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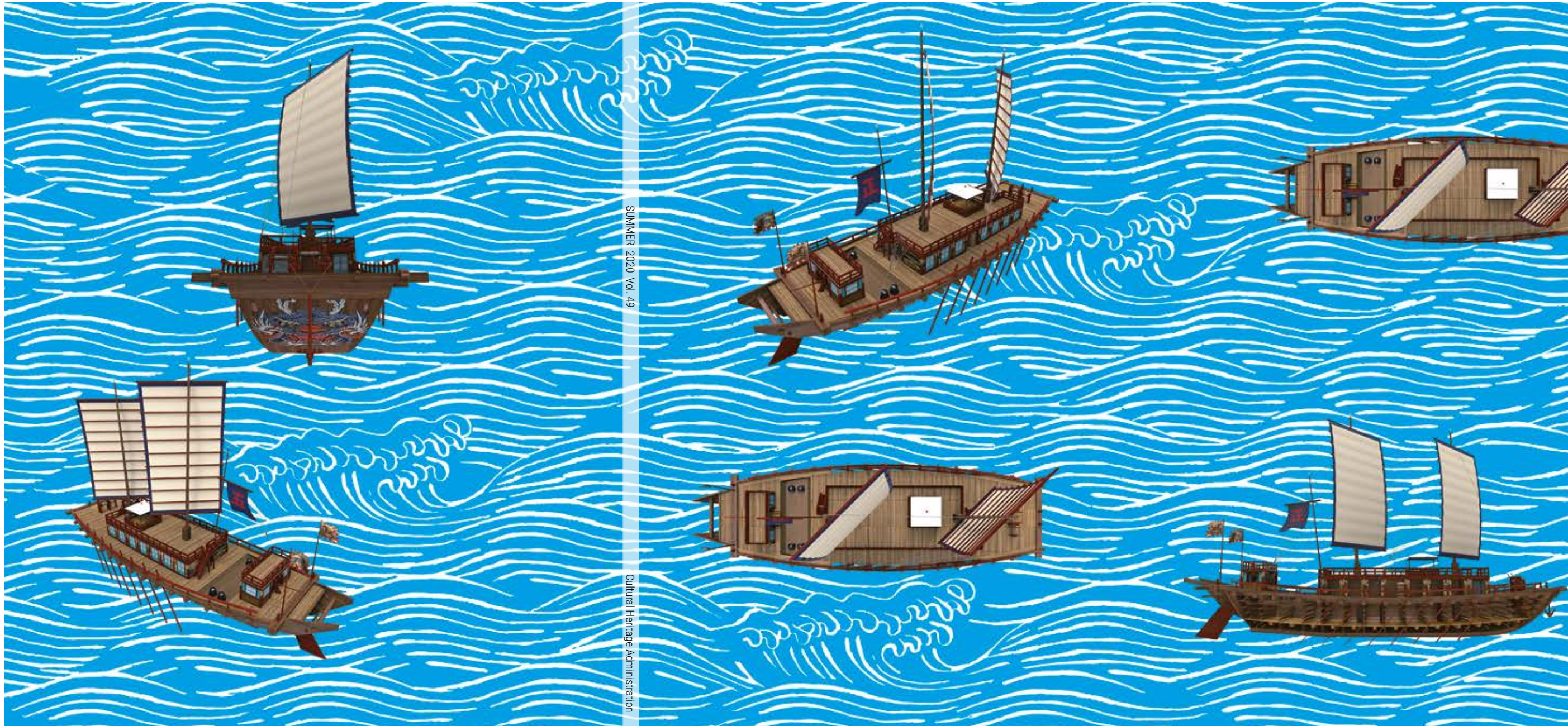
KOREAN HERITAGE

# KOREAN HERITAGE

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The Joseon court resumed sending emissaries to Japan in 1607 at the request of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Known as Joseon Tongsinsa, these diplomatic missions were the mainstay of cultural exchanges between the two states in literature, painting, calligraphy, medicine, and more. Ships dedicated to this purpose were named Tongsinsaseon, or "Ships for Goodwill Missions." The reconstruction of the flagship of this diplomatic fleet was completed in October 2018.



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The COVID-19 pandemic has brought fear and disarray to the entire world. Countries are closing national borders and individual citizens are placing themselves in quarantine. Before the coronavirus outbreak, it was not broadly understood that the term “pandemic” would someday become part of our everyday vocabulary. However, humanity has always been plagued by contagious diseases. Pandemics and their effects during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) are explored here.

**Text by** Kim Ho, Professor of History, Gyeongin National University of Education

**Photos by** the National Museum of Korea, National Folk Museum of Korea, Gyeonggi Provincial Museum and Gahoe Minhwa Museum

## Appeasing “Your Majesty”

The 18th-century nobleman Gu Sang-deok kept a journal for decades. In this record, entitled *Better than a Good Memory* (*Seungchongmyeongnok*), not a single year passed without an outbreak of infectious disease. The plague that spread in the summer and winter of 1732 (during the reign of King Yeongjo) was particularly devastating. The entry from December 29, 1732 reads:

*A long drought starting in June this year caused a massive emergence of harmful insects and accordingly the devastation of crops. At the same time, three types of plague broke out, killing numerous people. With the absence of seasonal rain and unusually cold weather in the wintertime, the bodies of people dying from the cold, hunger, and disease are piling up in the streets. After tying the feet of a body with a straw rope, neighbors drag corpses away and throw them into a pit. The marks left by the dragging of bodies remain as clear as the tracks of a wheeled cart.*

The most dreaded epidemic diseases for the people of Joseon were smallpox and measles, together known as *mama*, or “Your Majesty.” Based on the size of the red rash marks and the resultant scars, smallpox and measles were respectively known as large and small *mama*. With no treatments available to prevent or cure these diseases, people relied on shamanic rites to send away the god *Mama*. The god *Mama* was believed to have arrived from the west through India and China and showed a sensitive and nervous temperament. Trying not to irritate this sensitive god, Joseon people appeased it with ritual foods so that the god *Mama* could pass by without throwing further tantrums.

Lady Jang, a wife of King Sukjong (r. 1674–1720), was the mother of the heir to the throne.



During the Joseon Dynasty, smallpox was called *mama*, or “Your Majesty.” The god *Mama* was believed to move around constantly transmitting disease. To avoid the potentially fatal infection, people appeased the god *Mama* with the utmost care. (Photo courtesy of the Gahoe Museum)

It is recorded that she prepared offerings including red rice cake and a girl’s dress and prayed to the god *Mama* after her son contracted smallpox. The 18th-century Confucian scholar Kim Mae-sun composed a ritual writing seeking the salvation of his six-month-old daughter when she succumbed to smallpox and offered it to the god *Mama* along with rice and alcohol.

Not everyone had an absolute belief in shamanic

rituals for the god *Mama*. One senior member of the Hong family adored the three sons finally born to him at an advanced age. When all three caught smallpox, he devoted himself to offering prayers to the god *Mama*. After losing his first and then second son to the disease, however, Mr. Hong angered and abandoned his faith in the god. Realizing the uselessness of trying to appease the god *Mama*, Mr. Hong killed an ox and threw a large feast. The third son was fed with the beef and eventually recovered from the disease. This sparked a rumor about the healing effect of beef soup throughout the neighborhood, raising the price of beef. Yi Ik, a scholar of *Silhak*, or “Practical Learning,” published a recipe for deep-boiled chicken soup as an effective treatment for smallpox and measles.



A portrait of the Joseon scholar Oh Myeong-hang (1673–1728) with smallpox scars clearly depicted in his face (Photo courtesy of the Gyeonggi Provincial Museum)

## Social Distancing and Quarantine Measures

The only available strategy to avoid an infection was fleeing from the illness. Noblemen with the economic means would pack up bags of grain and seek refuge in a Buddhist mountain temple or in the house of a relative or friend. Infected people would be isolated within a designated room in the house. A quarantine area was prepared within villages as well: A shelter was installed at one corner of the district government office to prevent infected people from wandering around the neighborhood. There were also central government care centers for patients installed outside the walls of the Joseon capital Hanyang.

When a serious measles outbreak occurred in Hanyang in 1786 (during the reign of King Jeongjo), a special medical policy was prepared by the central government. The capital was divided into two sections—one made up of the western, northern, and central districts, and the other containing the eastern and southern districts—and respectively assigned to the Palace Medical Office (*Jeonuigam*) and Office of Benefitting the People (*Hyeminseo*). Three doctors from each of these two medical agencies were given the task of caring for the patients in their area. The doctors personally paid visits to critically ill patients and issued prescriptions to those with mild symptoms. To speed their medical rounds, the doctors were allowed to use post horses. All the medical supplies were provided by the government, and the two responsible agencies were required to report the number of patients and consumption of medicines to the king every five days.



When an infectious disease broke out, the government performed rites to pacify the evil spirits that were believed to spread it. A ritual altar for this purpose was mandatory at local government sites. The facility marked in red on this map of Mujaeng-hyeon in the Jeolla region was such an altar. (Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Korea)

Medical instruments for treating smallpox and their container  
(Photo courtesy of National Folk Museum of Korea)



The fundamental terror of plagues stemmed from the lack of knowledge about their causes. Poverty-stricken people could not even imagine access to medicines. The only luxury they could afford in the face of an infectious disease was a long-boiled soup made from beef or chicken. Along with treatment and quarantine measures, the government needed to offer solace to the minds of its people. As those killed in war or political insurgencies were believed to become evil spirits who spread infectious diseases, the government performed rites to pacify these dead souls.

### Research on a Smallpox Vaccine

Despite all these individual and government efforts to combat epidemics, the only fundamental solution was the development of a vaccine. Jeong Yak-yong (1762–1836), a late-Joseon scholar and the foremost theorist of Practical Learning, was renowned for

his profound distrust of shamanic beliefs. Suffering from smallpox himself in childhood and losing many of his children to the fearsome disease, Jeong dedicated himself to developing methods to combat it, the first such research in Korea.

Appointed magistrate of Goksan in Hwanghae Province in his mid-30s, Jeong personally witnessed the devastating impact of infectious diseases on people's lives. He collected medical books on contagious diseases and conducted experiments on a range of treatments. In 1798, his efforts culminated in the compilation of the medical book *Magwa hoetong*, which means a "A Comprehensive Treatise on Infectious Diseases involving Rashes as a Major Symptom."

