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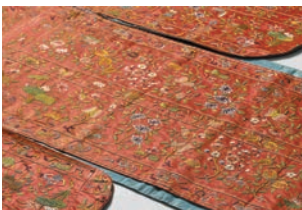
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The image on the cover shows Sosuseowon, one of the nine Joseon-era educational institutes collectively inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2019 under the name *Seowon, Korean Neo-Confucian Academies*. Located in present-day Yeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Sosuseowon became the first Neo-Confucian academy in Korea when it was built in 1543. In 1550, it became the first to be endowed with a name plaque displaying the king's handwriting.

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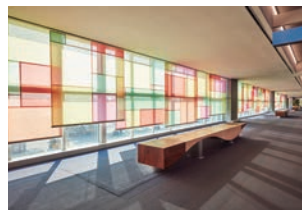


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FEATURE STORY

Ceremonial Attire and the Frugal Majesty of the Joseon Royal Family

Text by Lee Min-joo, The Academy of Korean Studies

Photography by National Palace Museum of Korea, National Museum of Korea

Royal Weddings

In the royal court of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), wedding attire varied depending on the period, the wearer's position in the royal hierarchy, and the stage of the ceremony.

Rich historical information can be found in the wedding outfits worn by members of the Joseon royal household. This article explores Korean royal wedding garments based on the wedding of Crown Prince Yi Cheok (1874–1926).

Yi, who eventually ascended the throne to become Emperor Sungjong (r. 1907–1910), was the second son of Emperor Gojong (r. 1863–1907) and Queen Myeongseong. He was named crown prince in 1875 and, in February 1882, married a daughter of the literary official Min Tae-ho.

The process began with a national ban on marriage engagements for girls aged between seven and eleven. Potential royal brides were selected from among them and brought in to undergo the first round of a three-stage selection process for choosing royal consorts known as *gantaek*. The candidates who passed the first round went on to a second round of selection, soon after which Yi Cheok, who was still a child himself, rushed to hold the coming-of-age rite required of him before he could wed. The successful candidate to become crown princess was chosen in the third round of the selection.

Clothing was an important issue for all the girls and women applying to become a royal bride. Aware of how extravagant wedding ceremonies could become in terms of outfits and gifts, the Joseon royal household sought to practice frugality and provide a fitting example. As part of this effort, crown princess candidates were prohibited from displaying luxury in their attire for the selection process beyond a simple outfit made from ramie fabric or sparsely woven silk. Given that the prohibition orders had to be reissued throughout the Joseon era, it appears that not all candidates strictly abided by this rule. However, it seems that those finally selected as royal brides mostly complied with the government's policy of keeping their outfits humble. Lady Hyegyeong, the birth mother of King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800), accounts in her memoir *Hanjungnok* (Record of Sorrowful Days) that her skirt for the crown princess selection was made by recycling old jacket linings and her late sister's wedding garments. It is recorded in *Jodaebi ipgwol ilgi* (Record of Queen Sinjeong's Entry into the Palace) that Queen Sinjeong, the consort of Crown Prince Hyomyeong (1809–30), dressed herself for the crown princess selection process in an outfit made from coarsely woven silk and distinguished herself from other candidates through the humility of her attire. The court ladies observing her took note of her frugality.

Attire was provided by the royal household to the candidates who made it to the third round of the selection. The royal household individually measured the candidates and provided them with dresses denoting the royal character of the event. The one selected to become crown princess was granted an outfit expressing the authority of her royal status. This outfit featured a *bongdae* (a chest belt for ceremonial attire) and a *wonsam* ceremonial robe woven with gold decorative patterns. Wearing this display of authority, she temporarily moved to *byeolgung* (detached palace) prepared for her stay to learn the rules and practices of the royal court as part of her education on becoming crown princess.

Wedding Outfits for the Crown Prince

The preparatory phase of a royal wedding was followed by a main ceremony comprised of six sequential rites, including *napchae* (the groom proposing marriage to the bride), *napging* (the groom sending gifts to the bride), *gogi* (the groom notifying the bride of the wedding date), *chaekbin* (the bride's enthronement as royal consort), *chinyeong* (the groom visiting and then escorting the bride to his residence), and *dongnoe* (the groom and the bride sharing a ceremonial meal). The apex of the main ceremony was the groom's visit to the bride's former home to take her back to his residence. Afterwards, the groom and bride bowed to each other and shared a ceremonial drink to seal their bond.

A fire-damaged portrait of Crown Prince Hyomyeong (1809-30), depicted in a *myeonbok* robe and an eight-stringed *myeollyugwan* crown.





King's myeonbok
with nine emblems

A Joseon crown prince visited the bride's palace wearing a ceremonial crown and robe respectively known as *myeollyugwan* and *myeonbok*. Myeollyugwan, a type of crown consisting of a rectangular board mounted on a fitted cap with beaded strings dangling from the front and back edges of the board, indicated the rank of the wearer through the number of strings. There were seven for the eldest son of a crown prince, eight for a crown prince, nine for a king, and twelve for an emperor. Crown Prince Cheok wore an eight-stringed myeollyugwan with red, white, and green jade beads decorating each string. Myeollyugwan also had a pair of jade beads suspended from either side of the rectangular board to hang next to each ear. A myeollyugwan was worn tilted slightly forward so that the beaded strings completely obscured the vision of the wearer. The beaded strings in the front and the jade beads alongside the ears were a symbolic means of instructing the wearer to guard against attaching himself to what he saw and heard and to maintain a distance from worldly distractions.

A type of robe known as *myeonbok* served as an official outfit for kings and crown princesses from the early Goryeo period (918–1392) through the Joseon Dynasty. Also known as *jangbok* (emblematic clothes), *myeonbok* were most prominently characterized by the emblems that embellished them. The seven emblems for a crown prince and the nine for a king symbolized both the virtues expected of the wearer and his authority. Crown Prince Cheok wore a *myeonbok* with seven emblems. The emblems for a crown prince included flames, meaning “illuminating the world,” and pheasants, symbolizing superb writing and calligraphy. Others included ritual vessels to denote devout reverence for ancestors, with tigers and monkeys drawn on the inside of the vessels to respectively represent bravery and wisdom. The emblems of grasses also referred to skillful writing and calligraphy, and rice grains represent the people. A king's *myeonbok* added dragons and mountains to these seven motifs, delivering wishes for his power and authority to extend to such a degree that he could bring peace to the country.

