea. They were part of the process of expressing ideas about death and the life that comes after it. Dolmens were also the result of social stratification and the emergence of an elite. Leadership groups adopted dolmen construction as a means of placemaking through which they could nurture a collective consciousness among members of the community and strengthen their political power. Community members came to perceive dolmens as an integral part of their everyday landscape. Dolmens in South Korea are an invaluable source of information for understanding the complexities of ancient culture and society. The Gochang, Hwasun, and Ganghwa sites collectively registered as a World Heritage property merit sustained global attention for the protection of their critical contributions to the understanding of human history. 🌐



A table-type dolmen at Jeom-gol Village in Ganghwa County



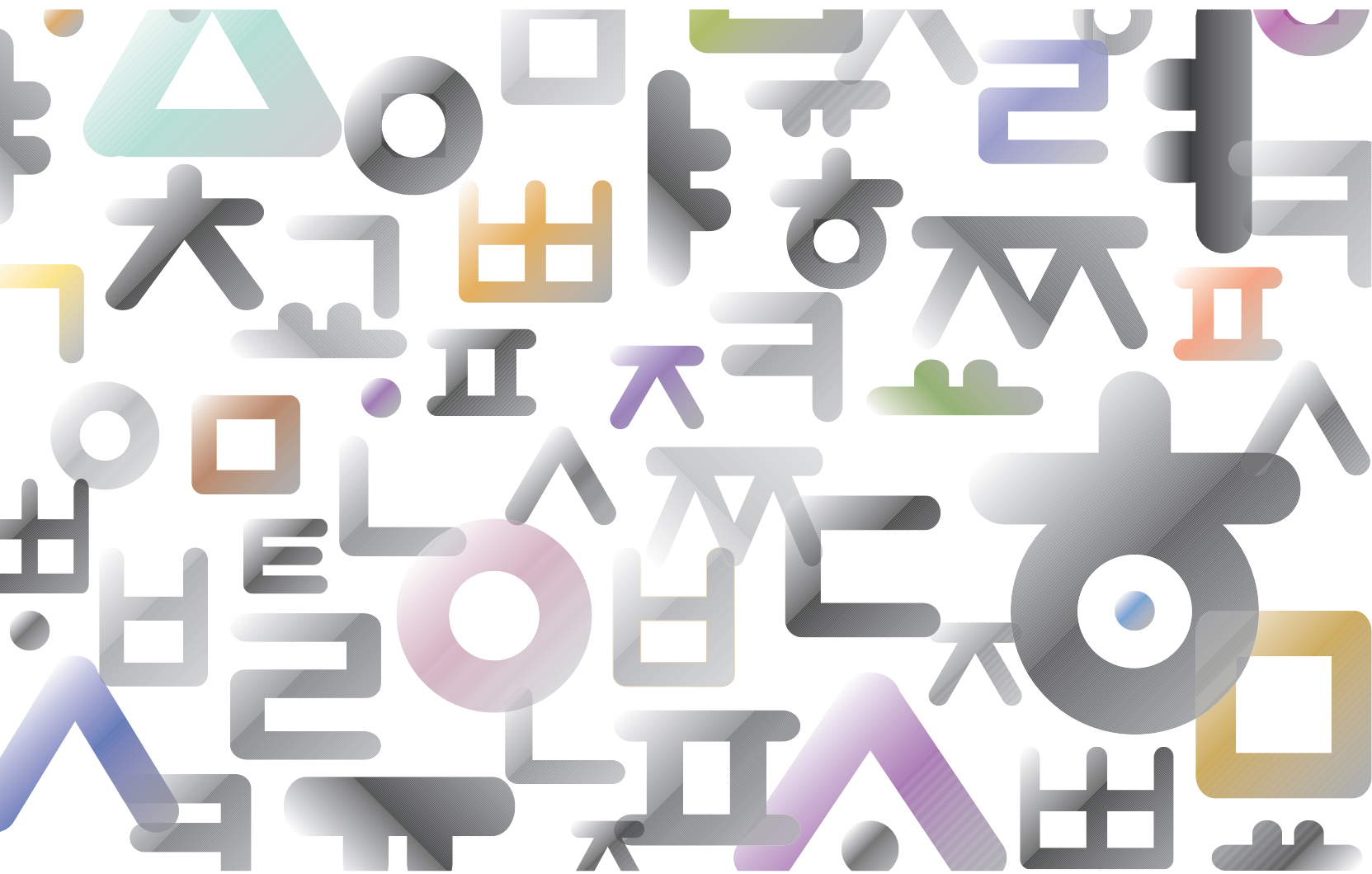
The Power of Hageul



Allison Lauren Garbacz

Allison is a recent graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Linguistics and Asian Language and Cultures with a special focus on Korean language and culture. She has studied the Korean language for 5 years and interned at the Voluntary Agency Network of Korea (VANK) where she worked to help spread Korean culture and history to the world.

Photos by VANK, Shutterstock



Formative arrangement of Hangeul

King Sejong has been sung countless praises for his invention of hangeul, his unrivaled intelligence and spirit of innovation ultimately producing a writing script that has been recognized in the linguistic community as the most intuitive and easy to learn alphabet in the world.

Thinking back on my own experience learning hangeul and the Korean language as a foreigner, I have been struck countless times with an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude that I happened to pick a language with such an intuitive writing system. In a show of true naivety, I began my Korean studies independently and under the impression that every world language had an alphabet as a writing system. It was a mere stroke of luck that I happened to pick the easiest writing system in the world, and I was able to gain a rough yet still complete understanding of hangeul in just a couple hours with the help of the internet.