Jeong learned of a preventive treatment for smallpox practiced in China that involved taking powdered scabs from the pustules of a smallpox patient and either inhaling it through the nose or smearing it on clothing. Jeong asked the Korean embassies sent to China to secure books on this

The cover of *Magwa hoetong*, or "A Comprehensive Treatise on Infectious Diseases involving Rashes as a Major Symptom," by Jeong Yak-yong (Photo courtesy of the Gangjin Dasan Museum)



form of variolation. He soon acquired *Formulas for Smallpox Vaccination* (*Zhengshi zhongdoufang*) by Zheng Wangyi and *The Golden Mirror of Medical Orthodoxy* (*Yizong jinjian*), a compilation by a group of Chinese doctors. Based on these medical books, Jeong published Korea's first medical treatise on smallpox vaccination, *Jongdu simbeop yoji*. Jeong formed a cooperative relationship with the contemporaneous Practical Learning scholar Park Je-ga, who was also deeply interested in research on the prevention of smallpox.

### Unwavering Commitment to Overcoming the Infection

Jeong was sent into exile upon the death of King Jeongjo in June 1800, but managed to sustain his research into a smallpox vaccine. After being released from exile, his efforts continued. Jeong obtained a copy of the 1828 edition of *The*

*Newly Published Extraordinary Book on Smallpox Vaccination from England* (*Yingjiliguo xinchu zhongdou qishu*), a slim volume on Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccine based on the cowpox virus.

First published in Guangdong in June 1805, this book was re-published roughly 20 years later in Beijing. Jeong went to great lengths to acquire a copy, indicating that his deep passion for research into a smallpox vaccine lasted well into the final years of his life. Although he suffered a great deal throughout life due to his strong belief in "Practical Learning" and Western theories, Jeong Yak-yong never compromised his scientific passion and worked continuously toward his goal of obtaining a smallpox vaccine.

Unknown plagues terrify people. However, they can never triumph over the human will to overcome them. This holds as true today as it did in the past.

KOREAN FOOD

# Salted and Fermented Foods

Text by Joo Young-ha, Professor at the Graduate School of Korean Studies of the Academy of Korean Studies

FEATURED

Lifespans increased dramatically after early humans started to use fire for cooking. Proto-humans sometimes survived on the leftover flesh of prey abandoned by lions and hyenas. Once they mastered the use of fire, they started to hunt large animals themselves. The problem remained of the rotting of the meat, with its organic substances such as proteins and fat being decomposed by aerobic microorganisms. Spoiled meat could seriously impact the health of those who consumed it. Until the 19th and 20th centuries when industrial food processing, artificial refrigeration, and freezing became widespread, cooking practices placed a great emphasis on slowing the process of decay.



Pickled anchovy (myeolchi jeot). This salted fermented anchovy can be seasoned to serve as a side dish or used as an ingredient in kimchi.



Pickled shrimp (*saeu jeot*). Pickled shrimp is mainly used for making kimchi.

## Jeotgal, Salted and Fermented Seafood

When it comes to the preservation of meat or fish, drying in the sun or wind was long the simplest and most economical method known. However, drying deprives food of moisture and much of its original flavor. Smoking is another good way to slow the process of decay, but the resulting smoky flavor can be excessive. Salting was often seen as the best method for preserving the authentic flavors of food over long periods. Meat or fish could be soaked in brine or crusted with salt. One of the definitive Korean foods made through brining is *jeotgal*, or “pickled fish.”

The word *jeotgal* is comprised of two components—*jeot* meaning “soaked and fermented” and *gal* meaning “a pile of things.” *Jeotgal* is made by alternating layers of fish

and salt in a jar. When salt is sprinkled over the muscles, intestines, and reproductive organs of fish, an enzyme is produced that breaks down proteins into amino acids. This process is described as *sakida* in Korean, or “fermentation.”

Three ships dating to the early 13th century were excavated in 2009 off the coast of Taean in Chungcheongnam-do Province. Alongside dried mussels and dried abalone was found a jar of salted abalone. It appears to have been a form of *jeotgal* made from abalone caught off the coast of Gangjin in Jeollanam-do Province. People on Jeju Island call the intestines of abalones *ge-ut*. Pickled abalone intestines, or *ge-ut jeot*, is the favorite type of *jeotgal* among the islanders.



Pickled damselfish (*jari jeot*). Pickled damselfish is a local specialty of Jeju Island.

Herring, known for its high protein and fat content, was caught in large quantities off the western coast of Korea until the 19th century. During the Joseon era (1392–1910), herring was enjoyed dried or dried and then grilled. Affluent people made *jeotgal* with herring.

A recipe for herring *jeotgal* is included in *Understanding the Taste of Food (Eumsik dimibang)*, the first cookbook written in the Korean alphabet. Its author Jang Gye-hyang (1598–1680) states, “As herrings can be spoiled when washed in water, they should be cleaned with a cloth. In a clean and dry jar, add 3.2 kilograms of salt for every 100 herring.”

The court doctor Yu Jung-rim (1705–71) relates in his

book *Expanded Edition on Farm Management (Jeungbo sallim gyeongje)*: “In a bamboo basket, place a layer of herring and scatter salt; place another layer of herring and scatter salt. Cover it with a straw mat and leave it overnight. The watery substances from the herring will all be drained away. Place these herring in a jar and again sprinkle them with salt. It will be ready for consumption in six months or a year.”

Herring *jeotgal* made according to the directions in *Understanding the Taste of Food* exudes a putrid smell like the Swedish fermented herring *surströmming*. For the Joseon people who could not afford beef, however, it was a good source of protein and fat.



## Sikae Born from a Mixture of Salt and Grain

There is a form of *jeotgal* called *sikae*, a word consisting of two Chinese characters respectively meaning “eating” and “soaking in brine.” Yi Gyu-gyeong (1788–1856), a late-Joseon scholar of *Silhak*, or “Practical Learning,” writes that people in fishing villages made *sikae* with various kinds of fish including Chinese tapertail anchovy, large-eyed herring, shrimp, squid, octopus, long-legged octopus, baby octopus, clam, mussel, flatfish, dried pollack, and sardine.

To make a *sikae*, first cook rice and then mix it with barley malt, powdered *nuruk* (a traditional Korean fermentation starter), and water. Leave the *nuruk* mixture for a few days to ferment. Any surface moisture should be removed from the selected fish before they are half-dried, chopped into pieces, and mixed with salt. The salted fish pieces should be inserted in the *nuruk* mixture and left to sit for about 10 days to become ready for consumption.

Flatfish *sikae*. Flatfish is mixed with grain, red pepper powder, and salt, and then fermented. Flatfish *sikae* is characterized by its spicy and acid flavor.



People in Samcheok and Gangneung in Gangwon-do Province still use flatfish and millet to make flatfish *sikae*.

Pickled fish is an essential secondary ingredient for making cabbage kimchi. During the 18th–19th centuries, well-off households in Seoul considered pickled shrimp a must in cabbage kimchi. The fermented shrimp enrich the taste of kimchi with flavors derived from their protein and fat. With catches of anchovy increasing in the 20th century, pickled anchovy started to be used in kimchi making as well. Kimchi with pickled fish added develops a fishy smell, however, so red pepper powder, garlic, and ginger are used in greater quantities. Pickled fish, or *jeotgal*, endows kimchi with a distinct flavor that differentiates it from other forms of fermented vegetables such as pickles in the United States and Europe, Chinese *pao cai*, or Japan’s *tsukemono*.



## Fermented Skate with the Pungent Flavor of Urea

There is one fish that can be fermented without salt—a type of skate known for its pungent flavor. In the 15th century fishermen would often bring in an abundant catch of skate in the waters around Heuksando Island off the western coast of the Korean Peninsula. Once a crew of them smelled a strong ammonia-like odor coming from some left-over skate and presumed the fish was decaying. However, they were unwilling to just toss away the result of their hard work and decided to taste it. They developed no stomachaches and thought the fish tasted wonderful. The news spread through the southern Jeolla region and fermented skate, or *hongoe hoe*, became established as a local specialty.

Skate have soft cartilaginous bones. Swimming on the ocean floor 80–100 meters deep, skate develop large amounts of urea to control the process of osmosis. When alive, they excrete the urea through the skin, but it remains trapped within them after death. This urea decomposes into ammonia. In the proper environment, the ammonia eliminates decay-causing microorganisms and softens the flesh. Such skate does not immediately rot, even unrefrigerated. The pungent smell simply gets stronger with time.

Even as *jeotgal* was falling out of favor with the advancement of storage techniques, the popularity of fermented skate only increased. Restaurants in Jeollanam-do Province drew on the craze for fermented skate to create a new dish called *hongoe samhap*, or “skate trio.” It is a dish setting fermented skate alongside boiled pork slices and cabbage kimchi. As people moved from Jeollanam-do to Seoul, this “skate trio” was transported to the capital. Starting in the 1990s, this novel dish became established as a national food.

It is not really science that draws a line between fermentation and decay. Fermented foods that are popular in one community might be shunned as rotten in another. In this sense, it is the shared culture within a certain community that decides the meanings of fermentation and of spoilage. It all depends on the collective experience that perceives the flavors from the decomposition of food as well fermented rather than rotten. Pickled fish, *sikae*, and fermented skate are all foods that are, in the words of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, “good to think with” for Korean people.

Fermented skate (*hongoe hoe*). Fermented skate is dipped in a red pepper paste diluted with vinegar or accompanied by ripened kimchi.

CULTURAL ROOTS

# Building Ships

Interview with

**Hong Soon-jae**, the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage

**Lee Dong-kon**, the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering

The reconstruction of a ship that carried Joseon emissaries between Korea and Japan across the Korea Strait hundreds of years ago was completed in 2018. In the same year, Korea reclaimed its title as the world's top shipbuilder in terms of new orders taken. Korea is indisputably a shipbuilding superpower. In this issue, Hong Sun-jae from the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage and Lee Dong-kon from the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering talk about the past and present of the country's shipbuilding.

