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고 고 하 다

Compared to words *jeong* (情, “attachment”) and *han* (恨, “resentment”) which are somewhat familiar to foreigners, *gogohada* is a lesser-known concept. However, it is important for understanding the sensibility of traditional Korean culture, especially that of Joseon period literati elite. It also serves as an interesting introduction for foreigners to the sensibility—common to Confucianism and Buddhism—that emerges from the stoic position of cultivating character and refinement detached from the mundane world.



dignified,
refined

The Pine Tree: A Symbol of Stoic Grace, Rooted in Korea



My father spent his entire life building traditional Korean houses and structures, and I spent my childhood playing with carpentry tools. Naturally, I became a carpenter as well. To a carpenter, wood is everything. Many are drawn to the profession out of their love for wood. If you are a carpenter in Korea, especially one working in traditional architecture, you cannot help but marvel at the beauty of pine trees.

The pine tree has long inhabited the natural landscape of the Korean Peninsula and dwelt in the hearts of its people. Korea's aesthetic tradition has always emphasized harmony with nature, and the pine tree—evergreen throughout the seasons—symbolizes enduring vitality. Accordingly, it has been revered as a symbol of integrity, uprightness, and stoic grace—qualities cherished as essential virtues in human character.

The symbolism of the pine tree is deeply embedded in various aspects of Korean culture, from everyday life to the arts. In the late Joseon period, Jeong Seon's true-view landscape paintings of Geumgangsán and Inwangsán Mountains prominently featured







pine trees standing tall amid the vast natural scenery, symbolizing the upright character to which scholars aspired, as well as the harmonious relationship between nature and humanity. Literati paintings and poetry used the pine tree as a central motif to represent constancy and integrity. Even the ink used for calligraphy and painting was made from pine soot, further reinforcing the connection between nature and artistic expression. Through the pine tree, artists expressed the human ideals they saw mirrored in the natural world. In traditional Korean architecture, the pine tree holds meaning far beyond its functional role in building. As a native

species well-suited to Korea's climate, pine is durable, resistant to humidity, and conducive to ventilation. In particular, *yuksong*—also known as “Joseon pine”—is distinguished by its deep reddish bark and fine, dense grain. Due to its stability and the beauty of its grain, pine was the preferred choice for interior columns and beams in traditional *hanok* houses and was also central to palace architecture. It embodies the traditional architectural philosophy of seamless integration with the natural world. This, along with its ability to thrive even in harsh environments and enrich its fragrance over time, has endowed pine with deep

Jeong Seon, *Old Pine Tree*,
National Museum of Korea

Pine and Cranes, National
Museum of Korea



symbolic meanings and cultural value. Given its symbolic and practical significance, pine remains the most important element in traditional architecture. When Naksansa Temple, a historic site built in the 11th year of King Munmu's reign (671) during the Silla Dynasty, was destroyed by a major wildfire in Yangyang, Gangwon-do, in 2005, securing the right yuksong pine was key to its restoration. In Buddhism, the color red symbolizes spiritual discipline, compassion, and perseverance, further elevating the significance of yuksong, the red pine. For this reason, renowned temples such as Bulguksa, Haeinsa, and Tongdosa feature magnificent yuksong in

their major halls.

When I was working on restoring Naksansa's Binillu Pavilion, we struggled for five years to find the right wood with matching dimensions. Then, by chance, two pine trees were felled by a strong wind. Both were bent in exactly the same way, making them perfect for the restoration. While design and craftsmanship are important, especially since major structures rely on traditional joinery, finding quality pine is the most critical. As in this case, it is often a matter of luck for a carpenter to encounter the right materials. Trees cannot be artificially produced; they grow according to the natural order over time. Thus, hanok construction relies



Irworobongdo, National
Palace Museum of Korea

heavily on the forces of nature. Pine trees are also deeply rooted in palace architecture, with palaces today serving as popular tourist destinations for many international visitors to Korea. The red hue of yuksong represented dignity, stability, and authority within the royal court, and thus pine trees were also planted around the royal tombs of the Joseon Dynasty to symbolize the nobility and lasting legacy of the royal family. This symbolism is further emphasized by the deep red pine trees depicted in *Irworobongdo* (painting of the sun, moon, and five mountain peaks on a six-panel folding screen), located behind the throne in Gyeongbokgung's Geunjeongjeon Hall.

In hanok architecture, pine has preserved the dignified elegance and beauty of structures over the centuries, harmonizing with Korea's natural environment through its unique blend of aesthetic appeal and durability. Beyond architecture, the image of the pine tree reflects the ideals of integrity, loyalty, resilience, spirit, and vitality—qualities that have shaped the lives of the Korean people. Embodying the virtues Korean society aspires to, the pine tree is an essential part of the nation's art and culture. Deeply intertwined with our lives over generations, the Korean pine tree remains a cherished part of our beautiful heritage.