Ceremonial Garments and Accessories for the Crown Princess

When greeting the crown prince during his visit to her palace, a crown princess wore a *jeokui*, literally meaning a “pheasant garment.” This ceremonial attire was reserved for women related to the Joseon dynastic line, including the consorts of the eldest son of a crown prince, crown princesses, queen consorts, and queen dowagers. *Jeokui* denoted the royal rank of the wearer through color: purple-red for queen dowagers, bright red for queen consorts, and dark green for crown princesses and consorts of the eldest son of a crown prince. The bride of Crown



A jeokui, the highest-ranking ceremonial robe for female members of the Joseon royal family. This was worn by the wife of Yeongchinwang (1897–1970), the last crown prince of Korea.



Hapi

A long and narrow scarf-like ornament worn over the shoulders



Okdae

A leather belt wrapped in silk and then decorated with jade plaques



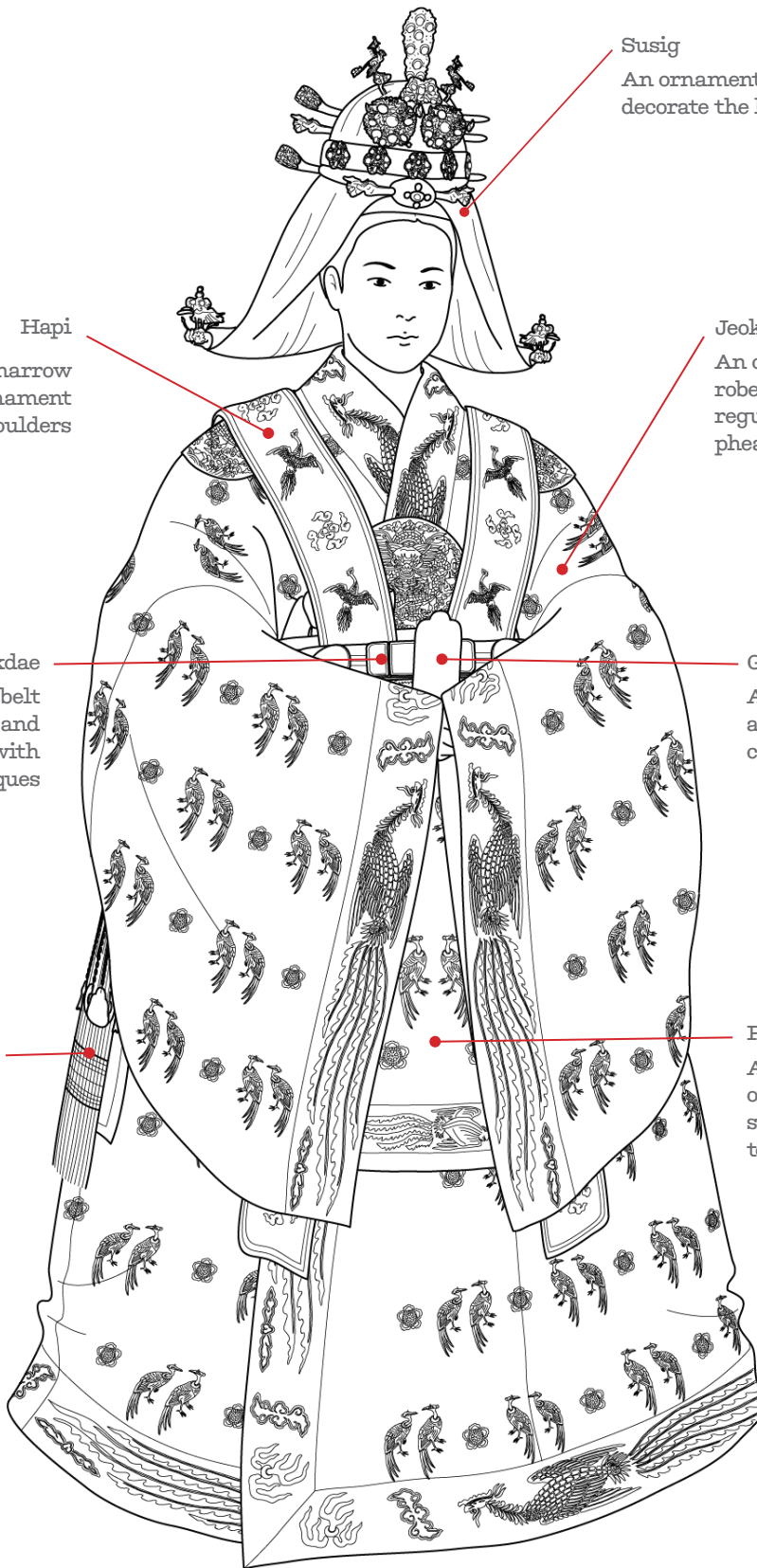
Paeok

Jade pendants worn at the sides of the waist



Mal

Traditional Korean socks, also known as beoseon



Susig

An ornament used to decorate the hair



Jeokui

An outer ceremonial robe decorated with regularly spaced pheasant patterns



Gyu

A flat jade scepter accompanying royal ceremonial robes



Pyeseul

A rectangular ornamental cloth suspended from the waist to cover the knees



Seok

Traditional Korean shoes with double outsoles



Prince Yi Cheok, who later became Queen Sunmyeong, welcomed him wearing a dark green jeokui.

A jeokui robe was accompanied by a range of accessories. They include a *gyu*, a jade tablet signifying the holder's status as crown princess; *pyeseul*, a decorative panel covering the knees; *dae* belts; *husu*, an ornament attached to the back of the robe; *hapi*, a scarf-like sash draped over the shoulders; *paeok*, jade pendants worn at the sides of the waist; *beoseon*, traditional socks; and *seok*, ceremonial shoes. Jeokui robes were once combined with a crown known as a *jeokgwan*, but they were replaced with decorative hairdos based on wigs during the reign of King Injo (r. 1623–49). Korean women had a reputation for long and voluminous hair, which could amplify the beauty of wig-based ceremonial hairstyles.

Headgear used to secure wigs and decorate the hair included diverse *binyeo* (hairpins), *tteoljam* (fluttering hairpins), and *daenggi* (ribbons). The fluttering of *tteoljam*, in particular, were considered key to the dignity and splendor of the figure of the wearer. A flat disk was made from white jade, coral, gold, or silver and lavishly embellished with small gems, some of which were attached to the end of a spiral of wire to gently wobble as the wearer moved. These fluttering hairpins were intended to signify the vigor of royal brides.