Text by Choi Min-young

Photos by the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage,  
Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering, Ministry of Oceans and  
Fisheries and Jung Meen-young





The flagship of the Tongsinsa fleet that carried Joseon goodwill missions to and from Japan from 1607–1811 was relaunched in October 2018. (Photo courtesy of the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage)

Hong Sun-jae  
**A Symbol of  
 Bilateral  
 Exchange  
 Reconstructed**

Less than ten years after the Japanese invasions of the late 16th century, the Joseon court resumed sending emissaries in 1607 at the request of Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate. These diplomatic missions known as either Tongsinsa or Joseon Tongsinsa were at the mainstay of cultural exchanges between the two states in literature, painting, calligraphy, medicine, and more. Ships dedicated to this purpose were named the Tongsinsaseon, or "Ships for Goodwill Missions." This fleet ranged between three and six ships as it shuttled between the two states for over 200 years until the final voyage in 1811. The reconstruction of one of these diplomatic ships was completed in October 2018. Hong Sun-jae at the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage, who played a critical role in the reconstruction of the Tongsinsa vessel, shares his experiences with this historic undertaking.

"A number of documents contain records on the Tongsinsa ships. Among them, the book *Gyemi susarok* by Byeon Tak, one of the emissaries sent to Japan in 1763, offers detailed information on the preparations for the mission, particularly on the process of building Tongsinsa ships and on their structure. The manuscript *Heonseong yugo* also provided critical information on the design, materials, and construction timetable of the ships. Based on these sources of information, we were able to make informed decisions in our effort to reconstruct a Tongsinsa ship."

The reconstructed ship is a representation of the flagship that carried the head of the goodwill mission to Japan. It was the largest in the fleet and was finished with lavish but dignified decorations. It was a symbolic representation of Joseon's royal authority in its diplomatic relations with Japan. Hong performed historical research to identify the exact size and weight of the flagship: 34.5 x 9.3 x 3 meters in length, width, and depth, and a weight of 137 metric tons. This newly confirmed data was faithfully reflected in the reconstructed ship. The painted woodwork (*dancheong*) and silk ornamentation that decorated the original flagship has also been accurately reproduced.

"Traditional Korean ships were made from entire logs, a unique shipbuilding practice found in Korea. High quality pine trees (*geumgangsong*) were used for this reconstruction as well. Carpenters skilled in traditional woodworking were hired. They trimmed the timber using traditional methods and tools such as adzes, chisels, and inking spatulas."

Hong explains that the reconstruction team poured as much



Hong Sun-jae at the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage hopes that the successful reconstruction of the Tongsinseon ship will lead to a revival of the historic *geobukseon*, or “turtle ships.” (Photo taken by Jung Meen-young)

effort into replicating the materials, techniques, and tools used for the original ship as they did into determining its appearance through historical research. As the reconstructed ship was intended to actually be sailed, respecting the regulations in the Ship Safety Act was also important. While the outer appearance of the new ship was kept as close as possible to the original from centuries ago, its structure and motors had to follow the shipbuilding requirements of today.

About two hundred years after its last voyage in 1811, the flagship of the Tongsinseon fleet once again revealed its dignified stature to the public in 2018.

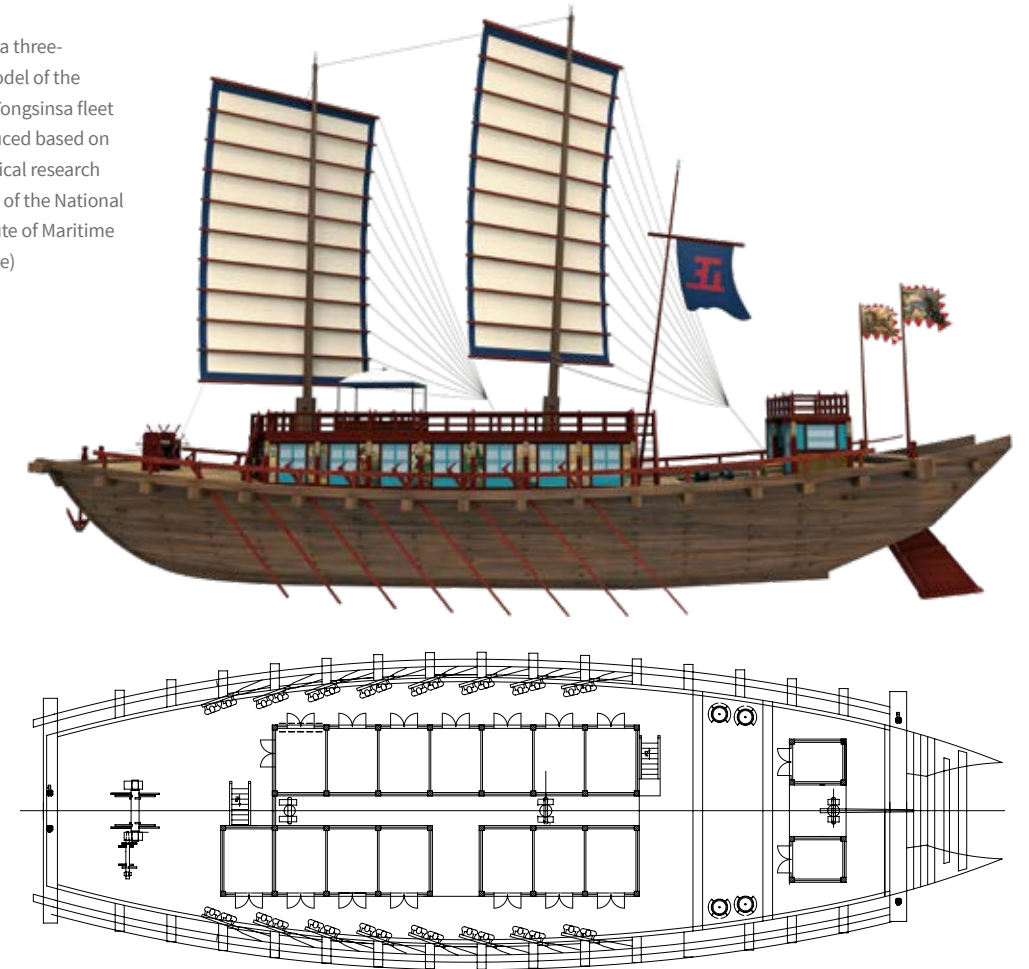
### Manual Skills of the Past

Since the discovery of artifacts in the waters off the coast of Sinan, Jeollanam-do Province in 1975 and the subsequent underwater excavation, the National

Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage has been steadily conducting archaeological and other investigations on underwater heritage, such as excavating, conserving, and analyzing historical remains from the ocean floor, restoring old ships, and studying traditional shipbuilding techniques. Hong Sun-jae talks about the characteristics of traditional Korean ships.

“The Korean Peninsula is rich in major rivers and tributaries. The waters on the three sides of the landmass are shallow and have a large tidal range. The changing seasonal influence of hot and cold currents allow abundant fish resources. These factors make a flat bottom more practical than a curved one for the conventional form of a traditional Korean ship. Flat-bottomed ships are easier to maneuver in shallow waters and are able to change directions within a narrow space. Since wooden pegs were used rather than iron nails, ships could easily be repaired and used for a long period of time.”

The design and a three-dimensional model of the flagship of the Tongsinseon fleet that were produced based on thorough historical research (Photo courtesy of the National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage)



It is clear how a flat-bottomed structure would be advantageous for fishing boats operating in narrow spaces and shallow waters. This traditional structure found its most dramatic application in *geobukseon*, or “turtle ships,” however. A turtle ship is a type of traditional Korean warship that was first used in the fight against Japanese invaders in the late 16th century. They were a modified version of the dominant type of ship of the Joseon naval forces known as a *panokseon* (board-roofed ship). The two-story structure of a *panokseon* was adopted and its combat capacity was improved by covering the roof with spiked iron plates. Turtle ships won fame during the late 16th century when Admiral Yi Sun-sin skillfully utilized them to win historic victories over massive numbers of invading Japanese warships.

“There are also historical records testifying to the shipbuilding capacity of Korea. *The History of Goryeosa* notes that on the request of Yuan China, Koreans built 900 warships over a four-month span in 1274. According to *The Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*), shipbuilders from the ancient Korean kingdom of Baekje were invited to the country in 271, and the ships they made were called ‘Baekje ships’. These records confirm that the shipbuilding skills of Korea had already reached an advanced level of expertise at these times.”

Hong Sun-jae adds that shipbuilding was long one of the most important state businesses. According to historical documents, government offices dedicated to the purpose of shipbuilding were installed throughout the dynastic history of Korea, namely



Korea is a global superpower in the shipbuilding industry. Its competitiveness in constructing cargo ships, LNG carriers, and other specialized ships is renowned.

the Ship Office (Seonbuseo; established in 583) of the Silla Kingdom, the Office for Armed Vessels and Naval Forces (Dobuseo; 996) of the Goryeo Dynasty, and the Warship Office (Sasugam; 1392) of the Joseon era. What underpinned the Korean focus on shipbuilding?

“Regardless of how large a ship was to be built, there was always work to be done by hand. Manual dexterity is a key to producing a quality ship. The high levels of manual skill and creative ideas of the past fed the development of shipbuilding techniques that are awe-inspiring, even by today’s standards.”

The reconstruction of a historical ship otherwise surviving only in written records is like reviving the associated history and culture. It is thrilling to watch historical elements that had lived only in the domain of imagination become part of reality. It is also thrilling to see the futuristic technologies that are currently being developed. Lee Dong-kon at the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering (KRISO) describes how the ships of the future will be completely different from what we know today.

*Lee Dong-kon*

## **Historical Inheritance Inspires Today’s Accomplishments**

Korea is the world’s leader at designing and building ships. Its techniques for constructing cargo ships, LNG (liquefied natural gas) carriers, and FPSO (floating production storage and offloading) vessels are recognized worldwide.

“Korea excels in design. Its responsiveness to changing sociocultural factors is superb as well. Building a ship as requested by a client is just business as usual in the shipbuilding industry. Korean shipbuilders, however, can develop a ship equipped with state-of-the-art technology and propose it to a potential buyer. Korea is always ahead of the pack in employing new technologies, which sometimes translates into the creation of new business.”

After the government began to nurture the shipbuilding industry in the 1970s, Korea emerged as a power in global shipbuilding circles. It is now the largest shipbuilder in the world in terms of new orders. The country dominates the market for large cargo ships, LNG carriers, and special-purpose ships. Lee Dong-kon at the Korea Research Institute



Lee Dong-kon relates that today's Korean shipbuilding is based on the physical skills of workers. (Photo taken by Jung Meen-young)

for Ships and Ocean Engineering attributes the current success in the global shipbuilding market to the cultural and historical inheritances of the Korean people.