Jongmyo:

A Symbol of the Foundation and
Legitimacy of the Joseon Dynasty



Photographed by Kang Min-jung, National Gugak Center





Jongmyo is the principal shrine of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), built to enshrine the ancestral tablets of past kings and queens and to serve as a venue for royal ancestral rites. As such, it symbolizes the foundation and legitimacy of the Joseon Dynasty, which adopted Confucianism as its governing ideology. Upon his accession as King Taejo, the dynasty's founder, Yi Seong-gye, criticized the ancestral shrine system of the preceding Goryeo Dynasty its inconsistency inconsistent with classical literature on Confucian rites (*yegyeong*) and for its location outside the city walls. He therefore declared his intent to reform the system in line with proper Confucian principles. In the following years, Joseon developed its own Jongmyo system, drawing not only on Confucian texts such as *Yegi (Book of Rites)*, but also on the ritual practices of previous dynasties and carefully considering the realities of time. Furthermore, precise protocols were developed to regulate various ceremonial procedures at Jongmyo, including the ritual implements, attire, and court music used during the ceremonies. Jongmyo's two memorial halls contain multiple spirit chambers, each enshrining the spirit tablet of a king or queen. According to the principle that the west signifies higher status, King Taejo's tablet was placed in the westernmost chamber of the Main Hall (Jeongjeon), with the tablets of subsequent kings arranged progressively toward the east. Initially, Joseon adopted a five-shrine system, whereby only five kings could be enshrined in Jeongjeon. Once all five chambers were filled, the oldest tablet, excluding that of King Taejo, had to be relocated to the Hall of Eternal Peace (Yeongnyeongjeon). However, certain kings,

including Taejong, Sejong, and Sejo, were regarded as exceptionally meritorious, and their tablets were retained in the main hall. After multiple expansions, the main hall grew to include nineteen chambers, forming a symmetrical structure with a long row of chambers extending on both sides. Sasiye(四時祭), the seasonal rites, and Naphyang(臘享), the year-end rite, were collectively known as Ohyangdaeje(五享大祭), or the Five Grand Rites. These were among the most important large-scale state ceremonies performed at Jongmyo. Barring exceptional circumstances, the king would personally attend these ceremonies to perform the rituals alongside civil and military officials, as well as with members of the royal family. The expansiveness of the two-tiered stone terrace, *Woldae* (月臺, "Moon Terrace"), which stretches out in front of the Main Hall reflects its function as a ceremonial space designed to accommodate large gatherings. The surface of the terrace comprises broad, flat gray stones (*bakseok*) laid together, with black bricks embedded along key areas to indicate the paths and positions of key participants in the ceremonies. The *Jongmyo Ritual Protocol Folding Screen (Jongmyo Chinje Gyujae Doseol Byeongpung)*, a 19th-century cultural artifact housed at the National Palace Museum of Korea, provides a detailed visual and textual record of the various stages of the ancestral rites performed at Jongmyo. It depicts the preparation, execution, and arrangement of ritual offerings, the placement of ritual implements, and the positions and procedures for the officiants during the ceremonies. One of the paintings on the folding screen,

entitled *Ohyang Chinjae Banchado*, illustrates the arrangement of officiants, civil and military officials, royal family members, musicians, and dancers for the Five Grand Rites attended by the king. Although the king and crown prince are not depicted, their positions are symbolized by two rectangles: one on the path extending from the eastern gate of the Main Hall to Woldae, representing the king, and the other, just below, signifying the crown prince.

Musicians dressed in red garments are positioned on both the upper and lower terraces, playing instruments, while a group of dancers performs the ritual formation dance (*ilmu*) in front of the musicians on the western side of the lower terrace. During the rites, each stage of offering food and wine to the royal ancestral spirits was accompanied by instrumental music and dancing to songs praising the virtues of past kings.

A notable aspect of the Jongmyo ritual music (Jeryeak) is that “Botaepyeong” and “Jeongdaeop”—music and songs composed by King Sejong and based on the indigenous musical tradition of *hyangak*—have continued to be performed since 1464 (the 10th year of King Sejo’s reign).

Another painting on the folding screen, this one entitled *Ohyang Chinjae Seolchando*, illustrates the arrangement of ritual vessels used during the five grand rites. In great detail, it depicts the placement of vessels for food offerings in front of each spirit chamber within the Main Hall and those placed outside, such as jars of wine and a variety of vessels used to slaughter, cook, and serve sacrificial animals such as cattle, sheep, and pigs.

