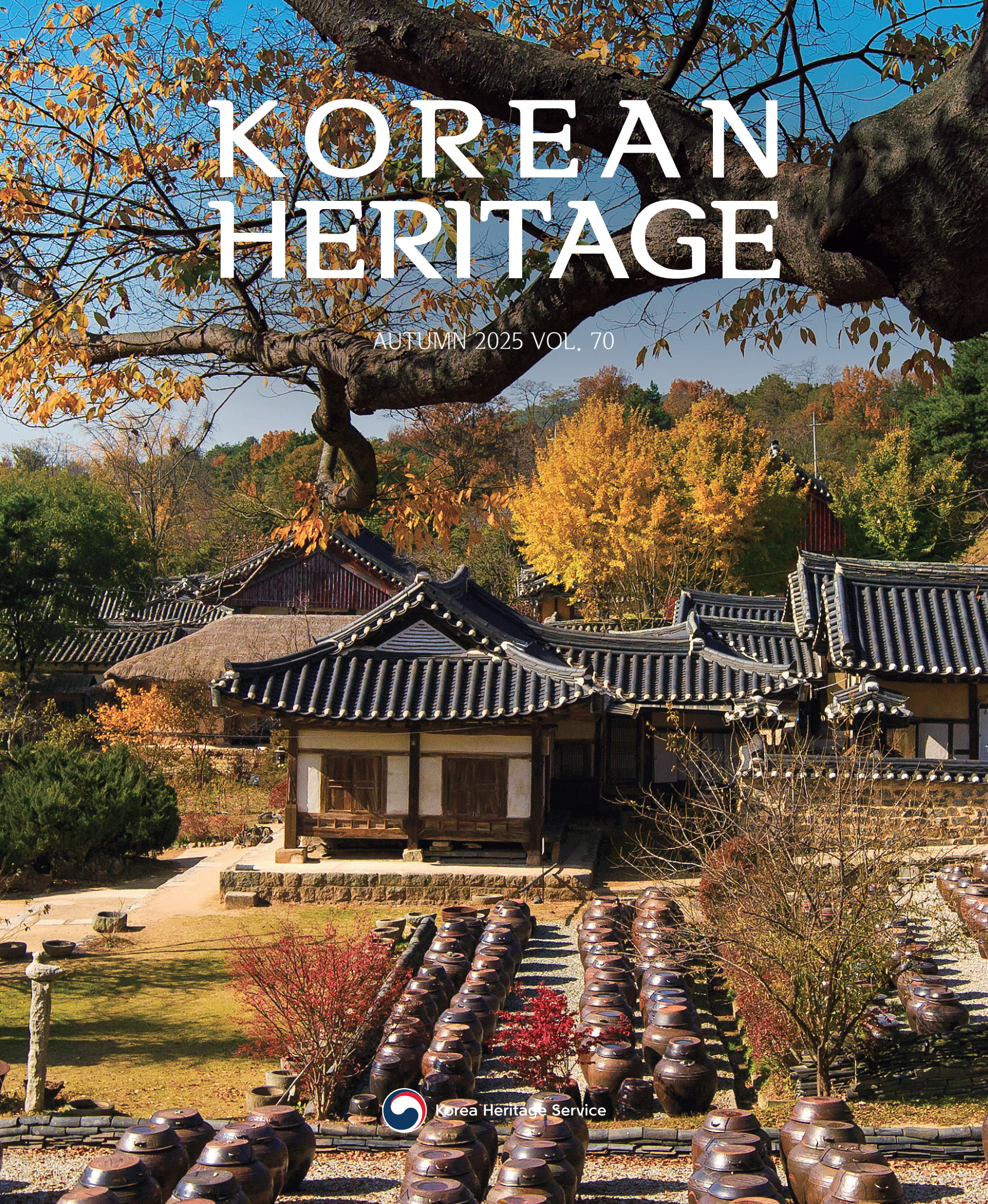

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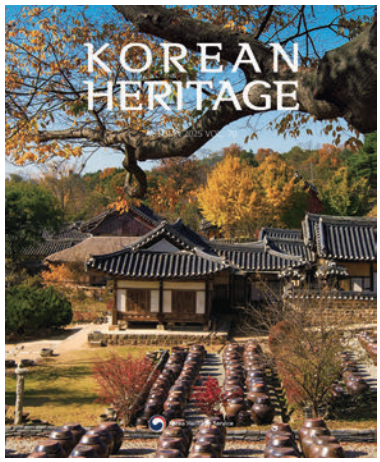
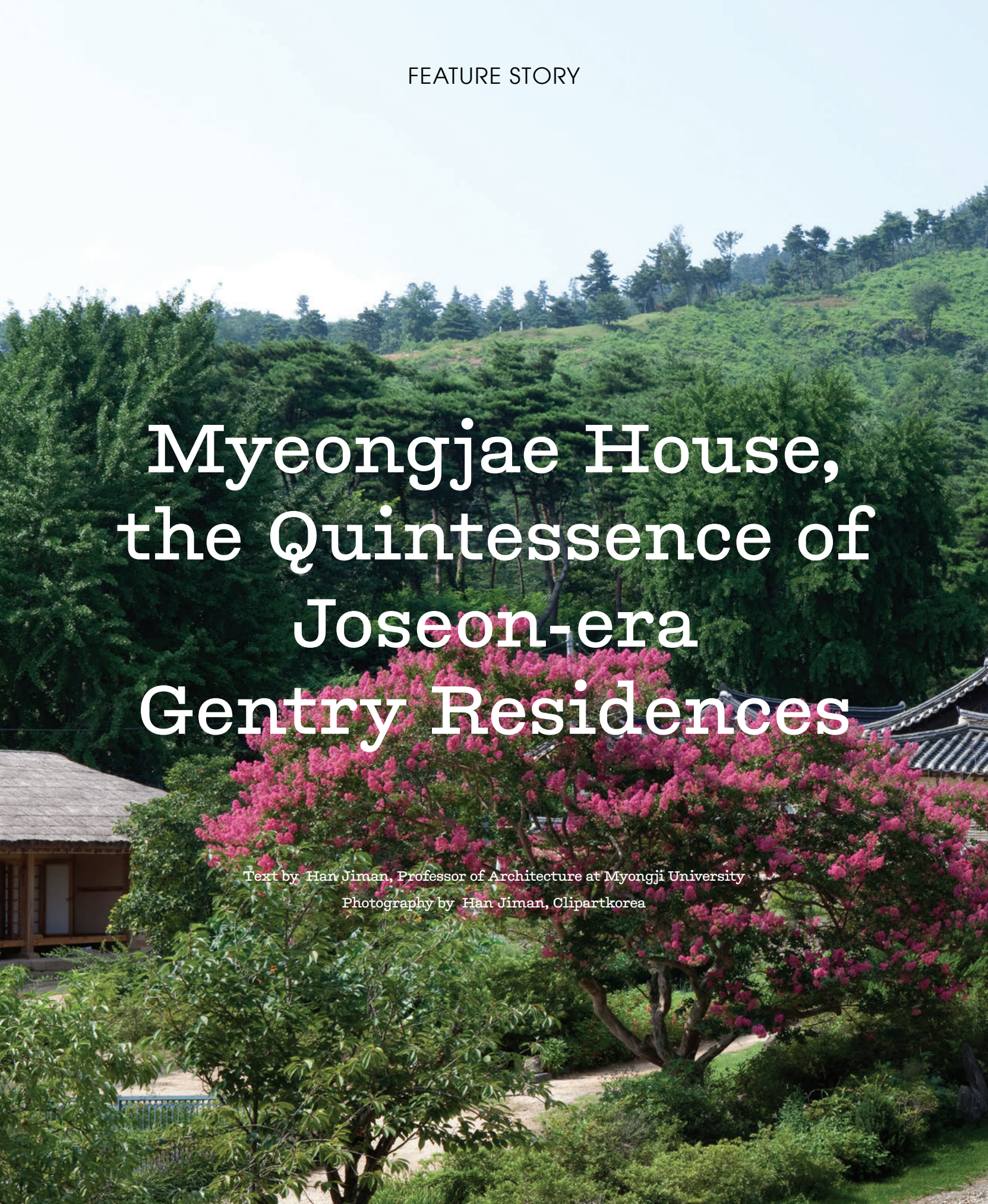


Myeongjae House represents aristocrats' homes from the second half of the Joseon Dynasty.



Myeongjae House, the Quintessence of Joseon-era Gentry Residences

Text by Han Jiman, Professor of Architecture at Myongji University
Photography by Han Jiman, Clipartkorea

Myeongjae House was entered onto the National Folklore Cultural Heritage list in 1984 as an example of aristocrats' houses from the second half of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). It is located in Noseong-myeon in Nonsan City, Chungcheongnam-do Province. Yun Jeung (1629–1714), a Neo-Confucian scholar active during the reign of King Sukjong (r. 1674–1720), had it constructed in the early 18th century and moved there from a nearby home. It takes its name from his sobriquet Myeongjae.

The neighborhood where Myeongjae House is situated was the longtime social and political base for Yun's Papyeong Yun clan, who had lived there for generations. Yun Jeung became known across the country as an academic and ideologist while still residing in the area. The 17th century, the era in which Yun earned fame as a Neo-Confucian scholar, was a period known for ritual study. Two foreign invasions over the span of a few decades—first the Japanese (1592–1598) and then the Manchus (1636–1637)—led the ruling elite of Joseon, known as *yangban*, to seek the restoration of stability and order in society through the application of stringent feudal protocols. They sought theoretical underpinnings for this pursuit through ritual study.

Yun Jeung provided the archetype for how an ideal ritual scholar should live. He not only possessed celebrated intellectual prowess, but abundant economic resources as well. However, he lived as a humble academic practicing careful frugality. Although he was called on by the king several times to serve in important government posts, Yun declined them all and never withdrew from his position of criticism of the injustices manifested in central politics. He remained rooted in his hometown all his life, dedicating himself to self-cultivation and nurturing the next generation of scholars.