Left
A *tteoljam*, a decorative hairpin worn with a *jeokui* robe. Its flat disk base was often shaped like a circle, rectangle, or a butterfly.

Right
A *Norigae*, an ornament worn by women on their outer garments

Authority and Dignity of Royal Attire

A royal wedding was not just enjoyed by the royal household: It was a celebratory event for the entire nation. Such a national occasion needed to be matched with ceremonial attire of fitting elegance and majesty. While seeking to articulate the dignity and stateliness of the event through its ceremonial outfits, the Joseon royal household also went to great lengths to keep royal weddings from devolving into extravagance and to demonstrate the virtue of thrift through their ceremonial garments.

Although valuing the practice of frugality, for certain occasions the Joseon royal household allowed commoners to wear some of the ceremonial outfits otherwise reserved for female members of the royal family. Ordinary brides were granted the right to wear such ceremonial robes as *wonsam* or *hwarot* on their weddings. The royal household made efforts to set an example by practicing frugality themselves while providing people with an opportunity to enjoy luxuries normally beyond their class at a once-in-a-lifetime event, demonstrating an expression of the *noblesse oblige* ingrained into the Joseon royal family. ☺



A commoner wedding from the late-Joseon period. The bride wears a wig-based ceremonial hairstyle while wearing a hwarot robe.

SPECIAL ISSUE

Confucian Wooden Printing Blocks Preserving Social Values for the Future

Text by Lee Sang-ho, Director, Humanities Convergence Headquarters of the Korean Studies Institute

Photography by Korean Studies Institute

Video by K-Heritage Channel



On the eighth day of the seventh lunar month of 1823, more than 400 local Confucian scholars assembled at Dosanseowon, a Neo-Confucian academy in present-day Gyeongsangbuk-do Province. The sultry summer day did not deter them as they gathered to restart a publishing project that had been obstructed in 1801. The project sought to publish the collected works of Chae Je-gong (1720–99), one of the most powerful literary officials from the latter centuries of the Joseon period (1392–1910). As a trusted aide to King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800), Chae helped alleviate the negative reputation of the Gyeongsang region in Joseon politics as an area predisposed to rebellion. The gathering of 400-plus Confucian scholars was a show of the collective commitment of the Confucian community in the Gyeongsang region to pay tribute to this important Confucian sage.

The texts had been collected and edited for publication by his disciples in Seoul less than a year after Chae's death in 1799. The project progressed smoothly at first, and even King Jeongjo himself had taken part in the editing process. The Confucian scholars in the Gyeongsang region were prepared to move on to the next stages of publication, including carving the printing woodblocks, when the death of King Jeongjo in 1800 triggered a sudden shift in the political climate and allowed forces with negative positions regarding Chae Je-gong rose within the Joseon government. Chae ended up being posthumously deprived of all his official titles. Under these circumstances, it was clear that the project of publishing his works ultimately came to a halt.



Beonamjip
(Collected Works of Beonam) contains poems and other writings produced by the late-Joseon literary official Chae Je-gong.

樊巖先生集卷之二十七

疏劄八

因虹變乞免劄

伏以臣於病伏涔涔之中得見青臺之報陰虹有貫日之變矣嗚呼何由而致此伏惟我 聖上臨御二十載 聖志益勵求治益切未明求衣侵夜忘勞此帝王之盛節也第恨朝廷之上人才眇然不足以對揚萬一以登大猷之世而若謂之因是而召災致異則亦云過矣奈之何上天示警去益丁寧昨歲冬雷懷惕之心尚今未弛今春無花簡策所未見謂之祥

樊巖集 卷二十七 疏劄

也不宜至若虹貫以陰氣而凌犯太陽之尊此其災曷云小哉我 聖上祇事日監之天無形之視無聲之聽不啻若孝子之事父母而今迺祥不見應災反有召 淵衷之惕然恐懼當復如何臣達宵彷彿實不知所措此際伏承時原任來待之 教盛矣哉

大聖人不違寧處求助臣隣之意也臣一縷未泯之前豈不欲匍匐進詣仰聆 玉音俯陳微衷而第臣素患塊積挽近以來發作無常終夜磨腹而莫之伏焉鎮日服藥而莫之驗焉此其勢病廢無疑而最是暫束袴帶便覺膺腹煩懣殆欲狂叫躍出冠裳赴



A wooden printing block used to publish the *Beonamjip*

In the following years, Confucian scholars in the Gyeongsang region made steady efforts to restore Chae's reputation. He finally regained his lost official titles in 1823, creating a friendlier environment for re-starting the publishing project. The Confucian scholars gathered at Dosanseowon on a summer day in 1823 decided together to publish a collection of writings by Chae Je-gong and name it *Beonamjip* (Collected Works of Beonam) after Chae's penname. The only hurdle that remained was funding. The writings Chae produced over his lifetime could fill upwards of 50 volumes, and it was estimated that a project of this scale would cost more than 4,000 *nyang* (a Joseon-era monetary unit). Given that a quality tile-roofed *hanok* (Korean-style house) in Seoul at the time cost approximately 150 *nyang*, a 4,000-*nyang* budget would be worth as many as 26 high-end homes. The scale of the project required the involvement of the entire Gyeongsang region to succeed.

Fund-raising efforts soon kicked off and continued for over a year, with donations collected from clans, individuals, and more than 80 Confucian academies. Using money raised from all across the Gyeongsang region, 1,167 printing woodblocks had been carved by the end of June in 1824 for the publication of *Beonamjip*. These woodblocks are now part of the 64,226 Confucian printing woodblocks that were inscribed together onto the Memory of the World International Register on October 10, 2015.

Social Meaning of Woodblock Printing in Joseon

In Joseon society, Confucianism provided a moral and social foundation based on lifelong education and ethical models. It aims to nurture Confucian sages through moral development and, eventually, to establish a moral community made up of Confucian sages. Two major preconditions for achieving this goal are individuals developing into Confucian sages and the social mechanisms for recognizing them. A Confucian society can only sustain itself and develop by acknowledging the individuals who have become sages and setting them apart as social examples.

The recognition of exemplary individuals is typically achieved through two methods. One is sustaining their memories through images and rituals. Paintings, statues, and sculptures created in memory of these individuals can be produced. In the same vein, in East Asia their spirit tablets can be placed at a shrine with rituals regularly held for them. Another means of recognition is to record their words or deeds in a written medium in the form of, for example,





A wooden printing block used to publish the collected works of the early-Joseon literary official Yi Hwang (penname Toegye).

scripture or canon. The written records of what these individuals said and did can serve as a guide for leading future generations into the same path.