The ritual vessels used at Jongmyo preserve the centuries-old characteristics of ancient ritual

culture that originated in China during the early dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou. This continuity reflects efforts made in the early Joseon period to revive the ancient ritual protocols of the Zhou Dynasty, drawing from ritual manuals and reference texts published during the Song Dynasty and investigating past precedents. When compiling new ritual manuals, such as *Jongmyo Uigwe* (*Protocols of Jongmyo*), illustrated sections on ritual vessels (*jegi doseol*) were always included to serve as guidelines for their production. These efforts served to ensure that the traditions of ritual vessels established in early Joseon remain preserved to the present day.

Jongmyo, along with its royal ancestral rites (Jongmyo Jerye) and ritual music (Jeryeak), has been internationally recognized for its cultural value. It was inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1999, and subsequently in 2001, Jongmyo Jerye and Jeryeak were listed as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Additionally, the royal seals (*eobo*) and royal books (*eocheak*) enshrined in the spirit chambers of both Jeongjeon and Yeongnyeongjeon were inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Heritage Register in 2017.

Although the ritual vessels used in the Jongmyo rites have not been inscribed, they nevertheless represent the pinnacle of ancient Confucian ritual art in East Asia. Collectively, the heritage of Jongmyo—including its architecture, rituals, music, and the various ritual implements—reflects not only the universality of East Asian traditions but also the unique cultural identity of the Joseon Dynasty.



The Royal Ancestral Ritual in the Jongmyo Shrine and its Music, National Gugak Center



Dongji Patjuk:

A Dish to Bring Hope and Warmth in the Cold of Winter



The 24 solar terms divide the year into equal parts, marking the ebb and flow of the seasons and comprise a tradition deeply woven into the fabric of East Asian life. Each of these solar terms gave rise to unique traditional cultural practices. Dongji (Winter Solstice), the 22nd term, has been designated as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage for its significance as one of Korea's major traditional holidays, along with Seollal (Lunar New Year), Daeboreum (First Full Moon Festival), Hansik (Cold Food Festival), Dano (Spring Festival), and Chuseok (Harvest Moon Festival). Dongji falls on or around December 22 in the solar calendar and marks the longest night of the year.

After Dongji, the days slowly begin to outlast the nights. Once the deepest darkness yields to light, people sense that the beginning of spring (Ipchun) is not too far away. Dongji symbolizes a moment when endings meet new beginnings, and people viewed it as the unofficial start of the new year. For this reason, government offices and merchants made sure new calendars were printed before Dongji. As thoughts of the new year began to take shape and the

Photographed by crowdpic.







official first day approached, calendars became the season's most cherished gift.

In the days of the Goryeo kingdom, Yi Gok (1298–1351) vividly captured the essence of this special day in his poem *Dongji*: “The streets resound with the voices of vendors selling new year calendars. Dongji, indeed, is a day as special as Seollal.” The poem opens with the narrator stirred from sleep by the soft knock of a neighbor at the door, bringing *patjuk* (red bean porridge) to share. Just as in Yi Gok’s poem, red bean porridge is the signature dish of Dongji, traditionally referred to as “*Dongji patjuk*”.

Since the tradition of making red bean porridge dates back to the Goryeo Dynasty, each household developed its own unique method. Some just simmered whole red beans for hours, others strained the boiled beans to extract a smooth paste. Some added rice or rice flour after the beans had softened; others added cooked rice from the outset, simmering everything together. For an even silkier texture, some families strained the mixture multiple times.

The tradition of Dongji *patjuk* continued into the Joseon period. People in Joseon offered the porridge at household shrines and placed bowls of it throughout the home, including in rooms, on *jangdokdae* (platforms for fermentation crocks), and in barns. Once the porridge cooled, family members gathered to share it. In rural areas, where food was often scarce in winter, sharing *patjuk* became a meaningful way for the community to connect.

Over time, a belief developed that red beans symbolize brightness or were able to ward off evil spirits. Yu Deuk-gong (1748–1807) documented these beliefs in his *Gyeongdojapi* (*Miscellaneous*

Records of the Capital), noting, “On Dongji, people add *saeal* - glutinous rice flour balls shaped like birds eggs - to the porridge and sweeten it with honey. The porridge is also sprinkled on door panels to chase away bad energy.” This record reveals that by this period, adding *saeal* (or *saealsim*) to Dongji *patjuk* had become a common practice. Some households also added honey to the porridge to enhance its subtle sweetness and prepared it to varying textures that suited their preferences.