“Shipbuilding is a labor-intensive industry highly dependent on human dexterity. Unlike in the automobile and aircraft industries, there are inherent limitations on the extent to which the process can be automated because of the huge scale of the objects to be made and the need to produce a different design for each object. Seasoned skills of experienced laborers are required to complete the task. A diligent disposition and physical competence are essentials. Creative designs that satisfactorily meet the demands of ship owners are an advantage as well. A pool of trained and experienced personnel combined with advanced facilities makes a perfect environment for shipbuilding.”

Lee Dong-kon relates that the shipbuilding expertise of the Koreans of the past underpins the country's modern pride in producing a wide range of

ships with the highest of technology available.

### Future Ships with No Environmental or Safety Concerns

The Korea Research Institute for Ships and Ocean Engineering is dedicated to research in two primary areas—ships and offshore structures. The main subjects of research on ships are resistance and propulsion, propeller noise reduction, maritime safety and environment, and defensive technologies. For offshore structures, the focus is on offshore plants extracting oil and gas, on creating energy from waves, tides, and ocean heat and on underwater robots. Lee explains that maritime autonomous surface ships and the conservation of the maritime environment are two issues that are high on the international maritime community's agenda.

“To promote the conservation of the maritime environment, the Marine Environment Protection

**Top\_** Researchers at the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering testing the performance of a propeller for a large vessel (Photo courtesy of the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering)

**Below\_** A three-dimensional model of a maritime autonomous surface ship. Future ships like this one will be completely different from how we understand ships today. (Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries)



Committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has set a target for 2050 of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from ships by 50 percent compared to the 2008 level. Countries across the globe are working to develop technological solutions for this given task, and we are also hard working on fuel technologies like hydrogen fuels, fuel cells, and batteries. Currently, 80 percent of maritime accidents involve human factors. If maritime autonomous surface ships are commercialized, they are expected to reduce the likelihood of incidents at sea and the resultant human

casualties. Ships navigating on their own fueled by new forms of energy will be something totally different from how we understand ships today.”

The importance of technological development cannot be over-emphasized for the future of the shipbuilding industry. Key parts of the work of constructing ships, however, boil down to human dexterity. Behind the country's reputation for shipbuilding technology are seasoned technicians who diligently work with their hands to bring about the future we imagine.

## LOCAL HERITAGE GUIDE

The widely diverse charms of the local regions of Korea are best captured in their respective festivals. For those who wish to dive deeper into the full range of Korean culture, local festivals are perfect opportunities to explore. This issue presents some of these festivals and their special attractions.

# Special Festivals on Offer

FEATURED

**Text by** Choi Min-young

**Photos by** the Korea Dance Association, Korean Folk Village, Kwon Young-il, Baekje Cultural Festival, Miryang Arirang Festival, International Intangible heritage Film Festival and Jeju Tourism Association

## Seoul Dance Festival

### Seoul

**Period:** October 17–November 20

**Place:** Arko Arts Theater, Sangmyung Art Center, and more



Started in 1979 as the Korea Dance Festival, the Seoul Dance Festival is the largest dance event in all of Korea. The festival provides an annual venue that allows dancers, choreographers, and art directors to experiment with their artistic vision. It broadens the appreciation of dance among a wider public and offers audiences an opportunity to enjoy various forms of dance, including Korean traditional dance, modern forms, and ballet, all in a single space.

This year, the festival begins with a two-part program entitled *A Mind Free from Attachment*. The first portion, “Amazing Maestros,” features veteran dancers who have been at the forefront of the development of the art form. The second part, “Dancing Stars,” shows collaborative performances by today’s star dancers. Other programs include *Theater for Masterworks*, which presents dances designated as Masterpieces by the Korea Dance Association. *Chumpan Series* shows enthusiastic performances by passionate dancers of all ages from across the country. There is also a group interpretive dance competition.

The clear highlight of the Seoul Dance Festival is the preliminary event *Four Swans*. This is a public event at which any group of four people can put on a dance they have personally developed. There are no restrictions on the genre or form of the dances for this event. For those seeking to explore the dance world, the 41st session of the Seoul Dance Festival is being held this year.



## Welcome to Joseon

### Gyeonggi-do Province

Period: April 30–June 28  
Place: Korean Folk Village



The Korean Folk Village is a theme park focused on the presentation of traditional folk culture to visitors from home and abroad. It was built to reflect a typical Joseon village by transferring old houses from other parts of the country or building new ones in the traditional style. The everyday lives of Joseon-era people are reenacted here based on historical research and consultation. Within this historical ambience, visitors can experience life in the Joseon Dynasty in a fun and amusing way through the various programs on offer.

In some of the visitor programs operated by the Korean Folk Village, people from the Joseon era are portrayed by actors. These programs are highly popular for the lively engagement they allow with visitors. Possibly the most beloved program, *Welcome to Joseon*, has been brought back for 2020. The theme of this year's *Welcome to Joseon* program is a race to climb the social ladder. Visitors can upgrade their social status from commoner to *yangban* during the program and even eventually rise to the status of king. Besides *Welcome to Joseon*, there are many other interesting programs presented at the Korean Folk Village that offer visitors unique ways to experience the Joseon era.



Photo taken by Kwon Young-il

## DMZ Art Festa

### Gangwon-do Province

Period: August 13–17  
Place: Areas in and around the Yanggu Humanities Museum and an artificial island built in the shape of the Korean Peninsula (Hanbandoseom Island)



The three-year civil war on the Korean Peninsula ended in 1953 with an armistice and a lasting line between the South and North. The areas within two kilometers of either side of this line were designated the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Troops, weapons, and other military facilities are banned, and human traffic is strictly restricted. Thanks to these longstanding limits on human activities, the demilitarized zone boasts great biodiversity and provides precious habitat to many endangered species. It is recognized worldwide for its academic value to the study of natural ecosystems.

Artists and members of the general public have come together to create a festival to celebrate the spirit of peace embodied by the DMZ. Organized as a remembrance of the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, the DMZ

Art Festa marks its third session this year. Held under the theme “Memories Recalled” in Yanggu, Gangwon-do Province, this year’s festival presents diverse visitor programs that include light shows, such as a drone display and laser lighting show, theatrical performances delivering the historical pain of the DMZ, documentary films on the region and festival, and more. Besides these entertaining experiences, the DMZ Art Festa provides an opportunity for emerging artists to debut and for experienced ones to expand their artistic realm. For those who seek to experience this unique combination of tragic heritage, artistic performance, and aspirations for peace, the DMZ Art Festa is definitely worth a visit.



## Baekje Cultural Festival

### Chungcheongnam-do Province

Period: September 26–October 4

Place: Various areas in Gongju and Buyeo



Baekje is an ancient Korean kingdom that was founded in the area that is now Seoul in 18 B.C. In the latter half of its 678-year history, it transferred its capital to present-day Gongju and then on to Buyeo. Baekje culture was renowned for its sophisticated and gorgeous aesthetics, providing a foundation for the further development of ancient East Asian culture. Drawing on these cultural and historical roots, the Gongju and Buyeo governments have been organizing the Baekje Cultural Festival annually since 1955. It was further expanded with the inscription of the Baekje Historic Areas on the World Heritage List in 2015 and marks its 66th session this year.

This year's festival is being organized under the slogan "Enjoy Baekje, the Origins of the Korean Wave." The opening and closing ceremonies will be respectively

held in Gongju and Buyeo. Starting off with an ancestral ritual dedicated to the people of Baekje and performed by traditionally clothed performers, the Baekje Cultural Festival features traditional forms of culture such as performances, farmers' music, and dance, but also includes collaborations between traditional and modern cultural elements. There will be exhibitions of works by contemporary artists who reflect the exceptional dexterity of Baekje crafts, Baekje culture experience programs, traditional food experience programs, and more. Visitors of all ages to this festival can leap nearly 1,500 years into the past and immerse themselves in Baekje culture. The full range of visitor programs prepared alongside the archaeological remains from the Baekje era will create a perfect environment for this journey in time!



## Miryang Arirang Festival

### Gyeongsangnam-do Province

Period: September 24–27

Place: Yeongnamnu Pavilion and the area around the Miryanggang River



Inscribed on the UNESCO intangible heritage list in 2012, Arirang is a Korean folksong tradition that repeats the word *arirang* as a refrain. It is estimated that somewhere around 3,600 folk songs in approximately 60 types carry the title Arirang. It is arguably the most popular folksong among the Korean people overall, but at the same time it manifests distinctive local characteristics through numerous regional variations.

Miryang Arirang is the classic folksong transmitted in the southeastern city of Miryang. This version is based on the legend of Arang, the daughter of a Miryang magistrate. One of the functionaries at the Miryang government fell in love with Arang and tricked her into coming out to Yeongnamru Pavilion where he confessed his love toward her. Arang was killed resisting him.

The Miryang Arirang Festival is held at Yeongnamnu Pavilion and in areas around the Miryanggang River, the setting for this legend. Held under the slogan "The Resonance of Arirang Sounding into the Future," this year's event presents versions of Miryang Arirang enjoyed by communities of the Korean diaspora. Ethnic Koreans living abroad have been invited to put on performances both alone (*Diaspora Miryang Arirang*) and together with a domestic Korean team (*Toward a Greater Miryang Arirang*). In addition, the Arirang Theme Hall, the central component of the festival, will be expanded this year to offer a wider range of experience programs, performances, and exhibitions that satisfy the tastes of visitors young and old. *Odyssey along the Miryanggang River*, a musical show performed with the river as a living backdrop, is another visitor favorite.



## International Intangible heritage Film Festival

### Jeollabuk-do Province

Period: September 11-13

Place: National Intangible Heritage Center



Mass media can play a critical role in enhancing the public understanding of intangible cultural heritage. Among the many means of mass communication, visual media excels in its ability to effectively communicate the ethereal features of intangible heritage to the public through the use of diverse filming techniques, narration, and editing. The International Intangible heritage Film Festival draws on this intrinsic ability of visual media for sharing the diverse culture of humanity among a wider public.

The International Intangible heritage Film Festival is designed to stimulate the emergence of novel perspectives on intangible heritage by providing an opportunity to appreciate the historical value of intangible heritage from a contemporary point of view. By screening both documentary and fictional works stored in archives

worldwide, this festival is developing new uses for archived films and heightening their value. It can be said that the International Intangible heritage Film Festival is a sustainable space for creative archiving.