Today's image of the homes of a Joseon-era aristocrat is based on the gentry houses that were widely built as ritual study was considered the pillar of social order in the 17th century. For

1
A portrait of Yun Jeung. A member of the Papyeong Yun clan, he was a prominent scholar in ritual studies.

2
Cover of *Yeongdanggijeok* (*Record of the Memorial House*), a compilation that includes pictures of Yun Jeung's memorial house where his portrait was enshrined, as well as details on how his portrait and its copies were produced.

the ritual scholars of the time, houses were more than just a place of residence. Their homes needed to provide a space for properly practicing the Confucian proprieties in their everyday lives, particularly the four most important rites of passage: *gwallye* (coming-of-age ceremony), *hollye* (wedding), *sangnye* (funeral rites), and *jerye* (ancestral rites). For a suitable house, men's and women's quarters needed to be kept separate and a shrine housing ancestral tablets needed to be prepared. The *sarangchae*, the quarters for the male head of the household, was an imposing structure occupying the front of the house, while the *anchae* (women's quarters) were seated behind the male head's quarters and as far as possible from the front. Despite the usual local variations, aristocrats' houses from the second half of the Joseon Dynasty were constructed based on these norms.

Myeongjae House is situated facing south where the southern skirts of Mt. Noseongsan begin to flatten out. Gentle hills hug the house on its either side, and the low-rising woods to the front prevent a full view of the house from the outside. There is a *hyanggyo* Confucian school to the west of the house. The rectangular pond with a circular island can be found to the west of the entryway belongs to the house.