Buinpilji (*Essential Knowledge for Women*), a Joseon-era publication by Bingheogak Yi (1759–1824), and intellectual of her time, describes a method of enhancing the sweetness of red bean porridge by simmering *daechu* (jujube, a type of Korean date) along with the beans. The practice of adding *saealsim* is recorded here as well. Although Dongji *patjuk* has remained a part of daily Korean life, the conditions and meanings surrounding it have changed over time. The belief that the porridge’s red color symbolizes brightness and repels negative energy has largely faded. Yet, Dongji *patjuk* is still cherished today as a simple, subtly sweet winter dish that warms both body and soul.

Traditions change, but there is one aspect of Dongji *patjuk* traditions I hope will endure. Just a generation ago, if someone in the neighborhood could not afford a bowl of *patjuk* on Dongji, others would quietly leave some at their door. As one year gave way to the next, could there have been a more thoughtful gesture? Dongji *patjuk* was never merely a seasonal delicacy; it has also represented a heartfelt expression of warmth, served in a single bowl.

Jeongdok Public Library: A Fountain of Wisdom for One Hundred Years



Nestled between the royal palaces of Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung, Bukchon was once a prestigious residential area, prized for its auspicious location. From the elevated terrain one can gaze northward to Bugaksan Mountain and southward to Cheonggyecheon Stream and Namsan Mountain.

At the heart of Bukchon, on a low hill, stands the Jeongdok Public Library on the site of the “Former Kyunggi High School, Seoul,” a national cultural heritage site. Until the late Joseon Dynasty, this site was home to prominent families. There, the first modern middle school was established in 1900, during the days of the Korean Empire. Originally named simply Gwallip (“Public”) Middle School, it was renamed Hansung Public High School in 1906 and underwent further name changes during the colonial period: Kyungsung High School (1910), Kyungsung First Middle School (1911), and Kyunggi Public Middle School (1938).

After Korea’s liberation, Kyunggi Public Middle School was divided into Kyunggi Middle School and Kyunggi High School. During the Korean War, the U.S. Army took control of the school

Photographed by Kang Min-jung



buildings, which in turn were reclaimed by Kyunggi High School in 1956. In 1976, the school relocated to Samseong-dong, south of the Hangang River, leaving behind only a trace of its long history as the birthplace of Korea's modern secondary education. In 1977, the site came under the administration of Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education and reopened as the Jeongdok Public Library, carrying on its legacy of education, now in a new role.

The Jeongdok Public Library area has continued to evolve since establishment of the first government-run middle school in Korea. In 2002, the library and four nearby buildings were designated as national cultural heritage sites. South of the library, across the garden—formerly the school playground—stands the Seoul Education Museum, completed in 1927. The library's first, second, and lounge buildings date back to the Kyunggi Public Middle School





era. The main library, built on the upper hillside, is connected to later additions via bridges that link to the second floors of the newer structures.

The Kyunggi High School site offers rich historical insights into 1930s architecture and the shifts in government systems, from the Korean Empire to Japanese colonial rule, as reflected in the school's name changes. The building now housing the library, constructed in 1938, was a state-of-the-art structure for its time, featuring reinforced concrete, brick walls, and a steam heating system. In keeping with the early modernist style, the simple, elongated rectangular building incorporates minimal decorative elements. The Seoul Education Museum building, completed in 1927 and now showcasing educational content, further underscores the site's legacy as an

educational institution.

Even during the Japanese colonial period, Jongno and Bukchon remained bastions of national pride, where Japanese influence struggled to take root. The colonial government is thought to have aimed at showcasing its architectural and technological prowess by constructing a state-of-the-art school building in the area. In the 1930s, Bukchon developed into a major residential and educational neighborhood as a surge in population prompted the construction of large numbers of modified *hanok* houses. Today, Bukchon, nestled between Joseon's royal palaces, is celebrated for its distinctive urban landscape, where clusters of hanok homes—concentrated around the former school grounds—coexist with a variety of cultural facilities of all sizes.





As urban environments and living conditions changed, many schools in Bukchon, including Kyunggi High School, relocated to other areas. Yet, even after its relocation, the legacy of this cradle of talent—from the days of the Korean Empire to the Republic of Korea—endures through the Jeongdok Public Library, now serving as a fountain of wisdom at the heart of the

capital.

A century's worth of memories are preserved in the surrounding Bukchon residential area, once home to students and their boarding houses, as well as in the library and museum buildings. Bukchon's urban landscape and cultural content reflect the layers of transformation it has undergone throughout its history.