Marking its seventh anniversary this year, the International Intangible heritage Film Festival will present about 20 full-length films from across the globe. The program covers diverse film genres, including both dramas and documentaries, and a broad temporal range from classic movies to recent releases applying virtual reality. Besides films, the festival offers a wide range of other entertainments such as traditional crafting, folk games, and virtual reality experiences.



## Jeju International Tourism Marathon Festival

### Jeju Island

Date: September 6

Place: Starting from Gujwa Stadium and along the Jongdal Coastal Road



The Jeju International Tourism Marathon Festival is a multi-national sports event featuring the annual participation of roughly 4,000 marathoners from about 30 countries. Started in 1995, this year marks the festival's 25th anniversary. Every year, the event has developed further as a public sporting festival featuring the marathon and other fun activities.

This year there will be full and half marathons along with ten- and five-kilometer races, and even a "dog marathon" where dog owners can run alongside their pets. Also included in the program is an opportunity to learn about the pleasures of running with the help of Lee Bong-ju, who won a silver medal at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. An independent booth will offer tastings of abalone hand-harvested by the Jeju *haenyeo*

(women divers) whose culture and history was inscribed on the UNESCO intangible heritage list in 2016. Tours of promotional halls for local specialties and natural dying experiences are also on offer.

Winners get the opportunity to participate without charge in other marathon events held in Japan, Russia, and Vietnam. Anyone who loves running can apply for the marathon on its official webpage until August 7.



A jeogui is a queen's ceremonial robe decorated with a pheasant image in regular intervals. This jeogui robe was worn by Yi Bang-ja, the wife of Crown Prince Uimin, during an audience with Emperor Sunjong.

JOSEON STORIES

## The Queen, the Highest Female Authority at the Palace

**Text by** Shin Byung-ju, Professor of History, Konkuk University

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

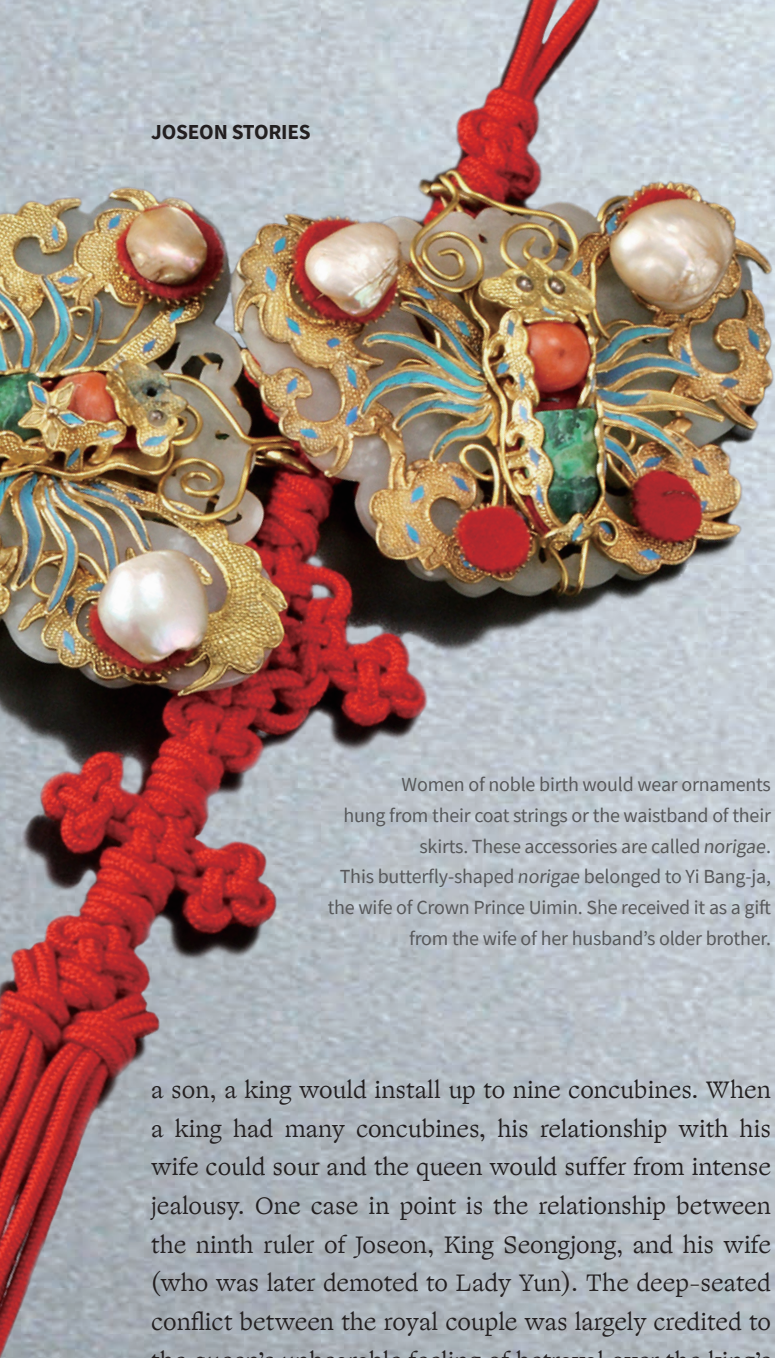
Founded by Yi Seong-gye (later King Taejo, the first monarch of Joseon) in 1392, the Joseon Dynasty endured until Japan's illegal annexation of Korea in 1910. This 518-year span is an astonishing period for a monarchy by both Eastern and Western standards. Through the centuries, 27 kings ruled over Joseon. Their spouses, however, reached more than 40 in number since a Joseon king generally married another woman if the queen consort died.

## The Demanding Job of Queen

A queen consort as portrayed in Korean films and TV dramas is the manifestation of splendor. Her regal attitude, beauty, and magnificent costumes make her the envy of all other women. According to my research, however, their lives were nothing that should inspire jealousy as they were deprived of personal freedoms. It can be said that their lifelong mission was simply tolerating the monotonous daily routine demanded of them within the confined spaces of the palace. Appreciating an artificial garden constructed at the back of their living quarters, taking a walk in the rear garden of the palace, reading a book, or writing letters to relatives were essentially their only escapes from their rigorous duties.

Queens were strictly forbidden from intervening in political affairs. Instead, they were assigned the symbolic responsibility of governing the court women within the palace. While kings were associated with the duty of promoting farming, queens were responsible for sericulture. To this end, they performed a rite of personally growing silkworms and producing silk. Paying daily respects to any living queen dowager and practicing utmost filial piety were also among their essential duties.

The foremost royal task for a queen was giving birth to at least one baby boy to serve as heir to the throne. If his wife failed to produce



Women of noble birth would wear ornaments hung from their coat strings or the waistband of their skirts. These accessories are called *norigae*. This butterfly-shaped *norigae* belonged to Yi Bang-ja, the wife of Crown Prince Uimin. She received it as a gift from the wife of her husband's older brother.

as a son, a king would install up to nine concubines. When a king had many concubines, his relationship with his wife could sour and the queen would suffer from intense jealousy. One case in point is the relationship between the ninth ruler of Joseon, King Seongjong, and his wife (who was later demoted to Lady Yun). The deep-seated conflict between the royal couple was largely credited to the queen's unbearable feeling of betrayal over the king's affection toward his concubines. No matter how beloved by a king, however, a concubine could never match a queen consort in terms of posthumous royal status. The spirit tablet of a queen was enshrined in Jongmyo, while those of concubines were allowed no place in the royal shrine.

Not all queens were treated equally in their burial sites, however. Among the royal tombs of the Joseon Dynasty, there are some where a king was buried together with the wife from his first marriage and others where the dead monarch is interred alongside the spouse from his second or third marriage. Sometimes the tombs of a king and his wife were constructed in separate places.

## The Bumpy Road to Queenship

Joseon queens mostly hailed from families of political influence with reputations for morality. The Cheongju Han and Papyeong Yun families produced many queens in the early Joseon period, as did the Andong Kim and Yeoheung Min families in the later. The Andong Kim family in particular provided queens for a succession of three monarchs in the 19th century (Kings Sunjo, Heonjong, and Cheoljong), resulting in a monopoly on important royal posts by the male relatives of the queens.

The conventional route to becoming a king's wife started with the process for selecting the wife of the crown prince. A three-stage competition was held among a group of candidates mostly in their teens. The six candidates selected in the first round were narrowed down to three in the second. The future crown princess was selected in the third round. The crown princess would naturally be elevated to queen when her husband assumed the throne. Over the course of the Joseon era, however, there were only six queens who obtained their status through this process: Queen Jeongsun (wife of King Danjong, the sixth monarch), Lady Sin (wife of Prince Yeonsan, the 10th monarch), Queen Inseong (wife of King Injong, the 12th monarch), Queen Myeongseong (wife of King Hyeonjong, the 18th monarch), Queen Ingyeong (wife of King Sukjong, the 19th monarch), and Queen Seonui (wife of King Gyeongjong, the 20th monarch).

Sustained political conflicts over the succession to the throne frequently prevented this conventional course of action from progressing smoothly. Often, it was the second son of an outgoing king, his grandson, or a son of his concubine who took the throne instead of the crown prince. The wife of the first son of King Taejong, the third ruler of Joseon, was demoted from her crown princess status when her husband lost his position as heir to the throne to his younger brother. When Crown Prince Uigyeong died prematurely, his wife (the mother of King Seongjong) had to renounce her crown princess status. The wife of Crown Prince Sohyeon, the first son of King

Injo (the 16th monarch of Joseon), was not simply stripped of her royal position, but was put to death when her husband died for an unknown reason. When Crown Prince Sado (a son of King Yeongjo, the 21st monarch of Joseon) died tragically, his wife Lady Hyegyong also lost her position as crown princess. Queen Myeongseong, the wife of King Hyeonjong, the 18th ruler of Joseon, was the only queen of Joseon who passed through the full spectrum of female royal authority, becoming crown princess, queen, and finally queen dowager. This shows how bumpy the road from crown princess to queen could be.

The political challenges facing a queen's family could also be severe. King Taejong took the lives of the younger brothers of his wife, Queen Wongyeong. He also executed the father-in-law of his son, King Sejong. Becoming queen was a risky business that could place family members' lives on the line.