If the strings of fate had been woven any differently, I might have ended up studying the logographic system of Chinese, where one character represents an entire word or a certain morpheme. Or maybe I would have studied Japanese, a language whose writing system is not an alphabet like hangeul but rather a syllabary, with one character representing a specific syllable. As a native English speaker, hangeul was a welcomed introduction to the Korean language, possibly one of the only easy parts of learning Korean, but welcome nonetheless.

But the birth of hangeul goes much deeper than scientific and linguistic technicalities, its creation stemming from a place of compassion and desire to promote the prosperity of the Korean people. The story of King Sejong creating hangeul in a quest to unite his people under one common language and erase any prejudices that stemmed from illiteracy and lack of education is one every Korean knows, and it is one that is slowly beginning to be heard throughout the rest of the world.

As I came to learn more about the Korean language in both a linguistic and historical context, the significance of hangeul became more and more apparent, causing me to reflect on just how large a role the written language plays in our everyday lives.

Today, writing is all around us. It is in menus, street signs, books, newspapers, social media posts, emails, and text messages. It is such an essential part of our daily lives that we often overlook just how present it is in everything we do. So it is shocking to think that it



Paju Publishing Culture Industrial Complex, Paju-si, Gyeonggi-do, Korea

who readily had access to the previous writing system. It is hard to imagine just what life might have looked like for someone who did not have access to something so essential as writing. Fortunately, hangeul quickly erased parts of this social gap, and the Korean people were once again united under a single writing system. Now the Republic of Korea boasts a literacy rate of 98%, something to physically prove just how much hangeul has done to unite the nation and make its people stronger.

From hangeul has also come some of the world's greatest authors, poets, songwriters, and scholars, all of whom were finally given an outlet to truly let their creativity and innovative spirit flow unrestrained once they were given the right tools. Hangeul is not merely one cultural asset of the Republic of Korea, but rather a seed planted that went on to give birth to so many more parts of Korean culture. Without hangeul, Korean culture might have evolved in a completely different direction, and the image we have now of the Republic of Korea would simply not exist.