The Confucian state of Joseon followed this pattern. When a person was recognized as a sage by the local community for the sacrifices he had made protecting Confucian virtues or for his faithful lifelong observation of Confucian principles, his spirit tablet could be honored at a local Neo-Confucian academy or memorial shrine so that the community could preserve his memory. The central government could do the same by placing the spirit tablets of important Confucian personages in Munmyo, the shrine to Confucius, and honoring them as state-recognized sages. Once deemed a sage at the local or national level, efforts would be made to collect and publish the figure's words and writings. The publication of a scholar's collected written works was generally performed by carving the texts onto wooden blocks and printing from them.

A majority of the publications produced during the Joseon era was made up of collections of individuals' written works. Locally or nationally recognized Confucian scholars were

memorialized with their writing being compiled, printed, and then disseminated. This commemorative tradition helped inspire Confucian scholars to persevere in their lifelong practice of Confucian principles. It also helped Confucian values to diffuse into every corner of society from the national government down through local communities and even individual lives. The tradition of publishing the collected works of Confucian sages persisted through the Joseon Dynasty. It was critical to the functioning of Joseon-era society, which was underpinned by the ideal of evaluating individuals according to Confucian standards and commemorating successful examples for others to follow. It is fair to say that this printing tradition was a major pillar supporting the Confucian society in Korea.

Publishing through Collective Decision-making and Shared Responsibility

It should be clear by now that the publication of a Confucian scholar's collected works was an effort beyond the capacity of a single individual or family. A publishing project could only be launched when there was consensus among a local Confucian community as to its regard for a Confucian scholar and on the need to publish his collected works. A critical part of the necessity of absolute consensus came from the practical reason that the costs would otherwise be prohibitive.

Wooden blocks were carved to allow the printing of four pages per block. The sheets printed from the wooden blocks were folded in half to produce a compilation. It is hard to exactly convert into today's currency the cost of carving each printing block. We can only gain a rough sense of how expensive it was based on the price of rice, a commodity used as a medium of exchange during the Joseon era. When calculated in absolute terms, the volume of rice that would have to be sold to produce one wooden block would be worth two to four million South Korean won in today's currency. Given that each volume of a Joseon-era book comprised 80 pages on average, printing a volume would have required approximately 20 wooden printing blocks, or 40 to 80 million KRW in today's currency. As *Beonamjip* consists of 1,167 such blocks, the cost for its production would be well over two billion KRW in today's currency at the very least.

We also need to consider how rice made up a much greater share of the economy of the Joseon era compared to today's. This emphasizes the financial scope of a publishing project that vastly exceeded the capacity of any single individual or clan. It was for this practical reason that an

entire community had to become involved in a publishing project in the decision-making stages to secure funds and proceed with the publication.

The collection of wooden printing blocks collectively inscribed on the Memory of the World International Register under the name *Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea* was recognized by UNESCO as the epitome of community publishing and shared wisdom. Confucian scholars in Korea oversaw publishing projects based on collective decision-making and fundraising with a view to supporting the sustainability of society and guiding the nation in desirable directions. *Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea* embody the collective will of Joseon-era communities to preserve and transmit the ethical values and social ideas they believed essential for a just and enduring society. ㉔

UNESCO Plaque commemorating the inscription of *Confucian Printing Woodblocks in Korea* on the Memory of the World Register





HERITAGE REDISCOVERED

Seonbi, the Moral Pillars of the Joseon Era

Text by Choi Young-sung, Professor, Korea National University of Cultural Heritage
Photography by World Heritage Integrated Management Center for Korean Seowon,
National Museum of Korea

Korean Confucianism is most eloquently characterized by the central position of *uiri* (義理), a form of moral theory combining the two philosophical concepts of “righteousness” (義) and “principles” (理). At the heart of Korean Confucianism lies the principle of righteousness. After adopting Neo-Confucianism as its governing philosophy, the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) made sustained efforts over its five centuries to cultivate Confucian intellectuals and deploy them as resources for governance. Rather than placing a complete focus on their studies, the Confucian elite pursued an ideal of harmonizing learning with political participation. When involvement in institutional politics was impossible, they turned to the countryside as a space for putting into practice what they had learned. Confucian scholars living in rural villages worked to guide communities in ethical thinking, unify divided opinions, and nurture civic virtue. The Chinese character for “Confucian scholars” (士) denotes their role in unifying diverse opinions by combining the character “十,” meaning “ten” with “一,” meaning “one.”



Seonbi in the Midst of Composing Poems
produced in the 1740s by the late-Joseon painter
Gang Hui-eon



Sehando (Winter Scene) created in 1844 by the renowned late-Joseon painter and calligrapher Kim Jeong-hui. The trees in the picture symbolize the steadfast moral conviction of *seonbi*.

Neo-Confucianism as the Governing Philosophy of the Joseon Dynasty

Neo-Confucianism provided the foundation for the statecraft in the Joseon era. The complex philosophy of Neo-Confucianism can be boiled down to the simple understanding that human nature is aligned with the moral order of the universe. This conception of inherent human moral inclinations begets such questions as what is wrong or right, what is evil or good, and what is unjust or just, all themes entailed within the compass of the righteousness principle. The righteousness principle is about mirroring the moral order of the universe within society.

Joseon-era Neo-Confucian philosophy succeeded in harmonizing the ideal of cultivating moral integrity with the historical and social demand to put moral virtues into practice. Confucian scholars were often prominent both in number and expression of commitment among those who voluntarily came forward in times of national crisis and sacrificed themselves to defend the pride and sovereignty of the nation. This is a manifestation of the Confucian principle of moral duty at the core of Joseon Neo-Confucianism. The primacy of “principle” over “material force” or “vital energy,” a theory known as *juriron* (主理論), was another feature of Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon era.



Seodang
(Schoolhouse),
a genre painting
by Kim Hong-do
from around 1780

Confucian Scholars and Their Ethos

The principle of righteousness defined the ethos of the Confucian scholars known as *seonbi* in Korean. As a social group, the *seonbi* were at the forefront of actualizing Confucian ideals. By studying Confucian classics at educational institutions such as *seowon* and *hyanggyo*, *seonbi* both advanced learning and cultivated their moral character.