The site of the house is composed of three escalating terraces cut into the slopes of the mountain. The lowest terrace accommodates the courtyard of the sarangchae, the middle terrace the sarangchae, and the highest terrace the anchae and its courtyard. If you enter the sarangchae's courtyard after walking along the eastern side of the pond, you gain a full view of the impressive stature of the sarangchae with Mt. Noseongsan as a backdrop. The anchae is hidden behind the servants' quarters to the west of the sarangchae. To the east of the anchae can be found an enclosed area housing the ancestral shrine. This layout reflects the Confucian ritual code that the ancestral shrine should be placed to the east of the main quarters in a literati house. The male head of the household is the primary performer of Confucian rites. He should be able to go from the sarangchae directly to the ancestral shrine without passing through the women's quarters. It is said that Yun Jeung would visit the shrine to pay his respects to his ancestors every morning and whenever he returned home after an outing.

The sarangchae on the middle terrace is a hipped-and-gabled roofed building with four *kan* (or bays) across the front. It is not a large structure, but seems grand and lacking of nothing. It is unostentatious but dignified. This must be the way Yun Jeung wished his sarangchae to appear. Upon a closer look at this relatively modest structure, you will be surprised by the ways in which the building enables diverse spatial experiences and offers good views of the scenic landscape. Among the four bays across the front, the two central bays form the primary room with *ondol* underfloor heating and a narrow wooden veranda to the front. The bay to its east is filled by a wooden-floored room. The bay to the west of the primary room has been

made into a pavilion structure with a raised floor. The frontage of the pavilion consists entirely of windows, offering a sense of diversity to the frontal view of the building. From the pavilion, you can appreciate the pond at the front of the house and the surrounding scenery. There is a secondary room to the rear of the pavilion. This two-bay-deep room is structurally connected to the servants' quarters. Between the primary room and secondary room is a small ondol room where servants could temporarily stay and wait for orders.

There are two wooden boards hanging at the pavilion. They are respectively inscribed with *Ieunsisa*, meaning "A House of Seclusion beyond the Secular World," and *Dowoninga*, "Peach Blossom Paradise." These phrases allude to the aspirations of Yun Jeung, who refused all opportunities to work in government and devoted himself to self-cultivation and study in the countryside.

Up a staircase to the west of the sarangchae, past a small courtyard, and along the two-bay passage is the servants' quarters. Anyone who took this route could be seen—and examined—by the male head of the household as he sat on the pavilion of the sarangchae. You must open the door on the west side of the passage to enter the anchae. Beyond the door is a wall blocking any direct view of the anchae, which was the primary space for family life. You can only arrive in the courtyard of the anchae by slightly moving your body diagonally to the east. This is an architectural technique often found in the passages in Joseon-era gentry houses.

The anchae has a south-facing U-shaped layout. With its courtyard in the center, the anchae has a spacious five-bay wooden porch across the front. The wooden floor and the courtyard create a sense of continuity, removing any potential feelings of stuffiness from the women's quarters tucked away in the innermost portion of the house. The wings on either side of the courtyard differ in scale. However, they agree in appearance and height on the side facing the courtyard, elevating the sense of order in the courtyard space. The roomy wooden porch was used as a living space for the family. It doubled as a ceremonial space for ancestral rites as well. As it was a common practice for Joseon aristocrats to observe rites for four generations of ancestors, it can be assumed that ancestral rites were held at least eight times a year in this space. The large wooden floor and the orderly courtyard allowed the many descendants to carry out ritual procedures for ancestral rites in the proper manner.

The west wing was the space overseen by the woman responsible for the household economy. The west wing has a main room and large kitchen, while the east wing is equipped with a smaller room and smaller kitchen. The west wing is wider than the east by half a bay. Beyond the back door of the large kitchen is a storage building. From there you can proceed toward the backyard, where a platform for earthenware jars containing sauces was installed.

Sarangchae and *Sadang* (shrine) in Myeongjae House

A good way to enjoy a tour of Myeongjae House is to appreciate its diverse courtyards. While the courtyard of the anchae was used for ancestral rites, the courtyard belonging to the sarangchae provided a place for congenial gatherings of clan members. There is a long and narrow courtyard behind the back of the east wing of the anchae. It was through this courtyard that ancestral tables were transferred to the wooden floor of the anchae from the ancestral shrine to its east. The passage for ancestral tables was made through a gate in the wall dividing this courtyard from the shrine. Looking southward from this gate, you can see a chimney made of stacked roof tiles and, at the end of the courtyard, a garden planted with eye-catching trees.

The backyard of the sarangchae is worth noting as well. This yard is functional: It connects the sarangchae to the anchae and the ancestral shrine. A spatial dynamic is created in this functional space through the secondary room of the sarangchae that protrudes into this yard. The side of the sarangchae's secondary room that faces this yard has a narrow wooden veranda facilitating entry. These outdoor spaces not only promote the observance of Confucian rites, but also allow residents to have dynamic spatial experiences in their everyday lives.

Transmitters of Traditional Royal Flavors

Text by Lee Soyoung, Korean Royal Cuisine Culture Foundation
Photography by Korean Royal Cuisine Culture Foundation, Clipartkorea

Records of Royal Cuisine

The royal cuisine of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) has been designated as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage for its informative representation of traditional Korean food. Royal food was prepared with the utmost care for a wide range of ceremonial events for the king and other members of the Joseon royal household. Information on the dishes served at birthdays, weddings, and death anniversaries of royal members can be found in various historical documents, including *Joseon wangsil uigwe* (Royal Protocols of the Joseon Dynasty), *Eumsik balgi* (Record of Food Offerings), *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty), *Seungjeongwon illgi* (Diaries of the Royal Secretariat).

These historical records offer details on the procedures of royal ceremonies, including how ceremonial foods were set on the table, what types of cooking utensils were used, what kinds of ingredients were applied, and the names of the various royal dishes. However, the surviving recipes for Joseon royal cuisine are not derived from these documents. Instead, they have been transmitted through a lineage of practitioners who learned them from Han Hui-sun (1889–1972), a court lady who served the final members of the Joseon royal household.