Joseon's Chaekgado: Capturing a Love for Books





Scholar's Accoutrements
 (painted on an eight-panel
 folding screen), The National
 Folk Museum of Korea



gained recognition for their exceptional contributions to this artistic tradition.

Why was chaekgado created? Who commissioned these paintings, and what purpose did they serve? In the Joseon Dynasty, books were regarded as essential. Success in the civil service exams—the gateway to societal advancement—required extensive reading. Moreover, the cultivation of literary knowledge as the foundation of scholarly refinement was deeply woven into the cultural fabric of the era.

The fact that many chaekgado works were painted by royal court artists suggests that they were an important element of the royal court's décor and symbolism. King Jeongjo, a noted bibliophile, placed chaekgado paintings behind his throne and remarked, "Although I enjoy reading,



Chaekgado (bookshelf painting), National Museum of Korea

there are times when my many responsibilities prevent me from engaging in it. During those times, I find solace in looking at chaekgado.” This passion for books, however, was not confined to the royal court; it permeated all levels of society, from aristocrats to commoners.

Traditionally, court paintings did not bear the painter’s signature or personal mark, as they were created for official purposes. However, there is evidence that at least some of these artists wished to leave an indicator of who produced the work. Some royal chaekgado paintings feature seals, painted flat to display the seal’s imprint, which occasionally include the painter’s name. Yi Hyeong-rok, as mentioned earlier, did just that on the ninth panel of a ten-panel chaekgado folding screen housed at the National Museum of Korea. In chaekgado, such playful and clever touches can be found, offering glimpses of creativity rarely seen in other genres of painting.

In chaekgado, books are often accompanied by essential implements for scholars, such as inkstones and brushes. Also frequently depicted were clocks, which were rare and coveted in those days, as well as objects symbolizing personal aspirations and societal values.

Plum blossoms, for example, represent success in the civil service exam and the attainment of social distinction. Peacock feathers are another frequent motif and symbolize high office and prestige, as the peacock, known as the “bird of letters” (文禽, mungeum), adorned the chest emblems of civil officials’ robes. Pomegranates, with their abundance of seeds, convey hopes for fertility and a prosperous family lineage.

In this way, chaekgado paintings blend scholarly ideals, personal aspirations, and even material desires, uniting these disparate elements into works rich in symbolic and cultural meaning. Jean Henri Zuber, a French naval officer involved in the 1866 campaign against Joseon, observed: “What amazed us—and wounded our pride—was that every household, no matter how poor, had books.” His words highlight how deeply books were embedded in the lives of even everyday Koreans. Cherished by the king and commoners alike, chaekgado encapsulates Joseon’s love of the written word and the cultural pursuit of a meaningful life.





Soban:

The Restraint and Simplicity of Korea's Soban

Korea's traditional small tables, known as *soban*, embody the essence of Korean lifestyle and culture like no other item of furniture. Their designs reflect regional characteristics, with more than 60 distinct types identified. The origin of soban dates back to at least the Three Kingdoms Period, as evidenced by depictions in murals from Goguryeo tombs. They proliferated during the Joseon Dynasty, when the use of individual tables increased due to the acceptance of Confucian customs regulating interactions between men and women, as well as between different social classes.

In a traditional Korean house, a single room could serve several purposes: when bedding was laid out, it became a sleeping area; with a desk in place, it functioned as a study. Similarly, placing soban in the room transformed it into a space for eating. Soban were typically about 50 cm wide—just the right size for a woman to carry one from the kitchen, through the courtyard, and into a room. At around 30 cm high, they were designed to suit Korea's custom of sitting on the floor. In consideration of the *ondol*





underfloor heating system, some soban were crafted with openings in their side panels to allow heat to pass through. Those used in palaces had openings that enabled someone carrying it to see the path in front better.

Naju, Jeollanam-do, was a center of production for wood furniture, supplying goods to the royal court, and soban from Naju, called Najuban, was one of its best-known products. Although the city

was prosperous, everyday items were crafted simply rather than in an ornate fashion. Najuban is minimalistic but exceptionally refined and sturdy. While some are octagonal or dodecagonal, most are rectangular with diagonally beveled corners. While the lacquer finish enhances functionality, it also allows the wood grain to emerge gracefully over time and reveal its charm.

Master Artisan Kim Chun-sik has been



making soban for over 60 years. Although he began the craft as a means of earning a living, he now researches the history and forms of Najuban as part of his role in preserving this nationally designated intangible cultural heritage. He believes the true value of Najuban lies in the harmony of beauty and practicality that comes from simplicity. “Najuban is simpler than soban from other regions. Above all, it’s easy to clean, with no crevices where dirt can accumulate. That, too, is part of its simple beauty.”