Hangeul is also a symbol of the Republic of Korea's status as an independent nation and people. Unlike the Roman alphabet, there is no other nation in the world that uses hangeul, and its letters and symbols remain exclusive to the Korean language. If one were to come across the Korean script, they would instantly think of the Korean people and their culture and nothing else. There is something very powerful in that. Being able to say that such a central part of one's society came directly from its own people is not something about



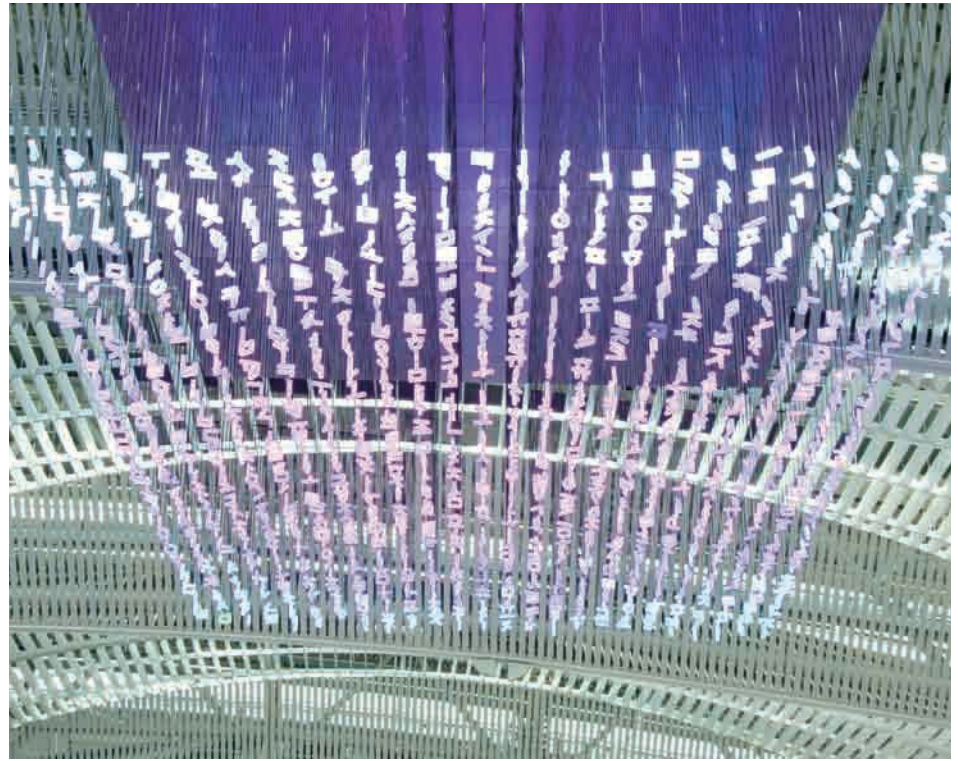
Left Hangeul design

Right Seoul, South Korea, Art decoration in Korean language letter on ceiling of terminal 2 building, Incheon international airport

which many can boast. But hangeul is just that. It is one of the fundamental building blocks of Korean society, and is something made for the Korean people by the Korean people.

Even as an outsider, it is obvious to me that Koreans recognize this amazing feat and take great pride in it. The celebration of Hangeul Day is just one example. Creating such a holiday for an alphabet of all things might seem quite trivial and unnecessary to outsiders, but at the very root of it, Hangeul Day is not just a celebration of hangeul, but rather one of Korea’s unique culture as a whole. The holiday is not simply a day recognizing the physical manifestation of the alphabet itself. It also celebrates the many great things that came from hangeul and serves as a reminder that these 24 letters remain a large part of why Korean culture is the way it is today.

As Korean culture continues to be spread far and wide across the globe, hangeul will play a vital role in helping people draw a more complete picture of this culture and its people. In



my opinion, even if someone can't read hangeul, just being able to recognize the symbols and draw a connection to Korea is already a huge step forward. To me, giving credit where credit is due in terms of such an amazing feat in Korean culture is of the utmost importance, and I hope that more people around the world will begin to view hangeul as such.