Rising to queenship was no guarantee of holding on to the position. Many Joseon queens were ousted from their royal status in the midst of political upheaval. When King Sejo usurped the throne from King Danjong, the latter's wife, Queen Jeongsun, had to step down as well. Losing her royal title, she came to make a living by dyeing cloth near today's Changsin-dong in Seoul. When her husband's royal title was restored 230 years later during the reign of King Sukjong (r. 1674–1720), she was also reinstated as queen. The wives of the dethroned 10th and 15th monarchs of Joseon—Prince Yeonsan and Prince Gwanghae—also shared the fate of their husbands.

## “Ruling from behind the Bamboo Screen”

A queen consort could gain an opportunity to wield political influence if she became queen mother or queen grandmother. It was customary that when a king took the throne before the age of 20, his mother or grandmother would serve as his regent until his coming of age. As public participation in politics was prohibited to women, the queen mother or queen grandmother ruled from behind a

bamboo screen while sitting next to the king; this practice was called *suryem cheongjeong*, or “ruling from behind the bamboo screen.” The most famous figure in this regard was Queen Munjeong, who acted as regent for her 12-year-old son, King Myeongjong (the 13th ruler of Joseon). In the 19th century, Queen Jeongsun, Queen Sunwon, and Queen Sinjeong all served as regents (respectively for King Sunjo, King Heonjong and King Cheoljong, and King Gojong). This political practice could lead to issues over the political dominance of the governing dowager's family.

The royal palaces of the Joseon Dynasty—Gyeongbokgung, Changdeokgung, Changgyeonggung, Gyeonghuigung, and Deoksugung—teem with the legacies of Joseon queens. Gyeongchunjeon Hall at Changgyeonggung is the site where Lady Hyegyong gave birth to King Jeongjo and wrote *Records in Silence (Hanjungnok)*, a classic work of royal literature. Located behind the queen's living quarters in Gyeongbokgung, Geonsungak Hall was constructed upon a royal order from King Sejong as a site for childbirth by his wife Queen Soheon. Nakseonjae Hall at Changdeokgung served as home to the last royal ladies of Joseon—Queen Sunjeong, Princess Deokhye, and Yi Bang-ja—until the final days of their lives.

For visitors to the royal palaces of Joseon, recalling the lives of Joseon queens—seemingly rosy, but actually filled with vicissitudes—can be a good way to more fully appreciate the places once inhabited by these royal ladies.



The wife of Emperor Sunjong (Empress Sunjeong) in the middle with court ladies after a royal sericulture rite in 1906

CHANGING TIMES

# The Cinema Craze of the 1910s

Text by Kim Seung-goo, Professor of Korean Literature, Sejong University

Photos by the National Library of Korea and Seoul Museum of History



The 1915 American serial *The Broken Coin* was adapted into a novel in the 1920s in Korea. The cover of the novel *The Broken Coin* shows Francis Ford and Grace Cunard, who respectively played the male and female leads. (Photo courtesy of the National Library of Korea)

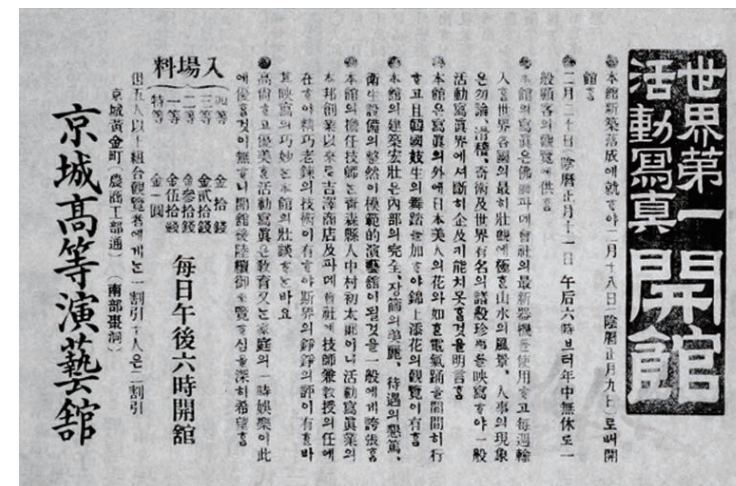
작빅릭데레후 • 레구치기

The most popular pastime among contemporary Koreans is (arguably) watching movies. The history of Korean cinema is not as long as some places. It was only in the early 20th century that moving pictures were introduced to Korea, later than in not only many Western countries, but also than in neighboring China and Japan. The early days of Korean cinema did not feature the luxury of permanent theaters: Films were screened outdoors under a canopy. Short films rather than full-length features were the norm at the theaters of the time.

## The First Theater in Joseon

The modern film industry first entered Korea in the 1910s when the Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater (Gyeongseong godeung yeonyegwan) was established as the first permanent movie venue in Korea. This pioneering theater was built in Namchon, or “Southern Village,” in present-day Seoul. Unlike Bukchon (Northern Village), the traditional residential district in the north of the capital, the Southern Village was an emerging neighborhood for Japanese profit-seekers arriving in their new colony. The Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater, founded and operated by a Japanese entrepreneur, was fundamentally a space for Japanese people. However, entrance by Koreans was not specifically banned, so the cinema can be said to have served—albeit in a very limited manner—as an entertainment space for Koreans. A fixed space dedicated to the screening of films seemed phenomenal to the Koreans of the time, many of whom had an extreme hunger for novelty.

The Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater was followed by the establishment of other theaters and entertainment venues in the Southern Village drawing upon Japanese investment. The boom in theater construction soon spread into the Northern Village as well, as evidenced by the opening of Umigwan Theater



An advertisement for the opening of the Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater in the February 18, 1910 edition of the *Hwangseong Sinmun* (Imperial Capital Newspaper). (Photo courtesy of the National Library of Korea)

in Gwancheol-dong in 1912. Umigwan monopolized cinema in the Northern Village until the establishment of Danseongsa Theater in 1918 and Joseon Theater (Joseon geukjang) in 1922. Although constructed with Japanese capital, Umigwan mainly showed Western movies.

## The Suspenseful Attraction of Serial Films

According to today's categories, the films screened at Korean theaters in the 1910s were mainly documentaries, comedies, action films, and dramas, and most had a short running time. The movie industry possessed a poor social reputation at the time. The Korean elite educated in the conservative social context of Joseon perceived cinema as an overstimulating novelty that could be addictive to children. Therefore, they instructed children to keep away from movie theaters while working to publicly spread a negative impression of cinema. To them, movie theaters served as breeding grounds for juvenile delinquency.

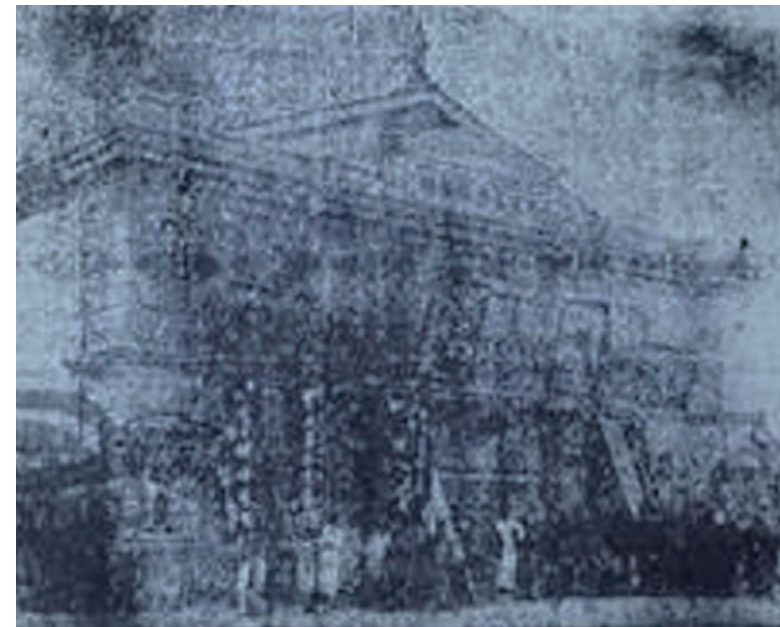
Until the popularity of cinema spread to more learned members of the public in the 1920s, most theater-goers were actually teenagers, and theater programs were specially tailored to their tastes. The most popular type of feature at Northern Village theaters in the 1910s was the serial. Consisting of subdivided chapters that together constitute an integral story, a serial film can be understood as a predecessor of today's miniseries. At the end of each episode, characters find themselves in a perilous situation, arousing suspense and curiosity in the audience and driving them to return for the next episode.

Theater programs from the 1910s indicate that these serial films were widely screened. One example of the serials of the time is *The Broken Coin*. This 1915 American serial was an adventure-mystery series consisting of 22 episodes tailored to children's tastes. It was screened over several months, with two episodes shown at a time. Records indicate that years later a festival was held where whole chapters of *The Broken Coin* were screened successively. It was a binge-watching opportunity for those who had missed episodes. Serial films started to yield their dominance with the development of feature films and the emergence of adults and elite groups as a new audience, ultimately vanishing after the 1920s.

## Understanding Films through Narration

While comedies and action films required little context to understand, documentaries and dramas did. A person known as a *byeonsa* was always present at the theater during this silent film era to serve as a kind of commentator. Taking a position next to the screen, the *byeonsa* offered an advance synopsis of the film and narrated the flow of events and characters during the screening. These commentaries, skillfully delivered in a manner reflecting the characters' genders and ages, were a critical element of the movie-watching experience.

Narrators in Korea topped actors or directors in their importance to the film industry. Renowned narrators rivaled today's top movie stars in fame. As narrators were essential to the screening of films, theaters competed with each other to scout talent. One of the leading narrators active at the time was Seo Sang-ho. Popular



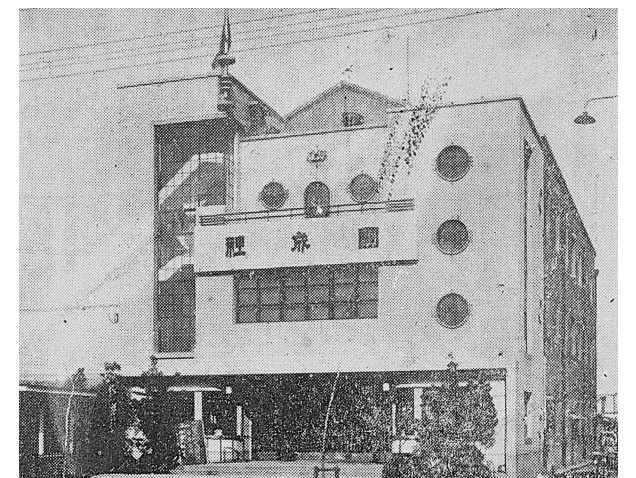
A photo of the exterior of the Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater run in the *Gukmin Sinbo* (*National News*) on October 5, 1909. According to this newspaper, it is presumed that the scheduled opening of the theater for October 1909 was pushed back to February 1910 because of the assassination of Ito Hirobumi.

for witty narration and masterly dance, Seo worked at various theaters as the top narrator in the country.