He harbors a deep affection for Najuban and hopes to pass it on to future generations. “When I started this craft in the 1960s, sitting on the floor was still very much a part of the culture, and soban were widely used. But as lifestyles gradually became more Westernized, floor-sitting declined, and with it, the use of soban as well. That’s why I make every effort to promote soban whenever I get the chance.” The Ban Clear series by Ha Ji-hoon, known for its polycarbonate soban, also traces its origins to a 2005 collaboration with Master Artisan Kim Chun-sik.

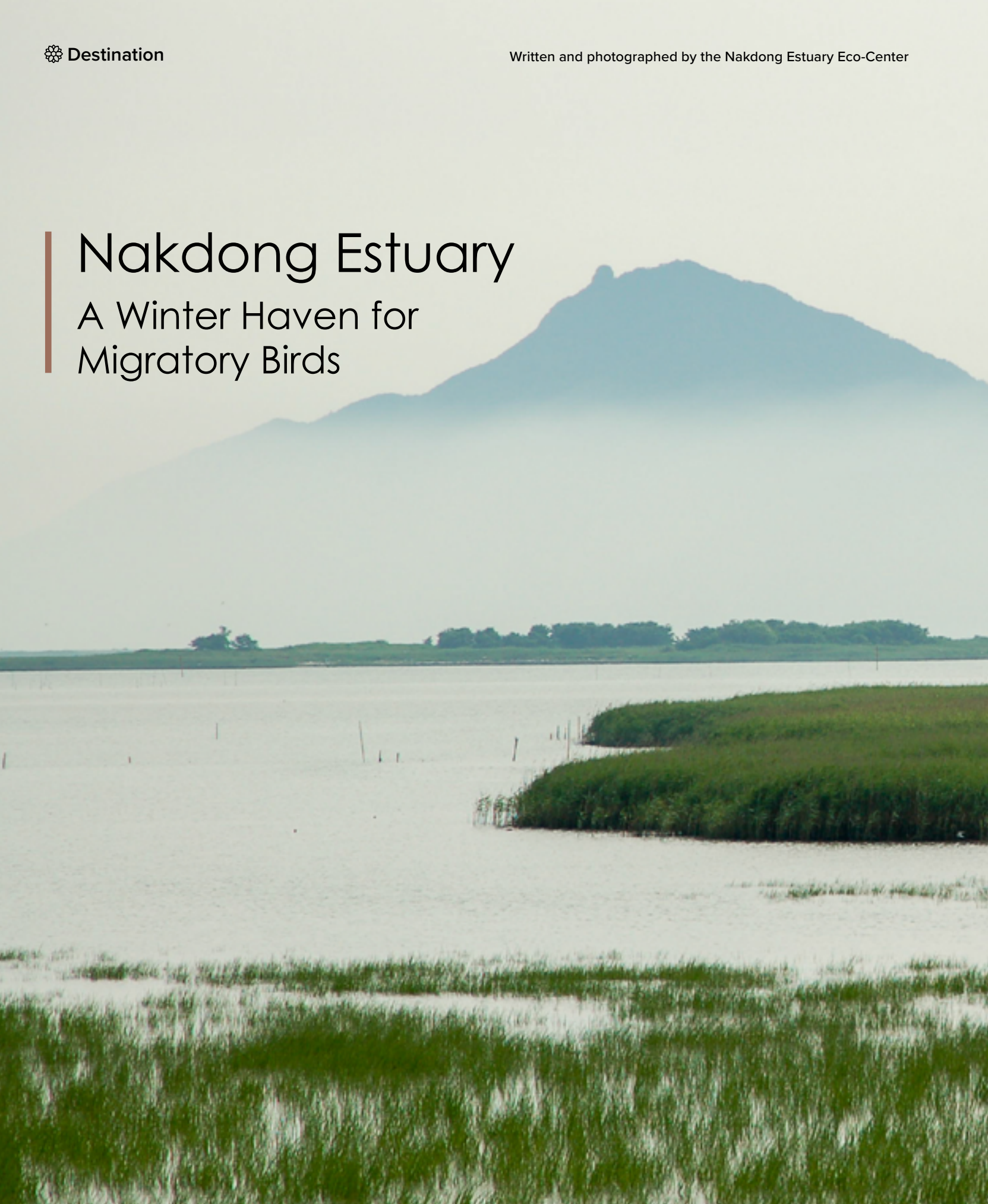
Recently, the rise of single-person households has given way to new trends, such as eating and drinking alone, and more people are living with less. Among Korean household items, soban—particularly Najuban—embodies the essence of minimalism. With its simple yet functional design, the use of soban is steadily increasing in cafés, tea houses, and restaurants. Master Kim Chun-sik emphasizes the importance of the public’s interest: “Traditional culture endures only when people cherish and engage with it. The same goes for soban. Wooden items, if left untouched, quickly deteriorate from moisture. Yet, soban, if regularly handled and cared for, can easily last over a hundred years.”