On its surface, hangeul may just appear as 24 simple letters, merely a tool people use in their daily lives without a second thought. But upon closer inspection, it is clear that hangeul goes far beyond just a few brush strokes. It is one of the building blocks of modern Korean society, the driving force that has brought people together, and the seed from which great things have arisen. One does not need to be Korean to recognize the power hangeul holds, and it is this power that will continue to drive the Republic of Korea and its people down a path of greatness into the future. 🌐



KOREAN HERITAGE meets with Ambassador Ismailova

Interviewer Suree Moon, Cultural Heritage Administration
Reviewer Myungjin Shin
Photographer Jaesheung Park



Any Korean who had a rare chance to visit Kyrgyzstan may have been surprised by locals that just might be your long lost sister. Korea and Kyrgyzstan share a common Ural-Altai roots, but we are still in our 'get to know' stage of the relationship.

KOREAN HERITAGE had the honor of meeting Ambassador Aida Ismailova, who might know more about Korea than a Korean.

KH Congratulations on being appointed as the ambassador to Korea. I heard that it has been less than a year since you've arrived. What was your impression of Korea as the ambassador?

Amb. Ismailova It is a great pleasure to receive your congratulations! I have to mention that prior to my appointment, Korea already had a certain impression in my mind. First of all, I have an excellent command of Korean language and Korean economy. Moreover, during my service as a Member of the Parliament, as the head of Korea-Kyrgyzstan Friendship Group, I have visited Korea four times. During the working trips, we have visited the National Assembly of Korea. Korea has left the greatest and unforgettable impression as one of the most advanced countries that preserves national and cultural identity. Therefore, now being here as the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, Korea continues to impress from different perspectives, starting from cultural heritage and finishing with economic development.

KH I heard that you majored in Korean economy in university. What made you take interest in Korea?

Amb. Ismailova Yes, you're absolutely right. From 1994 to 1999, I studied at the Bishkek Humanities University named after K. Karasaev. My major was «Economist-Orientalist» with specialization in Korean Economics. Back then my academic choice was unusual amongst students. Nevertheless, while being highly interested in global history, I have known that historically Korea and Kyrgyzstan have common Ural-Altai roots. Thus, my academic choice was the Korean Economy.

My personal interest in Korean culture, traditions and history has also impacted further learning of the Korean language and economy.

KH Were you able to visit any of the cultural heritage sites this year or in the past? Is there a place that stood out to you or somewhere you would like to visit?

Amb. Ismailova During my many visits to Korea, there were numerous trips to various cultural heritage sites such as Hwaseong Fortress, Changdeokgung Palace, Beomeosa Temple in Busan, and Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju. Even though I usually have limited time to visit all the sites due to busy schedule, there is one cultural heritage site that has stood out to me personally. Gyeongbokgung Palace has always been the most remarkable cultural heritage site for me. The main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty has one of the longest histories. During my studying years at university, Gyeongbokgung Palace was the first Korean historical site I learned about. I remember the first visit to the Palace. After years of seeing it on the book pages, I had a unique chance to visit it in person.



View to Ruh Ordo cultural complex near Issyk Kul lake at mountains background in Cholpon Ata, Kyrgyzstan

The magnificent architecture and special energy of the Palace has fascinated me from the first steps. Undoubtedly, it is a must-visit cultural heritage site that impresses me each time I visit.

KH CHA had cooperated with countries of Central Asia, so we have learned of Kyrgyzstan. However, we Koreans don't know much about your country. Could you introduce Kyrgyzstan for us.

Amb. Ismailova Kyrgyzstan is a largely mountainous country in Central Asia that has been officially independent since 1991. Our country is famous worldwide for the gorgeous wild mountains and crystal clear water. The highest mountain peak is the Victory peak, which is 7,439 meters in height. Moreover, there are more than 40,000 big and small crystal clear alpine lakes in the country.

The unique nature of Kyrgyzstan offers all four seasons of winter, spring, summer and autumn. In winter, tourist and citizens enjoy skiing while summer offers to visit the magnificent mountainous lake Issyk-Kul. The symbolic animal of Kyrgyzstan is a snow leopard. Our nature is an ideal habitat for snow leopards and Kyrgyzstan leads the snow leopard conservation on the high stages.