This image shows the appearance of a special afternoon confection set known as *juda byeolbangwa*. The king of Korea would receive a juda byeolbangwa instead of a normal confection table when greeting honored guests or on other special occasions.

Meals for the king of Korea consisted of 12 side dishes in addition to a bowl of rice and some other fundamental side dishes. He would only start eating after a eunuch or court lady had sampled the dishes and ensured there was no poison.

Royal Chefs

During the Joseon Dynasty, the food for the royal household was systematically prepared by trained professionals. The office responsible for the food served to the royal household was known as the Saongwon (the Office of Royal Cuisine). The *suksu* (skilled male cooks) affiliated with this office played a primary role in preparing royal food.

The suksu from the Office of Royal Cuisine divided their labor according to their respective specialties. They were composed of a lead cook (known as the *bangam*) and rank-and-file *saekjang* cooks specializing in different areas. *Byeolsaong* (there were cooks dedicated to cooking meat), *Sangbaesaek (*table setting), *Bangong* (steaming rice), *Jeoksaek* (grilling), *Pojang* (preparing tofu), *Byeonggong (*making rice cakes), and *Jusaek (*producing alcoholic drinks). However large the given task might be, the suksu of the Office of Royal Cuisine were able to function efficiently by focusing on their areas of expertise.

Suksu are depicted in *Seonmyojo jejae gyeongsuyeondo*, a painting produced in 1605 describing a royal banquet held to celebrate the longevity of the mothers of court ministers. In this Joseon-era painting, various suksu are depicted holding a knife, starting a fire, and setting

A recreation of royal meals for the king from the late 1800s, prepared according to Han Hui-sun's instructions

the table. The job of suksu was often passed down within families. When large-scale royal banquets were planned, the most talented among the group would be called in. Some of these suksu ended up earning great esteem from the Joseon kings.

Suksu had assistance from eunuchs and court ladies as they prepared meals for the king. The chief of the eunuchs at the palace, the Sangseon Naegwan, was responsible for the quality and safety of royal meals. The chief eunuch would inspect the ingredients and taste the dishes on the royal table to ensure that there was no poison. This safety-management process was known as *gimi*. The queen consort or crown prince sometimes participated in this process. Court ladies would also often take on this role toward the later period of the Joseon Dynasty.

Court ladies, or *gungnyeo*, held ranks ranging from junior rank 9 to senior rank 5. Court ladies holding senior rank 5 were known as *sanggung* and held considerable power. The living quarters for royal family members at the palace came with auxiliary spaces for preparing meals (*sojubang*) and making confectionaries (*saenggwabang*). The court ladies assigned to the living quarters worked in these kitchen areas. Sanggung attended to the king while he was eating by keeping a stew boiling and delivering dishes.

Transmission of the Royal Tradition

The bureaucratic reforms enacted in 1895 during the reign of King Gojong (r. 1863–1907) significantly reduced the size of Korea's government, and many of the suksu cooks were let go. However, there remained court ladies serving the royal household and carrying on the royal cuisine tradition. One of them was Sanggung Han Hui-sun. After the end of the dynasty, the royal household food customs gradually faded from the consciousness of Korean people. The processes of modernization and the concomitant social and political turbulence brought about further changes in Korean food. Eventually, the royal cuisine of the Joseon Dynasty attained the status of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1971. Sanggung Han Hui-sun was recognized as the designated holder of this tradition.

Han began her palace life at age 13 as a kitchen trainee at Deoksugung Palace. She spent long years in the royal kitchen serving meals for King Gojong, King Sunjong (r. 1907–1910), and Sunjong's queen consort as she rose through the hierarchy to become a sanggung. As the authorized heritage holder of Joseon royal cuisine, Sanggung Han Hui-sun transmitted the skill by personally demonstrating how to cook it. Han played a critical role in passing down this royal food tradition to the present.

Professor Hwang Hye-seong (1920–2006) was among those taught by Sanggung Han. Professor Hwang's apprenticeship with Sanggung Han commenced in 1942, around the time when Hwang started teaching home economics at Sukmyung Women's Vocational School. Hwang learned from Han for the following 30 years until her death in 1972. Afterwards, Professor Hwang became the second authorized holder of Joseon royal cuisine. Hwang is considered to have modernized traditional recipes and established the academic awareness of this Joseon-era tradition. Professor Hwang made significant contributions to repositioning the royal cuisine of the era not just as a skill, but as a pillar of the nation's intangible heritage.

Professor Hwang passed the baton to Han Bok-ryeo (1947–present) and Jeong Gil-ja (1948–present), the current authorized holders of Joseon's royal cuisine respectively specializing in royal food and royal confectionaries. Beyond their primary mandate of passing down this tradition to future generations, these two third-generation holders have dedicated themselves to disseminating the significance of royal cuisine across contemporary Korean society through education, research, and awareness-raising efforts. They are sparing no effort at nurturing

Left
Han Hui-sun was among the last generation of Korean court ladies serving royal meals. Designated as the holder of royal cuisine preparation in 1971, she played a critical role in transmitting the tradition to the present.

Right
Hwang Hye-seong, the second holder, Han Bok-ryeo, the third holder, of royal cuisine making, contributed to systematizing the tradition.

new royal cuisine professionals, with roughly 30 such experts having been taught by them as of 2025. Along with their two teachers, these royal cuisine professionals have dedicated themselves to giving lectures, publishing books, and holding cultural events with a view to spreading the royal food tradition further among the public.

The royal cuisine of the Joseon Dynasty represents the dignity and authority of the ruling household. Every step in the process of making royal food had to be done in accordance with stringent protocols. Royal food was prepared with a systematic division of labor and an uncompromising spirit of professionalism.