The beauty of traditional culture lies in its ability to endure through time and, one day, reveal its true value to us once again. Though modest in size, soban holds a lasting vitality and restrained elegance. Interwoven into our way of life over the centuries, soban can once again reveal its subtle beauty—if only we reconnect with it and welcome it back into our daily lives.



Nakdong Estuary

A Winter Haven for
Migratory Birds





The area where the Nakdonggang River—originating from Taebaek, Gangwon-do—meets the sea, after its long journey from inland, is an ecological treasure trove with a well-preserved natural landscape of the deltas, estuary mudflats, and sand islands. The Nakdong Estuary serves as a key wintering ground for a wide variety of migratory birds and was thus designated a Natural Monument Sanctuary of Migratory Birds at Nakdonggang River Estuary on July 13, 1966, to ensure its protection. Originally spanning 231,901,130 m², the national natural heritage area has been reduced to 87,279,741 m², of which 60,932,550 m² comprise marine areas, after twelve adjustments and corrections for measurement errors.

The broad mouth of the river forms a delta, where migratory birds spend winter around the dunes shaped by the ebb and flow of the tide. Surrounding this area are sand islands, including Eulsukdo, Ireungdo, Jangjado, Sinjado, and Jinudo, alongside coastal sandbars, including Daemadeung, Baekhapdeung, and Maenggeummeorideung. During low tide, the dunes are exposed, revealing expansive mudflats that are submerged during high tide. The appearance and submersion of these dunes create an ideal habitat where migratory birds can forage, move freely, and rest. Unlike the central regions of the Korean Peninsula, where winter waters freeze over, the Nakdong Delta remains ice-free from November through March, making it a critical wintering site for countless migratory birds each year. In addition, the river's 525 km length carries a rich variety of nutrients downstream, boosting biodiversity and providing an abundant food source for these birds. Of migratory species, around 25% of Korea's total population of whooper swans find sanctuary here, along with approximately 80,000 ducks and waterfowl, including mallards, widgeons, and coots, that arrive as winter visitors. Natural Monuments, such as









the white-tailed sea eagle, black-faced spoonbill, stork, and black-headed ibis, can also be spotted here.

In spring and autumn, the Nakdong Estuary serves as an essential feeding and resting site for migratory shorebirds traveling between Australia and Russia, while in winter, it provides a crucial habitat for waterfowl, including ducks, geese, whooper swans, gulls, and cormorants. Species such as the white-naped crane, black-faced spoonbill, eagles, and falcons also winter here, and rarely observed migratory birds like pratincoles and bar-tailed godwits also stop by. The estuary attracts nearly every species of waterfowl and wading bird observed in Korea, thanks in large part to its abundance of undisturbed areas rich in benthic organisms, providing a plentiful food supply for waterfowl during the cold months.

At one time, however, various habitat disruptions—including large-scale reclamation projects, urban development, water pollution, farmland conversion, and bridge construction—caused a significant decline in both



the number and diversity of migratory birds. These activities reduced the local winter feeding and resting areas for ducks, geese, shorebirds, and raptors.

Once overdeveloped during industrialization, the Nakdong Estuary's riverbanks have been restored as ecological parks and wetlands, providing roosting and resting areas that have once again attracted migratory flocks. Consequently, on May 10, 2009, the Nakdong Estuary was recognized as an internationally significant habitat along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

The Nakdong Estuary is certainly one of Korea's largest migratory bird sanctuaries, but it is also an internationally significant hub connecting Japan, Korea, and Russia. The area holds high academic and educational value for its rich biodiversity, geological features, and marine environment. In line with global recognition of the importance of natural heritage, the newly established Korea Heritage Service plans to launch the National Institute of Natural Heritage to better implement its mission of supporting comprehensive and specialized conservation and research, and sustainable use of all types of national heritage. It is hoped that Korea's natural heritage sites, including the Nakdong Estuary, will continue to inspire future generations with their flourishing.





Vision for Inclusive and Sustainable Cultural Heritage Preservation



Heritage management is evolving beyond the material-centric concept of "Cultural Property" to embrace a more inclusive framework of "National Heritage." This shift reflects a growing recognition of the cultural, ecological, and social dimensions of heritage, aligning with global conservation practices. Professor Shu-mei Huang highlights how this transition integrates natural and intangible elements, enabling a holistic approach to preserving cultural identities and environmental contexts.