Furthermore, our country is famous for walnut and fruit cultivation. There are numerous plants all over the 7 regions of Kyrgyzstan where specific agricultural products are grown. Thus, the nature and climate are what makes the country so special and beautiful. Additionally, Kyrgyz people are the most welcoming and very tourist-oriented. Our people value traditions of the ancestors and are glad to introduce it to everyone who is interested. Thus, Kyrgyzstan is a must-visit place for every person who wants to experience the most colorful and vibrant trip of his or her life.

KH What does cultural heritage mean to the people of Kyrgyzstan and what are your thoughts on strengthening the exchange and cooperation in the field of cultural heritage between the two states?

Amb. Ismailova The history of the Kyrgyz people goes back more than 3,000 years. Kyrgyz history spans a variety of great empires and cultures. Our ancestors were nomads who have been moving with their tribes all over Asian region. In fact, all the past history has made Kyrgyzstan what it is today.

Our older generation has been preserving the centuries-old traditions of the ancestors. Both now and in the future our sacred task is to pass on the cultural and historical legacy of the Kyrgyz people to the future generations.

Thus, with regards to bilateral cooperation between Korea and Kyrgyzstan towards strengthening the various scientific and economic exchange in the field of cultural heritage, our country is more than determined. Mutual understanding of the great importance of cultural heritage brings unique opportunities for further cooperation. Kyrgyzstan is more than excited to be aligned with Korea in terms of cultural heritage preservation and to start working collaboratively towards one goal.

KH Kyrgyzstan is known as ‘Switzerland of Central Asia,’ and some Korean travelers visit to go hiking. Where would you recommend for us to visit and do?

Amb. Ismailova Indeed, Kyrgyzstan is known abroad as the Switzerland of Central Asia for its magnificent and spectacular nature. The variety of landscapes and natural resources opens tourists’ special opportunities to experience different types of activities. As Kyrgyzstan is famous for mountains, I strongly recommend Korean travelers to visit ski resorts in winter. The top ski base “Karakol” is located in Issyk-Kul region. The base is situated at altitude of 3,040 meters and therefore both beginners and professionals can enjoy skiing here.

In fact, Issyk-Kul region is famous not only for skiing but also for the well-known Issyk-Kul lake. The lake is considered one of the largest lakes in the world. During summer, the temperature of water is about 21 to 23 Celsius degrees, which makes it perfect for comfortable swimming. There are various resorts across the lake where tourists can go and cherish their time. Overall,



there are dozens of other splendid places to visit in Kyrgyzstan. The words are not enough to describe all of them.

KH This year was the 30th anniversary of our diplomatic ties. Is there a cooperation area that you would like to strengthen?

Amb. Ismailova Great question. First of all, I would like to congratulate all of us on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea.

I would like to emphasize that Kyrgyzstan considers South Korea one of the main and reliable partners in Northeast Asia. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the parties have built friendly, trusting relations and established close cooperation in various fields.

We are working to strengthen and expand cooperation through various areas: though inter-parliamentary ties using the Frindship Group, Central Asia Cooperation Forum, increasing trade and economic cooperation through negotiation with big companies and holding business forums for entrepreneurs.

Cooperation in the field of culture is one of the important areas of interaction, contributing to the rapprochement of our two peoples. We want to hold days for national cultures, including events dedicated to memorable dates in Kyrgyz-Korean relations. And the interest of Kyrgyz youth in Korean culture has been growing. With the high quality of the education system in the Republic of Korea, our students are interested in getting education from the universities in the Republic of Korea.

Healthcare sector is also a promising area of cooperation. The Kyrgyz side is interested in opening Korean medical centers with the latest technologies and advanced training of medical personnel in the Republic of Korea.

Kyrgyzstan has a high tourism potential and is considered a very attractive country for Korean tourists as well. The number of Korean tourists in Kyrgyzstan is growing each year. With the declince of COVID-19 cases we



Left Altyn arashan mountain valley in Tian Shan mountain, Kyrgyzstan

Right Mountain lake, Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, Lake bay



hope that mutual travel will be restored soon, especially since there is a visa-free regime for citizens of the Republic of Korea in Kyrgyzstan.