The royal food of the Joseon era is not just fossilized in history. Today, it comes alive through diverse research and educational and experience programs, integrating itself into Korea's wider food culture. Joseon's royal food tradition puts the change of the seasons, the rules of nature, and the hearts of its makers on the table. These virtues strongly appeal to contemporary people who seek to enjoy the art of food as a full-body sensory experience. The food of the royal households of the past has made its way into people's everyday lives as a carrier of traditional virtues and a new medium to experience in the present.

Royal cuisine transmitters in training

Heritage and Community Harmonious in Ancient Cities

Text by Choi Jangmi, Senior Research Officer, Korea Heritage Service

Photography by Baekje World Heritage Center, Korea Heritage Service

Wanggung-ri Archaeological Site in Iksan
This site once housed a Baekje royal palace built during the reign of King Muwang (r. 600–641). It was later the site of a Buddhist temple, evidence of which can still be found in the form of a five-story stone pagoda.

Cities that once housed the seats of government of the ancient states that thrived on the Korean Peninsula remain today as an important source of information for exploring how people lived in the past. On the one hand, these cultural and political centers of ancient Korean states have long been exposed to the risk of their precious heritage being damaged in the pursuit of development. On the other hand, the residents of these former capital cities of ancient Korean states have been required to live with legal constraints imposed on behalf of the protection of cultural heritage—for example, in the form of restrictions on property rights.

Coexistence of Heritage and Community

To address this challenge, a law on ancient cities was enacted on March 5, 2004 (it entered force on March 6, 2005). The Special Act on the Preservation and Promotion of Ancient Cities (previously the Special Act on the Preservation of Ancient Cities) aims to harmonize heritage protection with community life. It is intended to protect and promote the "historical and cultural environment" of each ancient city as a collectivity of all the forms of its heritage—

natural and cultural, tangible and intangible—with a view to preserving the historic identity of the city and improving quality of life for residents. The five cities of Gyeongju, Buyeo, Gongju, Iksan, and Goryeong have been designated as Ancient Cities under this law.

While the protection of ancient cities once revolved around individual buildings and sites under the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (the framework act on heritage that preceded the enforcement of the Framework Act on National Heritage in 2024), the new law on ancient cities conceptualizes them as continuous areas area incorporating all the important natural and cultural vestiges of the past. In addition, the ancient cities law marked a heritage policy shift away from the primacy of regulations and toward an era of the harmonization of preservation and promotion. In this way, the ancient cities law has laid a foundation for changing the social perception of heritage from being an obstacle to everyday activities and property rights to becoming an important resource to instill vitality into locals' living spaces and enhance an area's historical and cultural charm.

Enforced on May 17, 2024, the Framework Act on National Heritage emphasizes the sustainable integrated management of ancient cities. Under this new framework act, ancient cities are expected to play a greater role in improving the future, enhancing public opportunities to appreciate heritage, and utilizing the legacy of the past for local development. In addition, ancient cities are more strongly connected with the Historical and Cultural Zones designated for regions influenced by ancient Korean states under a separate law. In the Framework Act on National Heritage, research and restoration activities are to be linked for ancient cities and the Historical and Cultural Zones. All of these changes brought about by the Framework Act on National Heritage are evaluated as highlighting, once again, that ancient cities are not a simple collection of heritage sites, buildings, and artifacts, but a continuous cultural space where the historical and cultural environment of an area is organically interconnected with the lives of its residents.

Projects in Ancient Cities

Activities have been conducted in the ancient cities according to the Special Act on the Preservation and Promotion of Ancient Cities under two categories for projects—Restoring the Appearance of Ancient Cities and Supporting Community Initiatives. The Restoring the Appearance of Ancient Cities activities, commencing in 2015, are committed to restoring the historical and cultural environment of the cities and reclaiming their historical identity. This program encompasses diverse projects such as building or repairing *hanok* (traditional

Left
Residents tidying up their neighborhood in Gyeongju

Right
An educational program for residents of Buyeo

Korean houses), refurbishing streetscapes, sprucing up the exteriors of buildings, improving the design of shop signs, burying power lines, and restoring historic landscapes. These projects are all intended to achieve the goal of making full use of heritage as a resource for revitalizing cities and enhancing the well-being of their citizens.

The Supporting Community Initiatives program was launched in 2019 to increase the involvement of residents and other stakeholders in the preservation and promotion of ancient cities. Communities have participated in educational sessions (on the history of the city, legal systems for its protection, and its utilization as a tourism resource), cultural experience programs, and environmental cleanups, improving their heritage conservation capacity and enhancing their sense of ownership.

Rebirth as a Tourist Attraction

The Restoring the Appearance of Ancient Cities program is credited with the recent meteoric rise in popularity of neighborhoods as tourist attractions in the ancient cities. They include the Hwangnam neighborhood in Gyeongju, the Ssangbuk-ri hanok village in Buyeo, the Jemincheon River area in Gongju, and the Geumma village in Iksan. The program has been acclaimed for suggesting a new model for local tourism and urban regeneration through its focus on harmoniously combining hanok houses with modern aesthetics. The Hwangnam neighborhood in Gyeongju stands out as a particularly successful case. This area in the capital of the ancient Korean state of Silla has seen a growing number of conversions to hanok houses

over the last decade with its run-down streetscapes getting face-lifts. Cafes, restaurants, and art workshops have sprung up along its main street, inviting comparisons to Gyeongnidan-gil, a nondescript street in the Itaewon neighborhood of Seoul that rose to prominence as a tourist attraction in the 2000s with restaurants and other commercial outlets growing on either side of the street. It set a trend of suffixing the names of bustling touristic streets with "ridan-gil." With the Hwangnam neighborhood now enjoying widespread fame as a tourist attraction, its main boulevard has become known as Hwangnidan-gil. The other successful areas in Gongju, Buyeo, and Iksan—all of which served as the seat of government for the ancient Korean state of Baekje at different points in time—are also well received by visitors as historic spaces offering both abundant culture and visitor convenience.