As expressed in the old saying “A seonbi needs the ability to tell right from wrong while not seeking immediate benefits,” the seonbi of the Joseon era were expected to not pursue base desires or worldly gains. They regarded themselves as guardians of Confucian ideals such as “benevolence” (仁) and “righteousness” and held themselves ready to sacrifice themselves for the protection of these virtues emanating from human moral tendencies. The moral spirit of the seonbi was manifested in such sayings as “Killing their bodies for the achievement of benevolence” and “Giving up on life for the attainment of righteousness.”

The seonbi social group was the embodiment of the righteousness principle. They were expected not to take into consideration the probability of success or failure when shouldering moral responsibilities. They placed the motivation for a project and how it would be carried out before its likely results. They should act only according to their conscience and be willing to endure any hardship along the way. Seonbi were perceived as representatives of the ideal of fully realizing one’s moral potential and symbols of the ethical and intellectual ideals of the era. Seonbi were often compared to “original vital energy” (元氣) as the energetic source of all things. In many people’s eyes, seonbi were the primary force sustaining and advancing the Joseon Dynasty through its 500-year history.

Jeong Mong-ju as the Epitome of the Seonbi Ethos

One well-known paragon of the seonbi ethos is Jeong Mong-ju (1337–92; penname Poeun), a seonbi from the late Goryeo period (918–1392). He demonstrated all that was required of an ideal Confucian gentleman—a lofty character, profound learning, and extensive experience. He was an example of a fully realized person according to the moral, academic, and political standards of his day. Jeong Mong-ju lost his life while striving to sustain the rule of the Goryeo Dynasty in the face of the forces seeking to establish a new dynasty. His death epitomized the Confucian ideal of “sacrificing oneself for the achievement of benevolence” (殺身成仁). This is to say that his death was less about fidelity and more about morality. His life illustrates the weight Confucianism placed on loyalty and morality.

Along with two other late-Goryeo scholars (Yi Saek and Yi Sung-in), Jeong Mong-ju was exalted by Joseon-era seonbi as an example to follow. Reverence for Jeong Mong-ju persisted throughout the Joseon era as an epitome of the seonbi ethos as well as the progenitor of Korean Neo-Confucianism. The renowned Joseon Confucian scholar Song Si-yeol (1607–89)



Jeong Mong-ju was one of the most prominent scholar-officials of the final years of the Goryeo era



A portrait of Hwang Hyeon, a seonbi, poet, and historian active during Korea's final years under Joseon rule. This portrait was produced in 1911 by the painter Chae Yong-sin, and has been designated a Treasure.

accounts in his memorial, “The birth of Jeong Mong-ju was great fortune not only for Goryeo, but also for our [Joseon] royal court.” This demonstrates how significant an influence Jeong Mong-ju became on the spiritual and ideological realms of the Joseon period.

Hwang Hyeon and His Conscience

Another eloquent example of the seonbi ethos is Hwang Hyeon (1855–1910; penname Maecheon). Hwang spent the bulk of his life in what is now Gurye County in Jeollanam-do Province and never held an official position. He believed that giving up one’s life to accompany the fall of one’s country is required of seonbi—and put his beliefs into action. When Imperial Japan deprived Joseon of its sovereignty in 1905, Hwang Hyeon planned to go into exile in China but was unable to in the end. He killed himself upon the full annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. In his will, Hwang laments, “I have no duty to die. However, after 500 long years of cultivating seonbi on this land, it is deplorable that no one has come forward and sacrificed his life on this day of our national demise. I am willing to sleep forever not to betray both the heavenly order and my lifelong learning. It [dying] is only a liberation.” He also says in a poem composed before his death, “On an autumn day, I close the book and reflect on the past by the lamp / It is hard to live the life of an intellectual.” Hwang Hyeon was a seonbi and intellectual in the true sense of the word as he only acted following the dictates of his conscience.

In modern Korea, seonbi were often misunderstood as personifications of unrealistic stubbornness, irrational single-mindedness, and inhumane indifference. This is not what seonbi were at heart. They lived for justice, morality, and virtue. Maintaining a critical view of reality was one of the essential qualifications of becoming a seonbi: not blind obedience, but moral insight. They were morally driven actors who had the full capacity to sympathize with the hardships of the people. ☯



MASTERS OF KOREAN HERITAGE

Picturesque Scenes Stitched with a Needle

Choi You-hyun
Master of *Jasu*,
Korean Embroidery

Text by Lee Chi-heon, Transmission Support Department of the Korea Heritage Agency
Photography by Seo Heon-gang, heritage photographer; copyright held by the Korea Heritage Agency

Embroidered Motifs on Clothing and Everyday Objects

Jasu is the Korean name for the tradition of embroidering fabric with diverse designs using a colorful array of threads. It draws upon a rich repertoire of stitching techniques to express motifs from nature with a majestic aesthetic.

Jasu was mostly used to adorn clothes and decorative items in Korea. During the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668 CE), clothing made from flamboyant fabrics and lavishly embroidered with colorful designs was in fashion among both the ruling classes and commoners. The Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392) saw a boom in the production of religious



Sansindo
(Mountain Spirit)
Buddhist temples began to feature halls dedicated to the Mountain Spirit starting in the late Joseon period. Paintings of the Mountain Spirit were hung in these halls as an object of worship. This is a *jasu* work inspired by traditional *Sansindo* iconography.



embroidery with realistic designs influenced by Buddhism. The jasu tradition continued to flourish in the Joseon era (1392–1910) under the costume regulations implemented by the royal court for its officials. Joseon officials dressed according to their affiliation with the military or literary class and their position in the official hierarchy. Specific insignias in designated colors were embroidered on the back and front of each official outfit to indicate the wearer's order and rank.

The jasu heritage of Korea can generally be understood as consisting of secular and Buddhist traditions. The secular practices of jasu were long reserved for royal households and aristocrats. As it was gradually disseminated across society over time, the practice of decorating everyday items with embroidered designs developed as a craft by and for women. Buddhist jasu was conducted as a religious expression of pious belief and to build merit.



Jasu can also be categorized based on the status of its practitioners—whether royalty, upper-class women, or commoners—or on the function of the embroidered items—ceremonial, functional, or religious.

The traditional embroidery that survives today shows subdued colors and suggestive motifs. Traditional Korean embroidery is delicate, but not obsessed with detail. It does not hesitate to simplify the peripheral details of an object to produce an overview with gentle contours. This aesthetic runs through traditional Korean craft as a whole, and it provides one of the characteristics distinguishing jasu from the embroidery traditions in neighboring China and Japan.