I also want to highlight that at the beginning of 2021, the Government of South Korea included Kyrgyzstan in the list of priority partner countries for the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Relevant work is being carried out with the state bodies, and we hope for the practical implementation of all projects that have been approved and are under consideration. We are very interested in increasing the volume of ODA assistance, and it is a great news that CHA will be part of this endeavour.

Along with developing and strengthening important areas of political dialogue through the exchange of visits at the highest and higher levels, the development of trade and economic cooperation, culture, healthcare, education and tourism. Recently, the development of cooperation in the field of the environment, digitalization of information technologies, etc. has also become very relevant. We will work in these areas and to achieve practical implementation. ☺

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Talchum, Mask Dance Drama in the Republic of Korea

Text by Cultural Heritage Administration

Photos by Cultural Heritage Administration, Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation



Talchum is a performing art that encompasses dance, music, and theatre. An ensemble of six to ten musicians accompanies masked performers who sing and dance and exchange verbal interactions through theatrical movements.

Originally created during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), Korean mask dance dramas intrinsically entail anachronistic aspects of traditional Korean society, such as male dominance, a rigid social hierarchy, and references to the socially disadvantaged without due respect to the hardships they have endured.

The primary themes satirized by traditional mask dance dramas include the hypocrisy of Buddhist monks, the arrogance of the *yangban* nobility, and people's suffering under the male-dominated patriarchal system. Diverse social issues are humorously explored through dramatic combinations of songs, dances, movements, and words. Masks with exaggerated archetypal representations of everyday personages are an indispensable element in the presentation of *talchum*.

Themed around the criticism of the absurdities and ills of traditional society, the Korean mask dance dramas illustrate the escalation of conflicts stemming from these issues, but eventually end either with a reconciliatory dance encompassing all parties or in the promotion of virtue and punishment of vice. Therefore, *talchum* is not really an art about conflict, but one about harmony and reconciliation.



Left An elementary school student at the basic education course of Gasan Ogwangdae, wearing a mask made from paper

Right Lion dance at the Bongsan Talchum. The lion is sent by Buddha to punish the corrupted monk. The monk repents, and the lion forgives the monk and they dance together



Masks used for the *talchum* tradition transmitted in the Songpa area of Seoul



Jiyeon Gwangdae's dance at the Yecheon Cheongdan Noreum. Four Jiyeon Gwangdaes, wearing masks made from winnows, symbolize the four directions (NSEW) and four seasons

A Korean mask dance drama does not require a formal stage: Any empty space can become a venue for *talchum*. The audience for a masked-dance drama are not passive spectators, but important participants. They complete the production with their cheers and jeers as the drama unfolds. *Talchum* is a dynamic theatrical flow of action and sound created through the combined efforts of both the players and spectators.

This flexibility provided to *talchum* by the audience's active participation and its thematic orientation toward social criticism gave birth to the unique phenomenon of large-scale transmission of *talchum* among young people, particularly university students, during the 1970-80s.

Talchum is practiced in various regions across the Republic of Korea, with the Seoul/Gyeonggi-do/Incheon area and the Busan/Gyeongsangnam-do area being the main loci of transmission. It exhibits distinct characteristics based on the transmission region, as suggested by the diverse local names referring to each area's mask dance dramas. It is called Sandae Nori and Byeolsandae Nori in the Seoul/Gyeonggi-do area, but respectively Yaryu and Ogwangdae in the Busan/Gyeongsangnam-do area. There are mask dance drama traditions in Gangwon-do and Gyeongsangbuk-do Provinces as well, respectively known as Gwanno Gamyongeuk, Hahoe Byeolsingut Talnori and Cheongdan Noreum. The traditions originating in North Korea but currently practiced in the Seoul/Incheon/Gangwon-do area by North Korean migrant communities are termed Saja Noreum, Saja Nori, and *talchum*. *Talchum* is also practiced in several countries beyond the Republic of Korea where ethnic Koreans reside. It is currently being practiced in North Korea as well.