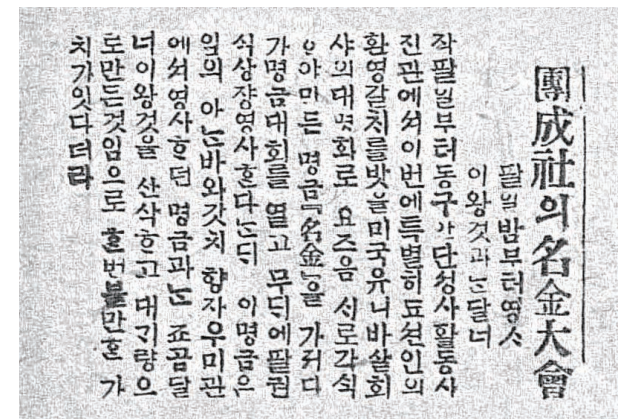
Records indicate that many people decided on which theater to attend based on the narrator rather than the program. This demonstrates the immense popularity narrators enjoyed at the time. People did not dream of becoming the movie's star, but its narrator. With the introduction of sound to movies in Korea in the 1930s, however, the position of narrators within in the film industry was diminished. Although narrators have become a thing of the past, there are still people in the in TV programs playing the role of offering commentaries on films.

Movie theaters in the 1910s were a space for young Koreans. Pre-modern theaters showing traditional performances still existed, but they could not capture the attention of the young Koreans at the front lines of the adoption of modernity. Enjoying motion mechanically projected at theaters, young Koreans could directly experience the scientific principles of modernity and personally witness exotic landscapes, objects, and peoples. As their experience with different ways of life accumulated, Koreans of this rapidly changing era were able to expand their imaginations and view the coming future.

One hundred years later, movie watching is no longer restricted to set times and locations, nor is it limited to large gatherings of people. It has become a defining element of popular culture that can be enjoyed anywhere by private means. Much about the film industry has changed in the meantime, but one thing stands intact: Cinema remains as popular today as it was for Koreans of the 1910s.



The opening of the Seoul High-class Entertainment Theater was immediately followed by the establishment of others. From top to bottom: Umigwan (opened in 1912) and Danseongsa (1918) (Photo courtesy of the Seoul Museum of History)



The September 9, 1920 edition of the *Mael Sinbo* (*Daily News*) announces an event for successively screening all the episodes of *The Broken Coin* at Danseongsa Theater. (Photo courtesy of the National Library of Korea)



Unexchangeable Even for the Three Highest Official Ranks (Samgong bulhwando)  
Kim Hong-do; 1801; light color on silk; 177 x 424.8 cm; collected at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art; designated Treasure No. 2000 on October 4, 2018

# The History and Meaning of Heritage Designation

**Text by** Hwang Jung-yon, Cultural Heritage Administration

**Photos by** Cultural Heritage Administration

On October 4, 2018 a painting by the late-Joseon artist Kim Hong-do (1745–c. 1806) entitled *Unexchangeable Even for the Three Highest Official Ranks (Samgong bulhwando)* was designated Treasure No. 2000. The designation number reflects its order of designation, meaning that the number of Treasures in South Korea hit the 2000

mark at this point. Other designations exist in South Korea besides the status of Treasure, such as National Treasure. With so many designated historical sites and items now in place, it is worth sparing the time to investigate the South Korean heritage designation system. Taking advantage of the occasion of a special exhibition to be held

in this June on the roughly 100 Treasures and National Treasures listed from 2017–2019, this article explores the history and meaning of the heritage designation system of South Korea with a focus on Treasures and National Treasures.

## Heritage Designation in Korea

Heritage designation is an effective tool to provide historical objects and sites of great significance with permanent institutional protection. The legal provisions establishing South Korea's heritage designation system were conceived during the Japanese colonial period (1910–45) and, after several revisions in the years following liberation, were compiled into the Cultural Heritage Protection Act in 1962. In the time since, this framework law on heritage protection has been steadily amended in response to sociocultural changes to eventually take on its current form. Heritage designation is performed both by the central and local (city or provincial) governments. These two levels of designation complement each other since important legacies of the past that the national heritage list cannot accommodate can be registered on local lists and protected by the pertinent regional governments.

In the Cultural Heritage Protection Act, “cultural heritage” is classified as “artificially or naturally formed national, ethnic, or world heritage of significant historic, artistic, academic, or scenic value.” According to this definition, the central government empowers the Cultural Heritage Administration to designate heritage sites and objects of significant historic, artistic, or academic value as National Treasure, Treasure, Historic Site, Natural Monument, or National Folklore Cultural Heritage. In the case of sites with exceptional scenic beauty, the designation Scenic Site can be applied as well. In addition, important nonmaterial legacies of the past are also protected at the national level under the designation National Intangible Cultural Heritage. A difference in status exists between the seemingly similar designations Treasure and National Treasure: National

Treasures hold greater significance than Treasures in terms of their rarity and value for humanity.

A ranked system like this exists only in South Korea and Japan. South Korea and Japan are also the only two countries to extend government protection to movable objects such as paintings, sculptures, and documents. Other countries, including China, the United States, and the European nations, operate their own heritage protection systems, but their protection only applies to historic sites and buildings. When Japan shifted from the term “Treasure” to Important Heritage Property following a legal amendment in the 1940s, South Korea became the only country to use the terms “Treasure” and “National Treasure.”

## History of Treasures and National Treasures

The history of Treasures and National Treasures in South Korea can be divided into three periods. The first spans the years under Japanese colonialism from 1933 to 1945 when heritage designation was first introduced in the country. This period is also marked by the plundering of Korean cultural properties by Japanese colonialists.

Japan began preparing legal provisions to ensure heritage protection within its territory and prevent the export of its cultural properties abroad in the late 19th century. It applied these heritage protection rules and regulations to Korea when it fell under Japanese control in 1910. The Historic Sites and Relics Preservation Rules were prepared in 1916 to identify cultural properties throughout Korea and list them on a register. This process of heritage identification and registration under colonial rule wreaked irreparable damage on Korean cultural heritage, with numerous cultural properties



**Top\_** The transfer of the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok in 1916 by Japanese archaeologists

**Below\_** Seobongchong Tomb in Gyeongju was excavated in 1926 during Japanese colonial rule. The Governor-General of Korea invited Swedish crown prince Gustaf VI Adolf, who was travelling in Asia at the time, to participate in the excavation. Appropriate protective measures were not taken at the excavation site and large quantities of excavated artifacts were displaced. This is considered one of the worst cases of colonial damage to Korean heritage.

being looted or displaced. The Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok, an invaluable artifact from Silla currently designated National Treasure No. 29 was transferred to a new site in 1916. The excavation of Seobongchong Tomb in Gyeongju, the long-time capital of Silla, was carried out with the participation of the visiting crown prince of Sweden in 1926. These are examples of the harm Korean cultural heritage suffered under Japanese colonial rule.

In 1933 the Act on the Preservation of Treasures, Historic Sites, Scenic Sites, and Natural Monuments of Korea was enacted, endowing the Governor-General of Korea with authority over the management of Korean cultural heritage. In reflection of the doctrine underpinning Japanese colonialism that Japan and its colony Korea were a single entity, the same designation titles used in Japan were introduced into Korea—Historic Sites, Scenic Sites, and Natural Monuments. To reflect the status distinction between the two countries, however, the designation National Treasure that was applied to Japanese cultural properties of greatest importance was demoted to Treasure in the Korean system. Under this law, 12 designation sessions took place during 1934–43, naming 419 Treasures, 145 Historic Sites, five Historic/Scenic Sites, 146 Natural Monuments, and two Scenic Sites/Natural Monuments.

The second period lasted from the years of rule by the U.S. Military Government (1945–48) until the enactment of the Cultural Heritage Protection Act in 1962. This was a transitional period for the heritage designation system. During these 17 years, a series of attempts was made in liberated Korea to devise new legal systems to replace the legal provisions on heritage established under colonial rule. Although these efforts failed to bear fruit, a foundation was laid for a new system through such efforts as preparing criteria for obtaining national designations and preparing a legal basis for designating both Treasures and National Treasures.



The third period began with the enactment of the Cultural Heritage Protection Act in 1962 and the establishment of the Cultural Heritage Committee as an advisory organ. The first law on heritage conservation ever issued by the South Korean government, the Cultural Heritage Protection Act includes provisions regulating the criteria and process for conferring and revoking the titles Treasure and National Treasure, the management of records on designated cultural properties, and the provisional designation of important cultural properties. The overall formulations at the time have mainly been maintained to the present.

Heritage designation was made subject to prior deliberation by the Cultural Heritage Committee. The first act of the heritage advisory committee was to endow 116 colonial-era Treasures with National Treasure status on December 20, 1962. Sungnyemun, the south gate in the Seoul city wall that had been designated Treasure No. 1 by Japanese authorities, became National Treasure No. 1 of South Korea. The advisory committee also elected to maintain the Treasure status of about 400 heritage sites and objects and to suspend the decision on whether to offer designations to the 67 properties located in North Korea that had been named Treasures during the colonial era. About a month later

**Heritage designation is an effective tool to provide historical objects and sites of great significance with permanent institutional protection.**



Left\_ Sungnyemun Gate, National Treasure No. 1  
Right\_ Heunginjimun Gate, Treasure No. 1



State Seal of the Emperor  
Korean Empire; jade; 95.2 x 94 cm; collected at National Palace Museum of Korea; designated Treasure No. 1618-2 on January 2, 2017

on January 21, 1963 the Cultural Heritage Committee assigned the status of Treasure to another 423 cultural properties. On March 1, 1971 the committee listed 52 cultural properties located in North Korea (including the South Gate in Kaesong) in an effort to organize the status of cultural resources in preparation for possible national reunification. All in all, 2,194 historical sites and objects are currently designated as Treasures and 345 have been named National Treasures.