Cheongnyongdo
(Blue Dragon)
This jasu work shows an image of the Blue Dragon, one of the four mythological guardians of the four cardinal directions in the East Asian tradition. The Blue Dragon is associated with driving off evil spirits.

Steps and Tools

The required materials and tools for the practice of jasu include fabric, thread, needles, and embroidery frames. First, fabric is tightly secured inside a frame and a sketch of the design is drawn on the surface. If it is to be padded embroidery (*gyeopsu*), the padding is inserted before stitching begins. When the embroidery is completed, the hoop is turned over and gently tapped with a stick to dislodge any dust. Adhesive is then lightly applied to the reverse side of the embroidery to prevent the threads from unravelling and the piece is dried in the shade. Once dried, the fabric is removed from the hoop.

Major stitching techniques in jasu include *jaritsu*, a method of densely weaving stitches to create an effect like the surface of a woven mat; alternating long and short stitches, which is known as *jaryeonsu*; *pyeongsu*, or filling the surface with vertical, horizontal, and diagonal stitches; *ieumsu*, a basic jasu technique of creating lines by connecting stitches; *jinggeomsu*, a method for placing long stitches at intervals over an embroidered surface to enhance its stability; *maedeupsu*, a knotting technique used to express details such as the stamens and pistils of flowers and pomegranate seeds; and *saseulsu*, a chain stitch resembling linked loops.

Choi You-hyun and Her Craft

State-recognized holder of jasu intangible heritage Choi You-hyun was born in 1936 in Boseong County, Jeollanam-do Province. The youngest of seven siblings, Choi had three older brothers and three older sisters. As a young child, she enjoyed doing anything that required manual dexterity. She picked up the practice of jasu at the age of 15 naturally from her mother since it was a common household activity at the time. Choi would do the jasu homework for her less skilled classmates in middle school. Her skill stood out clearly among her classmates, earning praise from friends and teachers alike. The more she was praised, the deeper Choi immersed herself into the craft of jasu.



Choi's life turned even further toward the art of jasu when she met Gwon Su-san, an authority on jasu and graduate of the Joseon Art School. Gwon had been based in Seoul, but escaped to Mokpo City in Jeollanam-do Province with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Once there, he established a home economics educational institute named Gajeong Yeosuk. Admitted to this institute at the age of 17, Choi You-hyun trained under Gwon's supervision for five years while both studying and serving as a lecturer. When her teacher Gwon opened the Home Economics Department at Pusan National University and became its dean, Choi followed him to Busan. However, she soon fell out with her teacher over the need to incorporate Western and Japanese influences. Drifting away from Gwon's more accommodating attitude, Choi left the close student-teacher relationship behind and found a new job as a jasu teacher at high schools in Busan.

Newfound Passion for Buddhist Embroidery

Choi You-hyun taught high school students for ten years while dedicating her weekends and vacation periods to the production of jasu artworks. She twice won a prize at national contests during this period. With a view to pursuing her lifelong passion, Choi quit her job as a high school teacher and opened an educational institute focused on jasu. As jasu was a popular activity in the 1960s, her institute was soon crowded with trainees. Choi's artisanry gained widespread publicity for her embroidery of calligraphic phrases penned by then-President

Ogyesuhojinjangdo
(Guardian Deities
of the Five
Precepts)
This jasu work
depicts guardian
deities symbolizing
the five Buddhist
precepts that all
novice monks must
follow.



Park Chung-hee. Jasu artworks by Choi were included in the gifts given to a visiting German president as well. Everyday objects such as pillows, cushions, and wall hangings dominated her creations through her 30s. In those years, she first developed an interest in using images from traditional Korean culture such as gene paintings and ceramic vessels as motifs for her jasu. Her items bearing images inspired by cultural heritage received an enthusiastic response in the market, so she pursued the direction even further.

While collecting Korean heritage items and related images, her interest in traditional culture expanded into Buddhist paintings. Starting in her 40s, Choi produced large-scale jasu works bearing Buddhist images such as Eight Scenes of the Buddha's Life, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, Mandala, Amitabha Buddha, Eight Guardian Generals, and Twelve Guardian Deities. Each of these grand jasu artworks would generally take two to three years to complete, but there were some to which Choi dedicated as many as eight years. Buddhist embroidery blends craft and religious devotion, requiring both technical mastery and sincere spiritual dedication. Her jasu work bearing the image of a mandala painting found at Yongmunsa Temple in Yecheon County won the top prize at the 13th Korea Traditional Craft Festival in 1988.

Choi You-hyun was eventually selected as the recognized holder of the state-designated traditional craft of jasu. She is currently dedicated to nurturing jasu practitioners at her workshop (named Jungsuwon) affiliated with the Traditional Clothing Research Center of Pusan National University. ☺



HERITAGE AND PEOPLE

Art and Concrete: The Fusion of Sensibility and Structure

Kim Chung-up,
A Master of Korean
Architectural Modernism

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Photography by Korea Heritage Service, Ambassade de France à Séoul,
Kimchungup Architecture Museum, Clipartkorea

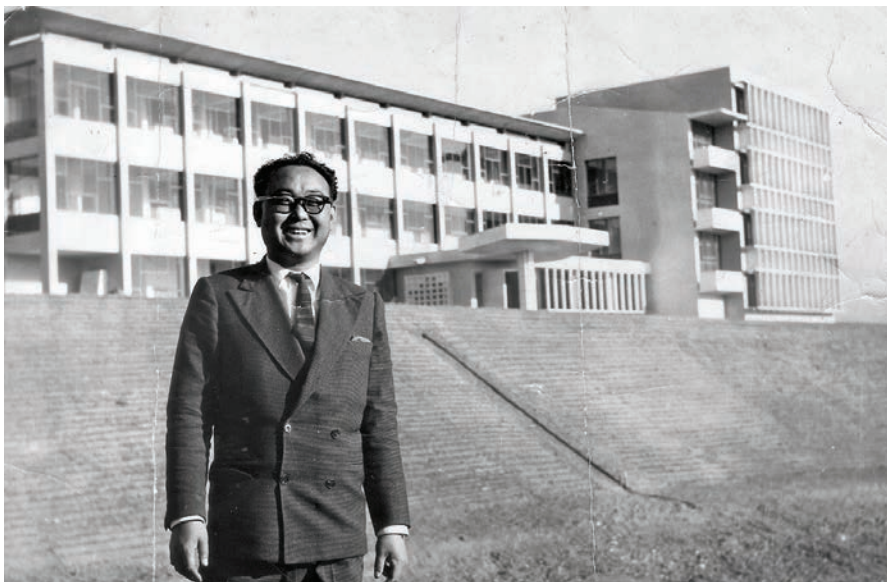


Seoul hits differently at night. For the first-time visitor, it can be a privilege to arrive after sunset and enter a city that has transformed into a kaleidoscope of sparkling light in every direction, fulfilling the archetype of the hypermodern Asian megacity. Yet by daylight, the same metropolis presents a vastly different vista as the neon gives way to concrete, looming grey and massive.