The changes to signboards, buildings, and streets brought about by the Restoring the Appearance of Ancient Cities program have altered communities' living spaces, which have further shifted the urban landscape of the city. The projects carried out under the program have created a more pleasant environment for visitors while facilitating the formation of commercial districts. It has established urban spaces that perfectly balance heritage and communities, places where the protection of architectural legacy enhances rather than undermines the quality of life of residents.

Hwangnidan-gil in Gyeongju
This street lined with hanok houses in the Hwangnam neighborhood of Gyeongju inspires nostalgia in visitors.

Jisan-dong
Tumuli

A New 'Ancient City'

Goryeong was added to the list of registered ancient cities on February 18, 2025. This was the first addition in 20 years since the initial selection of four cities (Gyeongju, Gongju, Buyeo, and Iksan) with the enactment of the Special Act on the Preservation and Promotion of Ancient Cities. Goryeong was the cultural and political center of Daegaya, one of the polities comprising the ancient Korean political entity known as the Gaya Confederacy. Goryeong retains a wealth of the tangible and intangible heritage of Daegaya, ranging from the Jisan-dong Tombs (a component of the World Heritage property "Gaya Tumuli") to the site of Daegaya's palace, its defensive fortress known as Jusanseong Mountain Fortress, the ruins of water transport infrastructure and kilns, including the oral tradition of Daegaya's foundation myth. Granting Goryeong "ancient city" status was based on the recognition of the historic, academic, and artistic significance of this tangible and intangible heritage.

The archaeological remains in Goryeong reflect how Daegaya, which was among the most powerful members of the Gaya Confederacy, developed a sophisticated culture while culturally and technologically influencing neighboring Silla and Baekje and the Japanese Archipelago. The cultural and historic environment of Goryeong has been well maintained, enabling contemporary people to understand what life would have been like in Daegaya. With Goryeong registered as an ancient city, great strides are expected to be made in restoring the historical identity of the city and instilling vitality into the lives of its current residents.

Ancient cities serve as vessels of the past and, at the same time, provide keys to a new future. Going forward, the Korea Heritage Service will redouble its efforts at applying an integrated approach to the preservation of the cultural and historic environments of ancient cities. By doing so, it will strengthen their historical identities and enhance the convenience of living there so that ancient cities can continue to serve as important resources for future generations.

Maedeup: the Craft of Knotting Silk Threads

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

Plaited Cords Interlaced and Tightened into *Maedeup*

Maedeup refers to the traditional Korean craft of making knots and tassels. It is a dexterous process requiring multiple steps, including dyeing silk thread, twisting strands of thread together, and plaiting them into a cord, or *kkeunmok*. A kkeunmok (also known as a *dahoe*), which can be rounded or flat in cross-section, is folded in half to establish a center. The ends of the plaited cord are intertwined and tightened to create a knot with a desired shape. Strands of thread or plaited cords are used to craft tassels in various forms. These maedeup artworks were widely used across different areas of traditional Korean life. They spruced up traditional clothing when attached to *norigae* (decorative pendants hanging from a woman's jacket or skirt), pouches, and belts. Maedeup knots and tassels were also added to bamboo screens, hanging letter holders, brush racks, and other everyday objects, as well as to ritual objects such as wedding palanquins, biers, flags, and musical instruments. Maedeup artworks served functional and ceremonial purposes in traditional Korean society, and their appeal was both material and spiritual.

Norigae pendants with octopus-shaped tassels

Left
Norigae pendants decorated with bat-design embroidery

Right
Norigae pendants with a coral decoration

The origins of knotting can be traced to the Neolithic Period, as evidenced by excavated items such as net weights and pottery decorated with woven patterns. Related tools from the Neolithic Period—clay spinning wheels and bone needles—have also been found. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), the royal court employed artisans dedicated to the craft of maedeup. While maedeup remained a luxury reserved for noblewomen during the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392), these decorative knots and tassels eventually found wider uses in everyday life and for ceremonial purposes.

Component Techniques for *Maedeup*

This art of interlacing lines of silk thread and making knots and tassels requires a range of techniques to complete. Maedeup starts by preparing silk threads. Skeins of silk thread are boiled in soapy water and thoroughly rinsed to remove the glue-like protein known as sericin. They are then dried in the shade. After going through this process (known as *jeongnyeon* and *suk* in Korean), the silk threads are dyed. Natural dyes include the flowers, leaves, and roots of various plants such as safflower, gromwell, indigo, madder, gardenia, kudzu, goosefoot, sappan wood, jujube, yew, pagoda tree, and marigold, as well as red beans and pear tree bark. The dyed skeins of thread are coiled on a reel known as *jaae*. After this, strands of thread are placed in parallel and twisted together into a thicker thread. These twisted threads are plaited into a cord, or kkeunmok. Depending on the intended purpose, four, eight, or twelve strands are used to create a kkeunmok. The artisan is then ready to make a knot. First, a kkeunmok of suitable length is selected. It is folded in half to provide a center point, and two strands of the cord are interlaced according to the design and tightened in an orderly fashion. The tightening should be done properly, as it is not just another step in the process, but the most important factor for determining the aesthetic quality of the finished work. As the final step of making a knot, the small loops created by interlocking the two strands of the cord are neatly arranged to achieve the balance of the design.

Maedeup makers create tassels as well, which can be crafted using either strands of thread or plaited cords. Tassels come in diverse shapes, each requiring different sets of knotting techniques. *Bongsul*, or "bar tassels," have a bar-shaped head that can be inscribed with a Chinese character meaning "happiness," "longevity," or "king." Bongsul were used to decorate norigae pendants, handheld fans, pouches, earrings, and interior objects. Tassels with a strawberry-shaped head are known as *ttalgisul*, which usually went with *sejodae* silk cord belts, norigae pendants, and handheld fans. *Bangmangisul* (mallet tassels) are made by preparing a globular wood or paper frame, covering it with a net woven from silk threads, and combining it with tassel strands. Bangmangisul usually formed the end of a large decorative knot for musical instruments, palanquins, and flags. *Bangulsul*, or "bell tassels," are made from 12 strands of plaited cords. A lotus-bud-shaped head is knotted, and the strands left below it are tied at the end with gold thread or threads of matching colors. Bangulsul were used to embellish glasses cases, handheld fans, and lightweight norigae for children. Another type of tassels made from plaited cord is *nakjibalsul*, "octopus tassels," named after the shape of tassel strands. Octopus-shaped tassels were also used to embellish norigae pendants.