## Treasures and National Treasures Today

Certain trends can be identified in Treasure and National Treasure designation. During the 1960s–70s, objects excavated from archaeological sites made up the lion's share of new Treasures and National Treasures, such as the Gold Crown from the North Mound of Hwangnamdaechong Tomb (National Treasure No. 191) and the Great Gilt-bronze Incense Burner of Baekje (National Treasure No. 287). In the 1980s–90s there was a concentration of designation of scientific heritage (for example, when the Celestial Chart Stone was designated as National Treasure No. 228 and the Clepsydra of Changgyeonggung Palace as National Treasure No. 229), architectural heritage (Geunjeongjeon Hall of Gyeongbokgung Palace as National Treasure No. 223), and other heritage areas that had not previously received due attention. Awareness was also growing during this period regarding books and documents in private ownership.

Ever since the 2000s, efforts have been made to actively identify new sites and objects for national designation and develop the value of existing designated properties. The Cultural Heritage Administration does not wait for requests for designation to be submitted



by local governments or individuals, but actively seeks out cultural properties to designate through both its own research endeavors and partnerships with other organizations. The Cultural Heritage Administration also elevates designated sites and objects to National Treasure status after discovering greater value in them than had been previously understood. Examples of its investigations include its blanket research into Joseon palaces and tombs, Buddhist temples, Neo-Confucian academies, and *uigwe* protocols; public requests for designation in such categories of heritage as moon-shaped porcelain jars, old maps, portraits, and calligraphic works; and partner agreements with the National Museum of Korea and Kansong Art Museum. As a result of this active administration by the Korean heritage authorities, the disproportionate concentration on archaeological relics and historical documents during the previous decades has been mitigated, bringing diversity and balance to the body of Treasures and National Treasures in terms of the thematic focus of designated items and the historical periods represented.

This June's special exhibition organized in cooperation between the Cultural Heritage Administration and National Museum of Korea features a series of Treasures and National Treasures reflecting this positive trend in heritage designation. The following are a few examples from this exhibition that reflect the efforts to determine the value of returned artifacts and upgrade designated properties to National Treasure status: the four volumes of *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* collected at the Jeoksangsan Mountain Library that have been newly included in the assemblage of volumes of *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* designated as National Treasure No. 151; the Reliquaries from the Wangheungsa Temple Site, which has been promoted from Treasure to National Treasure No. 327; and

**Top\_** Gold Crown from the North Mound of Hwangnamdaechong Tomb Silla; 27.5 cm high; collected at the National Museum of Korea; designated National Treasure No. 191 on December 7, 1978

**Below\_** Great Gilt-bronze Incense Burner of Baekje 7th century (Baekje); gilt-bronze; 64 cm high; collected at the Buyeo National Museum; designated National Treasure No. 287 on May 30, 1996

**Although sometimes still in private ownership, heritage sites and objects designated as Treasures or National Treasures can all be thought of as truly belonging to the people.**

**Top\_** Reliquaries from the Wangheungsa Temple Site 577 (Baekje); bronze and silver; 6.8–10.3 cm high; collected at the Buyeo National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage; designated National Treasure No. 327 on June 26, 2019

**Below\_** Geunjeongjeon Hall of Gyeongbokgung Palace, designated National Treasure No. 223 on January 8, 1985



the State Seal of the Emperor, a national seal of the Korean Empire that was returned to South Korea and designated Treasure No. 1618-2. Another interesting item on exhibit is the Stone Standing Maitreya Bodhisattva of Gwanchoksa Temple. This popularly approachable stone bodhisattva, sometimes called an "ugly stone Buddha," was reevaluated based on the delicate expression of Goryeo aesthetics hidden behind its rough appearance. It was accordingly upgraded in heritage status from Treasure to National Treasure No. 323, generating considerable public attention.

Also on display are Buddhist woodblocks that were designated as a result of research initiated in 2014 on the woodblocks collected at Buddhist temples and drawing upon the results of the previous research on Buddhist artifacts.



Additionally, there are 22 artifacts that have been designated through the partnership agreement with the Kansong Art Museum. These 22 artifacts include painterly and calligraphic works by renowned Joseon artists such as Jeong Seon, Kim Hong-do, Sin Yun-bok, and Kim Jeong-hui.

Meanwhile, designation does not always directly result in the development of an item's heritage value and its protection. Sometimes it provokes controversy regarding provenance and authenticity, but such controversy can be translated into useful reforms to the relevant policy. One example is the turtle ship gun that was designated National Treasure No. 274 in 1992. When it was identified as a forgery in 1996, it was deprived of National Treasure status and a new step was introduced in the designation process to allow the collection of pertinent public opinions. Items under deliberation for designation are published in the official gazette for at least 30 days before being subject to deliberation by the Cultural Heritage Committee. The Cultural Heritage Administration has also made it mandatory when requesting the designation of a cultural property to submit documents regarding its acquisition. Scientific research has also been institutionalized as a component of the designation process.

Providing historical sites and items with the designation of Treasure or National Treasure is a heritage policy of immense importance, not only because it provides a legal basis for the permanent protection to the pertinent cultural properties, but also because it testifies to the cultural history of Korea. The Cultural Heritage Administration is working hard to enhance the transparency and credibility of the heritage designation process. Its strengthened comparative research on similar heritage sites or items, institutionalization of scientific research, and inclusion of sociocultural interpretive analysis are all examples of the heritage agency's efforts



**Left\_** Stone Standing Maitreya Bodhisattva of Gwanchoksa Temple  
Ca. 968 (Goryeo); granite; 18.2 m high; located in Nonsan,  
Chungcheongnam-do; designated National Treasure 323 on April 20,  
2018

**Middle\_** Beauty (Miindo)  
Sin Yun-bok; 18th century (Joseon); light color on silk; 114.0 x 45.5 cm;  
collected at the Kansong Art Museum; designated Treasure No. 1973 on  
February 22, 2018

**Right\_** Hanging Painting of the Vairocana Buddha Triad at Bongseonsa  
Temple  
1735 (Joseon); color on paper; 785 cm high; collected at Bongseonsa  
Temple; designated Treasure No. 1792 on December 27, 2012



in this regard.

Although sometimes still in private ownership, heritage sites and objects designated as Treasures or National Treasures can all be thought of as truly belonging to the people. Cultural heritage reaches its fullest potential when it is openly enjoyed and appreciated by the public. Based on this principle, the Cultural Heritage Administration and National Museum of Korea have been organizing exhibitions on designated cultural properties. The special exhibition

being held this June is one part of this joint endeavor to promote the appreciation of designated heritage among a wider audience. It is hoped that this special exhibition will provide an invaluable opportunity not only to better understand the heritage designation system of South Korea, but to consider how to best transmit today's cultural heritage to future generations.

### The National Designation of Sutra Copying Underway

According to the Cultural Heritage Administration, the process to designate the skill of sutra copying as National Intangible Cultural Heritage is currently underway. The practice of sutra copying was first introduced into Korea during the Three Kingdoms period as a method for disseminating Buddhist texts, but it was gradually developed into an act for cultivating merits. The ink transcription of the Avatamsaka Sutra (Flower Garland Sutra) from the Unified Silla era designated National Treasure No. 196 is the oldest extant artifact in Korea testifying to the sutra copying practice. During the Goryeo Dynasty, a time when Buddhism served as the national religion, there was an

independent government agency dedicated to sutra copying. Copies of Buddhist texts were produced in the Goryeo era using the most advanced techniques and materials of the time. Copies done in gold or silver—like the gold transcription of the Avatamsaka Sutra designated National Treasure No. 235—were produced in large quantities. The art of sutra copying in Goryeo was so advanced that hundreds of such experts were dispatched to China at the request of the Yuan Dynasty.

The art of sutra copying requires 10 different skills, including color formation with gold powder, glue making, surface treatment of paper, writing text by hand, and decorating the cover. It also demands expert knowledge of calligraphy, Chinese characters, Buddhist theory, and painting. Maintaining intense concentration over long periods is also a must. Kim Gyeong-ho, who excels in these fundamental skills, has been



selected as the final candidate to become the national master of the skill of sutra copying. Over the last 40 years, Kim has dedicated himself to studying the art of sutra copying—its materials, form, and content—through historical documents and objects and has given his all to transform what he learned from his studies into practical techniques. During the evaluation process, his mastery of representing traditional writing styles characteristic of sutra copying and the dexterous fluent brushwork of his painting were highly appreciated.

### Audiovisual Visits to Korean Cultural Heritage

A special show has been programmed for K-Heritage TV, an internet-based broadcasting channel operated in conjunction by the Cultural Heritage Administration and Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation. Entitled *Audiovisual Travel for this Spring*, the special show presents the seasonal changes taking place at heritage sites within a wider natural setting. It is designed to help alleviate the distress people might be suffering under the protracted influence of COVID-19.

Consisting of 44 episodes on seven themes, the show offers an opportunity for people mainly staying at home these days to appreciate the beauty of Korean heritage sites—including royal palaces, islands, and traditional gardens—without physically traveling. It also includes 360-degree virtual

reality videos of difficult-to-visit sites such as Yongcheon Cave in Jeju, Baengnokdam Lake on top of Mt. Hallasan, and the Munseom and Beomseom Islands Natural Reserve. Also available on K-Heritage TV are ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos providing the sounds of, for example, silk weaving and the wind blowing through an old house.

It is hoped that the special show on heritage visits and the ASMR videos will contribute to lightening the burden on people during this global crisis. They are available on the webpage of K-Heritage TV (<http://www.k-heritage.tv>) and its YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/koreanheritage>). The Cultural Heritage Administration and Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation will carry on with their efforts to bring cultural heritage closer to people by producing and disseminating approachable audiovisual materials.



# Have Korean Art?

The Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation is seeking to purchase Korean artworks. A detailed schedule and application guidelines will be announced in July.

Contact  
[acquisition@okchf.or.kr](mailto:acquisition@okchf.or.kr)  
[www.overseaschf.or.kr](http://www.overseaschf.or.kr)



*Portrait of Kang No* (Joseon period, 1879)  
 Purchased from a private collection in the United States in 2017 and transferred to the National Museum of Korea