For the city, concrete is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing in that this supremely durable and versatile material allowed a city like Seoul to burst into its vibrant existence in the space of a couple of generations. No other building material could support such rapid growth and allow such a concentration of people and activity. But this versatility comes at an aesthetic cost: the curse of concrete's cold inhumanity, which seems to increase exponentially as structures get taller and more numerous.

Few would suggest that Seoul's older apartment complexes are easy on the eye, but architectural beauty was never their modus operandi. Instead, their aim was to house a rapidly rising urban population in modern, middle-class comfort. It would be hasty, however, to presume that concrete is forever cursed with ugliness. In the right hands, it can appear light, lithe and even delicate. Convincing support for this hypothesis can be found in the work of Korean architect Kim Chung-up.

Along with his contemporary Kim Swoo-geun, Kim Chung-up is considered a master of Korean architectural modernism. He was born in Pyongyang in 1922, the second of seven



The Main Building of Sogang University was designed in 1958 and completed in 1960. The building is praised for its architectural proportions and how it reflects the surrounding topography.

children. He began his study of architecture at Yokohama High School of Technology (now Yokohama National University) in Japan, and after graduating, he found his first employment at the Matsuda-Hirata architectural practice. He returned to Korea in 1945 and took up a teaching position at Seoul National University in 1947.

In 1952, Kim was chosen as Korea's representative at the UNESCO World Artists Conference, in Italy. Here he gave a lecture on Korean architecture that was to have a transformative effect on his career. In the audience was the renowned Swiss-French architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret – better known by his professional pseudonym Le Corbusier. Kim made quite an impression on the world-famous modernist, and he soon became his student. After a whirlwind architectural world tour, which took him across 17 countries over the course of three months, Kim threw himself into his work with Le Corbusier, often staying in the office to study his master's plans until the early hours of the morning.

Kim returned to Korea in 1956, and established his own architectural practice, as well as taking up a teaching position at Hongik University. One of his first major projects was the French Embassy building, for which he had received Le Corbusier's personal recommendation. His design showcased the two defining strands of his architectural DNA – a fusion between the hallmarks of traditional Korean architecture and the materials and formal vocabulary of European modernism. The embassy building was a light, modern structure raised on pilotis (the slim concrete supports favored by Le Corbusier) and crowned with a curving Korean roof. A survey conducted by the architecture magazine SPACE ranked the embassy number

The French Embassy was built in 1962. Traditional Korean aesthetics strike a perfect harmony in this building with materials and forms from European modernism. It is topped by a curving Korean roof made from concrete. The building has exerted a major influence on the development of modern Korean architecture.





two in a list of the best modern Korean buildings. Kim also received the Order of Merit from French President Charles de Gaulle in recognition of his work.

Kim maintained his teaching and designing activities throughout the next decade, culminating in the Samil Building in Jongno-gu, which is modelled after Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in New York, and until 1978 was Korea's tallest building. However, Kim's passion for architecture and his fearlessness in the face of injustice led him into a difficult situation. In 1970, the newly built Wow Apartment Complex in Mapo-gu, Seoul, collapsed, killing 33 residents. Kim did not hesitate to publicly criticize the rushed construction and the poor quality of the building materials, as well as the lack of proper government oversight of the project. His criticism brought him to the attention of the KCIA, at a time when Korea was becoming increasingly authoritarian. After an interrogation, Kim was forced to leave the country. He returned to France to work for Le Corbusier's firm, and did not return to Korea until 1978.

The front gate of the U.N. Memorial Cemetery in Korea and its Memorial Service Hall

The Samil Building was erected in 1970 in Jongno-gu, Seoul. The building has been designated as Seoul Future Heritage by the Seoul Metropolitan Government.



One of Kim's final projects was the World Peace Gate, built for the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Located in Olympic Park in Songpa-gu, this structure resembles a pair of concrete wings taking flight. The undersides of the wings are painted with a mural titled "A Painting of Four Spirits," depicting the four mythological figures that guard the gate. It is a fitting culmination to a career that sought to connect Korean tradition with modernist construction.

As well as these better-known projects, Kim worked on dozens more private houses, commercial buildings and municipal structures, in Seoul and beyond. But as the years pass, another of concrete's curses is taking effect – its limited lifespan. A number of Kim's earliest projects from the 1950s and 1960s have now been demolished and others will soon be reaching the end of their functional lifetime.

The World Peace Gate, built for the 1988 Seoul Olympics, is located in Olympic Park in Songpa-gu, Seoul.





Built in 1959, the old Main Building of Pusan National University epitomizes the architectural tendencies of Kim's early career.

Thankfully, the aforementioned Kim Chung-up Architectural Museum in Anyang is taking steps to preserve Kim's legacy. The former pharmaceutical company building designed by Kim in 1959 now houses a permanent exhibition detailing Kim's career and achievements, with explanations given in Korean and English. The museum also recently acquired the main structural elements of Kim's French embassy when it was demolished and rebuilt and have erected them in the grounds of the museum, along with an interactive display through which visitors can appreciate the building's original form.

The Kim Chung-up Museum is part of the Anyang Museum complex, which is located on the site of Anyangsa Temple, a temple dating to the Goryeo-era, and thus it is an apt setting for the ancient to meet the modern. Anyone who believes that concrete can only be cold, grey and ugly might find themselves blessed here with a new perspective. ☺



NATURAL BEAUTY OF KOREA

Seasonal Vistas: Summer in *Uponeup* Wetland

Text by Korea Heritage Service

Photography by Shutterstock, Clipartkorea

Uponeup Wetland, located in Changnyeong-gun, Gyeongsangnam-do, is Korea's largest inland wetland with a well-preserved natural environment. The area of Uponeup Wetland spans about 2.3km², with many smaller wetlands scattered throughout the region. In recognition of its values as a migratory bird habitat, the wetland has been inscribed on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in 1998.