A bamboo screen decorated with maedeup embellishments

Jeong Bong-seop was recognized as the authorized holder of maedeup making in 2006.

Jeong Bong-seop, the Living History of *Maedeup*

For Jeong Bong-seop, maedeup is a family tradition. She learned the craft from her father Jeong Yeon-su and mother Choi Eun-sun, both state-recognized holders of maedeup making. Her daughter Park Seon-gyeong is practicing the art as well. The craft of maedeup making was predominantly a male occupation in the past when women were considered too weak to produce large knots requiring arm strength, such as those for palanquins, biers, and flags. After marrying the professional maedeup maker Jeong Yeon-su, Jeong's mother, Choi Eun-sun, started making small decorative knots and tassels, such as those for norigae pendants, pouches, and belts. Choi took note of her daughter's innate talent early on and trained her stringently. Jeong Bong-seop not only inherited her parents' skillful dexterity, but also the immense perseverance required to accomplish the job. She trained by working with thin strings of silk thread more than 10 hours each day. Maedeup was not an easy route to take in life. For Jeong, armed with immense talent and rigorous training, it only made sense to follow in the footsteps of her parents and become a maedeup maker.

Crafting maedeup is a time-consuming and labor-intensive process. It takes more than 10 days of twisting, interlacing, and tightening to create a single norigae pendant. Maedeup knots and tassels are the results of enormous patience, perseverance, and labor. This also applies to Jeong Bong-seop, who has dedicated her life to the craft and earned a reputation for her superb dexterity and extraordinary skills. Maedeup making still means hours of nonstop handwork for her as well. Although the craft of maedeup making has cost Jeong physically—her fingers and back have required medical treatment—she still loves what she does.

Jeong is renowned not only for her skills, but also for the wide range of maedeup artworks she has created, from small decorative works such as norigae pendants to ceremonial knots and tassels. She is also celebrated for recovering traditional techniques for producing bongsul tassels. After becoming the state-recognized holder of maedeup making in 2006, Jeong became the honorary holder in January 2025.

K-Pop as Living Heritage: A Cultural Bridge Connecting Korea's Past and Future

Text by Yamamoto, Joho, Lecturer at Ritsumeikan University, JAPAN

Photography by Clipartkorea

Samul nori is a version of farmers' music (known as *nongak*) designed especially for the stage. It is performed with four traditional percussion musical instruments—the *kkwaenggwari* (small gong), *janggu* (double-headed hourglass drum), *buk* (barrel drum), and *jing* (large gong). The ecstatic music of samul nori has gained great popularity across the globe.

K-Pop has become a defining cultural force of the 21st century. Known for its electrifying performances, high-gloss visuals, and dedicated global fanbase, K-Pop is often perceived as a symbol of Korea's cutting-edge pop culture. But beyond the dazzling choreography and polished music videos lies something more enduring: a creative dialogue with Korea's deep cultural past. K-Pop is not merely a modern cultural phenomenon but functions as a living cultural heritage, serving as a bridge connecting Korea's past and future.

From stage design to soundscapes, elements of traditional Korean culture appear throughout K-Pop. Hanbok-inspired costumes, motifs from Korean palatial architecture, and references to folk art are incorporated into performances in both subtle and overt ways. BLACKPINK's *How You Like That*, for example, transforms the hanbok's silhouette into a bold, futuristic fashion statement, while retaining traditional color schemes associated with *obangsaek* (Korea's five cardinal colors).

Even in movement and choreography, echoes of traditional Korean dance forms can be found. Court dances such as *chunaengjeon* emphasized poise, breath, and the controlled articulation of limbs—qualities that still influence K-Pop's elegant hand gestures, floor patterns, and attention to bodily line. Though abstracted and modernized, these gestures reflect a continuity in bodily aesthetics that extends far beyond contemporary entertainment.

Musically, K-Pop draws from Korea's heritage as well. In tracks like BTS's *IDOL*, we hear rhythmic elements reminiscent of traditional *samulnori*, fused with global trap beats and electronic textures. Melodic lines occasionally mirror the traditional scales found in Korean folk songs, and vocal phrasing sometimes takes on the elongated contours of *pansori*, Korea's narrative musical tradition. This integration of traditional sonic elements is not incidental—it is part of a conscious aesthetic that reclaims Korean identity within a global pop framework.

Importantly, these traditional elements are not mere ornamentation. They are integral to K-Pop's multi-layered cultural language. They help assert national identity, invite curiosity, and offer international audiences a sensorial experience of Korea's living history. In this way, K-Pop serves not only as a musical product but also as a cultural ambassador, playing a central role in the country's soft power strategy.

Recognizing this potential, government-affiliated institutions such as Korean Cultural Centers and Sejong Institutes have increasingly used K-Pop as a gateway to promote Korea's broader cultural heritage. In cities around the world, dance workshops and K-Pop-themed events are now accompanied by exhibitions on traditional music, calligraphy, tea ceremonies, or crafts such as making of *hanji* (traditional paper) and *bojagi* (wrapping cloth). This multifaceted engagement allows fans to move fluidly between the contemporary and the historical—encountering Korea not only as a pop sensation but as a complex cultural civilization.