Traditionally, heritage management focused on physical structures such as monuments and historic buildings, often neglecting intangible practices like oral traditions and traditional craftsmanship. The new framework addresses this imbalance, ensuring that heritage conservation captures the full spectrum of cultural expression. By fostering sustainability and strengthening community ties, this approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of what heritage entails.



The monument built by the Japanese colonial government in the Indigenous territories during the 1930s to commemorate Saigo Judo. It is a listed heritage in Taiwan. The Indigenous Paiwan communities have mixed feelings with the monument. Photo taken by Shu-Mei Huang in May 2024

Professor Huang underscores the critical role of community-driven approaches in heritage management. Local populations, as the custodians of heritage, bring invaluable insights and historical context, enriching conservation efforts. Community involvement fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship, empowering people to reclaim and reinterpret their heritage. This participatory approach counters the risks of cultural commodification and colonial reproduction, ensuring that heritage management resonates with those most closely connected to it.

Digital technology plays a transformative role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Advanced tools such as high-definition recording, 3D scanning, and virtual reality (VR) enable accurate documentation and immersive experiences. VR, for instance, allows users to participate in traditional festivals or rituals virtually, making cultural practices accessible to broader audiences while preserving them for future generations.

Addressing the complexities of colonial heritage is another important focus. Professor Huang advocates for a nuanced approach that contextualizes

colonial legacies within broader heritage narratives. By acknowledging historical injustices and promoting inclusive participation, colonial sites can become platforms for education, dialogue, and reconciliation. The example of Taiwan's heritage system illustrates the challenges of balancing colonial influences with local identities, a theme also relevant to Korea.

In the Korean context, colonial heritage management reflects a duality similar to Taiwan's experience. Many colonial-era buildings in Korea evoke mixed emotions, serving as reminders of historical oppression while simultaneously being symbols of modernization. The reinterpretation of these structures, often through adaptive reuse as cultural centers or museums, highlights efforts to integrate complex narratives into modern urban life. Community-driven initiatives have played a key role in ensuring that these sites honor both historical truths and contemporary cultural identities.

The heritage preservation experiences of Taiwan and Korea share parallels in their decolonization efforts, offering opportunities for mutual learning. Both nations transitioned from colonial-era heritage management systems, shaped





the connecting corridor at the Losheng Leprosarium built by the Japanese colonial government in 1930.
Photo taken by Shu-Mei Huang in July 2023.





by Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), to more inclusive approaches emphasizing community participation. Taiwan's reinterpretation of Japanese colonial legacies and Korea's re-evaluation of its colonial past highlight their shared challenges in balancing historical preservation with integrating local perspectives. Collaborative efforts could enable both countries to refine heritage management practices, fostering inclusive narratives that address colonial legacies while empowering communities.

Climate change poses significant risks to both tangible and intangible heritage. Rising sea levels, extreme weather, and resource scarcity disrupt traditional practices and endanger historic sites. Professor Huang emphasizes community-led adaptation strategies, such as finding sustainable alternatives for limited resources, to mitigate these effects and preserve cultural continuity.

Education is central to fostering appreciation for heritage. Programs in schools and communities connect individuals to their cultural roots, instilling pride and a collective

commitment to conservation. Heritage tourism, particularly in smaller cities, further demonstrates the economic potential of cultural preservation. Thoughtful planning ensures that such initiatives support urban regeneration while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Through her insights, Professor Huang presents a vision for heritage management that emphasizes inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. By addressing challenges such as colonial legacies and environmental threats, her approach redefines how heritage can connect past and present, offering valuable lessons for both Taiwan and Korea in navigating their shared and distinct histories.

It is time to build an inclusive and sustainable vision for colonial-era cultural heritage by appropriately applying and adapting Taiwan's heritage management system, based on a study of the historical parallels between Taiwan and Korea. May the efforts of Korea Heritage Service continue to pave the way toward the future of cultural heritage.

The former settlement was built facing the sacred mountain Tagarawsu. Photo taken by Shu-Mei Huang in April 2019.

The sacred mountain Tagarawsu to the Indigenous Rukai people of Kucapungange.

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Park Gayeon, Kang Jeongyun, Lee Seungeun

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A.P.C

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Park Joon-Young

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Korea Heritage Service

189 Cheongsu-ro, Seo-gu,
Daejeon, Republic of Korea

Tel 82-42-481-4865

Fax 82-42-481-4871

Contact sarahlee87@korea.kr

Website www.koreanheritage.kr

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