Individual *talchum* practitioners are affiliated with respective safeguarding associations. These associations all conduct a wide range of education and training activities drawing on their experience and expertise and the willing participation of their members. They are voluntary grassroots organizations with their operations executed through the collaborative efforts of the membership. They include officially recognized masters who provide a focal point for the transmission of the element based on accumulated experience and performance skills, including the crafting of the required masks. The members also conduct various transmission activities depending on their personal specialties and years of experience, such as serving as *talchum* trainers or workshop lecturers, participating in performances, and pursuing academic research.

The individual *talchum* safeguarding associations have gathered to form the General Federation of Korean Mask Dance Associations. Also operated through voluntary efforts, this group is committed to serving as a communication medium and providing a cooperative network among its affiliates.

In addition, the broader general public can be found learning *talchum* at public educational institutions and practicing it as a pastime. Elementary, middle, and high school students experience *talchum* through both curricular and extracurricular programs. University students and other adult Koreans practice *talchum* in hobby clubs. There are numerous

cases of people first encountering mask dance drama as an amateur interest, receiving professional training, and eventually entering a *talchum* safeguarding association. Unlike in the past, women now actively take part in the practice and transmission of the element.

Talchum has been listed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage inventory since the 1960s, when the legal framework for intangible cultural heritage was first established. People in Korea have been perceiving *talchum* as a symbol of traditional performing arts and intangible cultural heritage for generations.

Considering the nationwide appreciation and awareness of this element, *talchum*'s inscription has reminded the Korean people that a local form of representative intangible heritage can become the intangible heritage of all humanity. It will serve as an opportunity to heighten their sense of community and their cultural identity as Koreans. 🌐



Gilnori parade of Bukcheong Saja Noreum. The guide leads all performers to the center to dance together



First Working Committee Meeting for ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation

Text by Cultural Heritage Administration
Photos by Cultural Heritage Administration



Members of the Working Committee showing excitement through ASEAN handshake

Cultural Heritage Administration hosted, with the support of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, the Inauguration and the first Working Committee Meeting for ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation from 10 to 11 November 2022 in Seoul. More than seventy people participated from nine ASEAN Member States (excluding Indonesia), Republic of Korea (ROK), ASEAN Secretariat, and domestic participants of ASEAN-related organizations in Korea.

Korean Government, recognizing the importance of cultural heritage proposed the establishment of an ASEAN-Korea Heritage Cooperation Organisation at the Special AMCA Plus ROK Meeting in 2019 and the 21st ASEAN-ROK Summit in 2020. The Working Committee is a preliminary step in the establishment of the ASEAN-Korea Cultural Heritage Cooperation Organisation.

The purposes of this event were to establish a discussion platform for cultural heritage cooperation between ASEAN and ROK and to discuss current issues and future directions in the cultural heritage field between ASEAN and ROK.

The meeting included presentations on how to operate the Working Committee for ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation, current status and demands of each Member States, and suggestions on possible cooperation areas in the future.

Through this meeting, ASEAN Member States, CHA, and the ASEAN Secretariat formed a consensus on four main things.

First, In order to begin discussions and advance cooperation between ASEAN and ROK in the area of cultural heritage for three years(2022-2024), the participants first established the Working Committee on ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation .



Left Presentation by Administrator of Cultural Heritage Administration

Right Focusing on the presentation attentively



Comments by Cultural Heritage Administration



ASEAN Secretariat giving a presentation



Presentation by Malaysia



Presentation by Brunei

Second, the following five major areas were determined to be high priority to be focused on the future cooperation through proposals and discussions at the first Working Committee Meeting.

- Promotion of creative cultural industries
- Capacity building
- Use of digital technology
- Cooperation on shared heritage
- Other (exchange programs, risk management, etc.)

To develop specific projects or programs for the practical execution of each priority field, further conversations should be held.

Thirdly, different perspectives on how to carry out ASEAN-ROK cultural heritage cooperation were presented. These perspectives included those on sub-regional cooperation within ASEAN, selection and

concentration on cooperation priorities, avoidance of duplication with and differentiation from existing projects, and development of cultural heritage cooperation metrics and cultural resource measurement indicators.

Fourth, the participants concurred that the necessity for pilot projects to demonstrate the willingness and strengthen trust for ASEAN and ROK collaboration on cultural heritage.