A K-Pop boy band on stage (image created by AI)

International fans are not passive consumers. Many actively participate in recontextualizing Korean culture in their own environments. Some learn Korean and take language exams. Others wear hanbok at fan events or post video essays analyzing traditional symbols in music videos. Fan-driven translation collectives subtitle not only songs but also documentaries about Korean history and heritage. These practices demonstrate how K-Pop fandom can evolve into a form of grassroots cultural ambassadorship, creating transnational networks of appreciation, inquiry, and interpretation.

As a Japanese scholar of Korean popular culture, I find it especially striking that K-Pop takes a radically different approach from J-pop, Japan's mainstream music industry. While J-pop tends to focus inward—emphasizing emotional resonance, idol intimacy, or fashion innovation—K-Pop has outward-looking ambitions. It incorporates traditional cultural motifs into high-production performances aimed at a global audience. This difference reflects broader national strategies: whereas Japan has often emphasized its "Cool Japan" branding through anime and subculture, Korea has positioned K-Pop as part of an integrated cultural portfolio that includes food, language, and heritage.

This deliberate cultural positioning is what makes K-Pop such an effective bridge. It demonstrates how pop culture can be both deeply local and profoundly global. Moreover, K-Pop allows Korean traditions to be shared globally as a living experience beyond museums or historical sites.

The inside of the passage in Gwanghwamun Gate

People visiting a Joseon royal palace wearing traditional Korean clothing known as *hanbok*

In this sense, K-Pop expands our understanding of what heritage can be. While heritage is often associated with the enduring beauty of ancient temples, folk crafts, or ceremonial rituals, K-Pop shows that it can also be dynamic, mobile, and collaborative. It lives in choreography, in rhythm, in costume and color, in the way fans interact with culture and with each other. This can be seen as a way in which K-Pop transmits K-heritage. This is heritage not as preservation, but as creation—a process of continuously reinventing meaning across time and space.

Moreover, by showcasing tradition through modern forms, K-Pop invites new conversations. It encourages younger generations—both in Korea and abroad—to rethink the value of cultural memory. Through this engagement, tradition becomes less a burden and more a resource: a wellspring of aesthetic inspiration, historical awareness, and global connection.

In this evolving landscape, K-Pop functions as both mirror and portal. It reflects the layered identities of contemporary Korea, shaped by history but oriented toward the future. At the same time, it opens doors—inviting audiences to step into a cultural narrative that is at once uniquely Korean and shared across borders.

K-Pop is not merely a soundtrack to youth culture. It is a living archive, a performance of continuity, and a choreography of heritage. And in this, it teaches us a vital lesson: that what we inherit is not only what we remember, but what we choose to bring forward—together, and in motion.

NATURAL BEAUTY OF KOREA

Seasonal Vistas:

Autumn in *Sansa*, Buddhist Mountain Monasteries in Korea

Text by Korea Heritage Service

Photography by Photographer Lee Dong-jun, Clipartkorea

Tongdosa Temple

Sansa consists of seven Buddhist mountain monasteries—Tongdosa, Buseoksa, Bongjeongsa, Beopjusa, Magoksa, Seonamsa and Deaheungsa Temples—located throughout the southern provinces of the Korean Peninsula. The seven monasteries established from the 7th to the 9th centuries have functioned as centres of religious belief, spiritual practice, and daily living of monastic communities, reflecting the historical development of Korean Buddhism. Sansa has accommodated diverse Buddhist schools and popular beliefs within its precincts, and many of its notable historic structures, halls, objects and documents reflect such assimilating features of Korean Buddhism.

The distinctive intangible and historical aspects of Korean Buddhism can be recognized in the continuous traditions of self-sufficient temple management, education of monks, and coexistence of meditative practice and doctrinal studies of Korean Seon Buddhism.

These mountain monasteries are sacred places, which have survived to the present as living centres of faith and religious practices despite suppression during the Joseon Dynasty and damages caused by wars and conflicts over the years.

Magoksa Temple

Seonamsa Temple

Beopjusa Temple

Buseoksa Temple

Daeheungsa Temple

Bongjeongsa Temple

Beopjusa Temple

Seonamsa Temple

Tongdosa Temple

The Return of Goryeo and Joseon Buddhist Masterpieces

Recently, two remarkable relics of Korean Buddhist artistry made their homecoming from Japan unveiled in a prestigious ceremony at the National Palace Museum of Korea on July 8. In a collaborative effort, the Korea Heritage Service (KHS) and the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation (OKCHF) presented the *Transcription of the Zhou Version of the Avatamsaka Sutra (The Flower Garland Sutra), Vol. 22 in Gold on Indigo Paper*, alongside a rare, complete set of early-Joseon Ten *Underworld Kings* paintings.

The exquisite sutra manuscript, created in 1334 during the Goryeo Dynasty, dazzles with its golden inscriptions on deep-blue paper, accompanied by intricately detailed illustrations of the Vairocana Buddha imparting wisdom to celestial beings. The dedicatory prayer mirrors that of another volume designated as a Treasure, suggesting that these two volumes once belonged the same set.

The Transcription of the Zhou Version of the Avatamsaka Sutra (The Flower Garland Sutra), Vol. 22 in Gold on Indigo Paper

Ten Underworld Kings paintings.

The *Ten Underworld Kings set*, retrieved at auction in 2023, stands as one of only two complete surviving examples from the early Joseon period—and remarkably, the first to be preserved in Korea. Each scroll vividly depicts a king of the underworld presiding over judgment scenes, capturing details such as King Yeomna's *myeollyugwan* (coronet), adorned with the stars of the Big Dipper, and King Byeonseong's moving portrayal of sinners reborn as radiant lotus blossoms—a rare and hopeful interpretation in Buddhist iconography.

Though centuries have passed, both masterworks retain a exceptional condition, showcasing the artistry of Goryeo calligraphy and the delicate finesse of early Joseon painting. They offer fresh avenues for research and exhibition, illuminating the past in profound ways. The return of these works embodies the steadfast dedication of KHS and OKCHF to reclaim and reconnect Koreas dispersed heritage, ensuring that these luminous fragments of history can once again be cherished at home.

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