The origins of Uponeup Wetland trace back to the geological formation of the Korean Peninsula. It has provided people with a means of livelihood, while retaining its well-preserved primitive ecosystem. In addition, the wetland plays an important role as a habitat for more than ten endangered species, a fact that draws global attention. The picturesque landscape surrounding the wetland area increases the invaluable aspect of the wetland as a vital repository of Korea's primitive ecosystems.

Recent archaeological discoveries such as an old wooden boat found in Shell Mound in Bibong-ri, Changnyeong, confirm that in the past, the inland area of Changnyeong was once affected by seawater intrusion via the Nakdonggang River. The small riverine marshes surrounding Uponeup were also created in this process. The shell mounds provide key to understanding the creation of Uponeup and its adjacent wetlands.

These archeological relics prove the previous interaction with sea water in this area, which is now regarded as a freshwater zone, and also provides a glimpse of lifestyles of the Neolithic era. It also reveals how the relationship between humans and this environment has evolved over time. ㉸







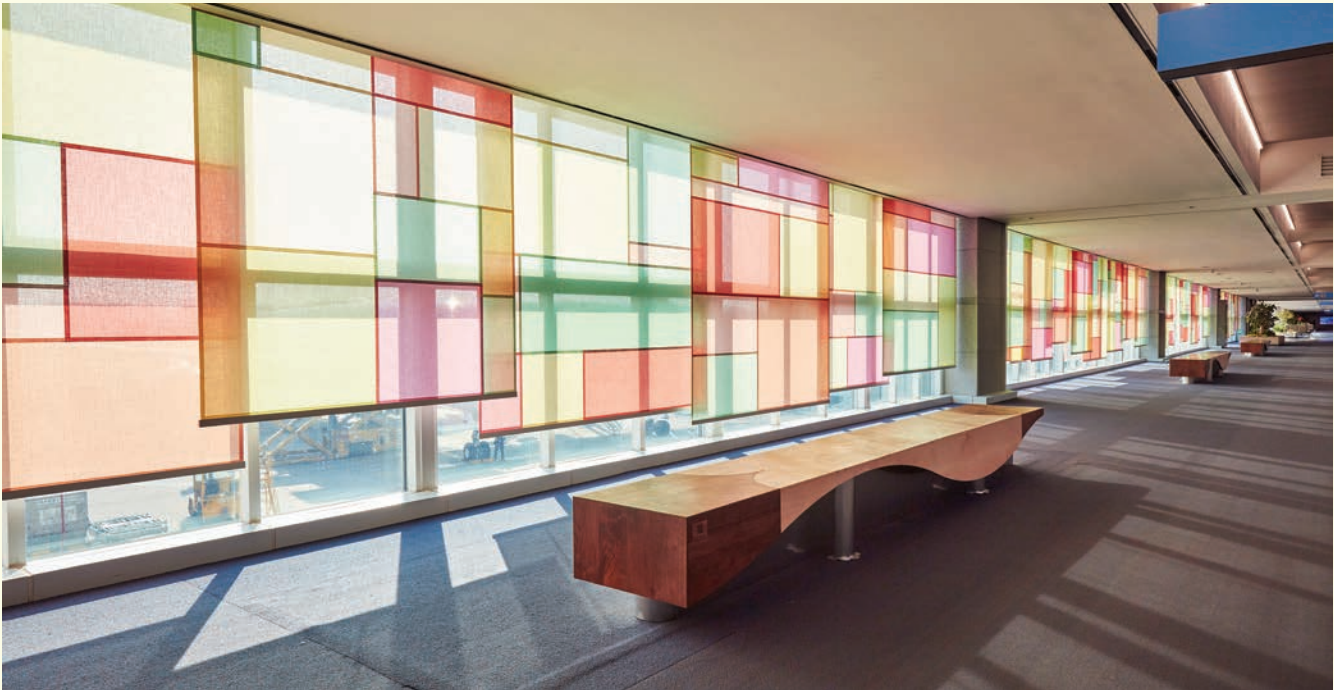








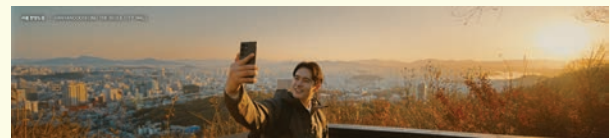




Traditional Culture Media Wall at Incheon Airport Reopens with Heritage-Inspired Media Art

The National Palace Museum of Korea and Korea Heritage Agency have completed the renovation of the Traditional Culture Media Wall in the arrivals hall of Incheon International Airport Terminal 1. Two new media artworks introduce Korea's heritage through immersive visuals—one highlighting Seoul's historic landscapes and the other reimagining royal relics such as seals and ritual vessels using dynamic 3D effects.

In addition to the updated content, the exhibition space has been enhanced with design elements inspired by traditional Korean aesthetics. Jogak-bo-style blinds filter natural light to create a warm, inviting atmosphere, while new benches modeled after a bronze dragon from Gyeongbokgung's Gyeonghoeru Pavilion offer travelers a place to pause and reflect. 🇰🇷



Two Korean Archives Added to UNESCO Memory of the World Register

On April 10, UNESCO officially inscribed the *Korea Reforestation Archives* and *the Revealing Truth: 4·3 Archives* on the Memory of the World (MoW) Register during the 221st session of its Executive Board. With these additions, the Republic of Korea now has 20 entries on the international register, further solidifying its role as a global leader in documentary heritage preservation.

The *Korea Reforestation Archives* document the country's post-war reforestation efforts, achieved through public-private cooperation. Recognized as a model for global sustainable development,



The 221st UNESCO Executive Board Session



Top
Reforestation efforts in
Yeongil Bay 1973-77
Bottom
Jeju 4·3 Report - published
edition

the archives offer valuable lessons in combating desertification and responding to climate change. Meanwhile, the *Jeju 4·3 Archives* consist of official documents and materials compiled in the course of investigations into the events that occurred on Jeju Island, documenting how the incident has been institutionally acknowledged and addressed over time.

The Korea Heritage Service prepared the nominations through expert consultations and a public call for submissions in early 2023. Following final submission to UNESCO in November 2023, the dual inscriptions mark a major milestone in the international recognition of Korea's documentary heritage. Together, these two archives embody both Korea's remarkable recovery after war and its effort to document and manage complex modern history through institutional processes. ㉸