There was understanding that ASEAN and ROK should strengthen their cooperation in the area of cultural heritage, and the Korean government voiced its strong desire to continue cooperation within the Working Committee's framework.

The members of the Working Committee visited the special exhibition of ASEAN textiles by the ASEAN Culture Center for the ASEAN Week, which showed Korea's growing interest in ASEAN culture. They also had a chance to visit the gardens of the Changdukung palace while exerting in Hanbok. ☺



Sporting little hearts at the Changdukung Palace

Talchum Inscribed as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity



1 Delegation celebrating the inscription of *Talchum*
 2 LOI signing at Hotel de la Marine

“Talchum, mask dance drama in the Republic of Korea” has made it into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The decision was made on November 30, 2022 at the 17th Session of the Inter-Governmental Committee in Rabat, the Kingdom of Morocco.

The UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Committee stated that the message of Talchum of universal equality value and criticism of social hierarchy is still relevant today and praised its role as a symbol of respective cultural identities its variant forms represent.

The inscription is the result of the joint efforts among the Cultural Heritage Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the City of Andong, Gyungbuk Province, 18 safeguarding associations and the World Federation of Mask Culture. It will serve as an excellent precedent of close cooperation between the private and public sectors in promoting Korea’s traditional culture to the rest of the world. Following inscription, the number of Korea’s elements on the UNESCO’s ICH inventory grows to 22. 🌐

CHA signs LOI with France

The Cultural Heritage Administration signed a letter of intent (LOI) on cultural heritage exchanges and cooperation with the Centre des Monuments Nationaux* (President Philippe Belaval, CMN) of France in Paris on December 2.

* A public institution under the Ministry of Culture and Communication that is responsible for preservation, restoration, utilization, promotion and publishing etc. of the monuments around France. It manages more than 100 sites: Arc de triomphe, Notre-Dame Cathedral, Mont-Saint-Michel Abbey, etc.

Through this LOI, CHA and CMA plan to cooperate in all areas of cultural heritage: conservation, preservation and protection of cultural heritage; operation of educational programs and exchanges; exchange of human resources, such as through joint research and mutual visits; exhibition and promotion of the cultural heritage of both countries; promotion of cooperative relationships between the cultural heritage institutions of the two countries; and support for cultural heritage entrepreneurship. 🌐



Kaneko Fumiko

I chose to give my life for the independence of Joseon



Louis Martin

Let's initiate a million-signature campaign for Korean independence



Homer Bezaleel Hulbert

I would rather be buried in Korea than in Westminster Abbey.



Albert Wilder Taylor

When I did, please bury me next to my father in my beloved land of Korea.



Du Junhul

I am a daughter of Joseon.

Foreign Independence Heroes Together 100 Years Ago



George Lewis Shaw

There is no doubt Korea will achieve independence from Japan.



Chiang Kai-shek

How amazing that one Korean man accomplished what a million-soldier Chinese army couldn't!



William Alderman Linton

Long live Korean independence!



George Ashmore Fitch

Long live Korean independence!



Frederick Arthur McKenzie

I am crying for freedom and justice. Is the world listening to me?



Floyd Williams Tomkins Taylor

I believe that every country deserves the same rights and freedoms.

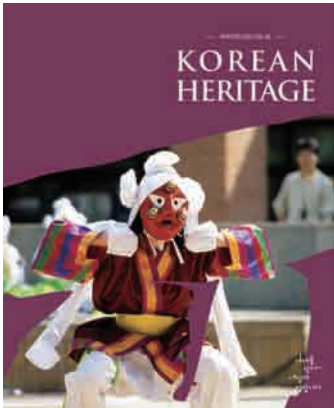


Chu Fucheng

Long live Korean independence!



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On the Cover

A *talchum*, or “mask dance,” performer is represented within the silhouette of a dolmen. The mask dance tradition in South Korea has recently been entered onto the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This comprehensive form of performing arts known for its cutting critiques of social hierarchy plays a critical role in expressing the cultural identities of its practicing communities.



Cultural Heritage Administration