

Discourses on Art Collecting in the Late Joseon Dynasty: Perceptions and Practices

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Introduction

The Korean phrase *seohwa sujang* (書畫收藏) is literally translated as “collecting calligraphy and paintings,” but its meaning is actually more comprehensive, encompassing the practices of researching, identifying, and appreciating art, as well as managing and preserving a collection. For clarity, in this article, *seohwa sujang* is translated as “collecting,” but it should be understood as comprising all of the above activities.

In order to understand the development of art collecting during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), it is crucial to consider three aspects of this practice: its social and economic foundations, its effect in guiding changes in art subjects and styles, and the overall demands of art collectors and patrons. As a Confucian society, Joseon revered the concept of *wanmul sangji* (玩物喪志), which held that attachment to material goods results in the loss of a person’s essential meaning and purpose. Accordingly, any act of collecting was considered inappropriate for Confucian scholars, so art collectors felt compelled to produce a variety of diverse theories to justify their activities.

This article examines some of the arguments that Joseon scholars employed to support their purpose in collecting art, as well as the actual practices and trends that emerged from such discourses. The aim is to analyze the basis for appreciating, authenticating, criticizing, and collecting art throughout the Joseon Dynasty, and to illuminate the reasons why art col-

lecting, despite being ostensibly discouraged by the nation’s ideology, became more common from the 17th century onwards. Through this analysis, I hope to articulate how changes in the attitudes and perspectives of collectors led to changes in the practice of art collecting, which will in turn help to improve the theoretical approach to cases of individual collectors.

Theories of Art Collecting in the Joseon Dynasty

Value Theory of Appreciating and Collecting Art

The practice of collecting art is based on the recognition of its being worthy of appreciation. In order to be appreciated, art must carry a positive value that merits desire, veneration, and respect. However, Korean Confucian scholars traditionally took a dismissive view of painting, deprecating it as a lowly, even demeaning, craft.¹ Thus, before we can begin to discuss how the practice of art collecting developed in the Joseon Dynasty, we must first examine how the value of art was redeemed, and how discourses attached

¹ It is important to note here that Confucian literati granted calligraphy a special status among the visual arts. Calligraphy was deemed essential for Confucian scholars to practice self-cultivation and study the wisdom of the sages. Thus, when Confucian scholars belittled art, they were referring to visual arts other than calligraphy.

significance to appreciating and collecting art. Hong Yangho (洪良浩, 1724-1802), a renowned calligrapher, epigraphist, and art collector, contributed greatly to elevating the value of art. Criticizing the attitude of the Joseon literati towards art, he argued that as calligraphy and painting shared the same roots, both were disciplines of high quality and standards.

Of course, even before the late Joseon Dynasty, not everyone had such a strict attitude against producing and appreciating art. The early Joseon period (15th-16th century) is known for emphasizing the pursuit of moral and spiritual beauty, rather than material goods, but there were some prominent scholars who openly valued and appreciated art. For example, Shin Sukju (申叔舟, 1417-1475) wrote *Hwagi* (畫記, On Painting) in 1445, after viewing the art collection of Prince Anpyeong. Shin claimed that the appreciation of art involved a form of purity and elegance that inherently appealed to human nature and intelligence. Furthermore, he stated that art, along with poetry, could contribute to self-cultivation by broadening the mind and yielding profound wisdom. But although Shin's article was one of many to discuss the useful effects of art appreciation for Confucian scholars, no one at the time wrote about the actual practice of collecting art. Nonetheless, these early affirmations of art appreciation would serve as the foundation for subsequent discourses on collecting art.

Such discourses finally began to emerge in the 17th century. Although the early Joseon idea of *wan-mul sangji* still lingered, art collecting gradually came to be seen as a suitable activity that demonstrated taste and refinement. Furthermore, in the 18th century, there were both reports of art collecting and stories from the collectors themselves, which show that their art collecting was much more than a mere hobby or pastime; it was a sort of mania, bordering on obsession. For example, a collector named Kim Gwangsū (金光遂, 1699-1770) wrote:

Ever since I was young, I've had an extreme liking for antiquities....Even though my family was affluent, I disdained wealth; I only liked art. When I acquired a rare book or epigraph, I couldn't help betraying my delight on my face. I cherished them so much that I almost forgot to sleep or eat, as if I had actually met the real people behind these objects from the past. (Kim Gwangsū. "Sanggodang jaseo" [尙古堂自叙, Story Told by Myself] in Sanggodang

yumuk [尙古堂遺墨, Calligraphy by Kim Gwangsū])

Another art collector, Hong Seokju (洪奭周, 1774-1811), echoed these sentiments:

I don't usually have a strong liking for things, except for paintings. If I saw an old painting that I liked, then I just had to buy it. I would pay a handsome price even if it was slightly torn or if the scroll was damaged. I cherished it as if it was my life. When I heard that someone had a great painting, I would exhaust every effort to schedule a visit so I could see it for myself. Then I would stare at it until my whole heart harmonized with it, and became part of it. I would look at it all morning without feeling bored, and all night without feeling tired. I forgot to eat, and I didn't even feel hunger. Alas, my mania! (Hong Seokju, Yeoncheon jeonso [淵泉全書, Collected Works of Hong Seokju], Chapter 7: "Byeokseol jeung banggunhyoryang" [癖說贈方君孝良, Discussing Mania with Bang Hyoryang])

The accounts of these two collectors epitomize the feelings of art enthusiasts from the late Joseon Dynasty. As mentioned, collectors were often willing to pay exorbitant prices to acquire works that they were attracted to. They treasured their favorite works of art, and spent all day looking at them without feeling bored. Their fascination with artworks went beyond the usual devotion of a collector, becoming more like a chronic disease.

Numerous accounts survive with details of contemporaneous art enthusiasts whose passion matched that of Kim and Hong. For instance, Yi Hagon (李夏坤, 1667-1724), a scholar and book collector, wrote in *Dutacho* (頭陀草, *Collected Works of Yi Hagon*), "After clearing the table, lighting incense, and brewing tea, I sit by a well-lit window and earnestly discuss landscape paintings with someone of like mind, evaluating styles and masterpieces. This is the greatest pleasure in my life." Yi Yuwon (李裕元, 1814-1888) wrote in *Rimha pilgi* (林下筆記, *Essays by Yi Yuwon*) that Yi Jomuk (李祖默, 1792-1840) squandered everything he had to buy expensive antique artifacts from China. All these cases illustrate that late Joseon literati thought that art was not only worthy of their devotion, but was an essential part of their lives.

This change in perspective by Confucian schol-

ars was accompanied by a series of discourses in support of art collecting. Many writings began to emerge that combatted the long-standing tradition of *wanmul sangji* by providing positive evaluations of the practice of collecting art and antiquities. Jeong Beomjo (丁範祖, 1723-1801), a representative literatus of the 18th century, kept company with two of the most renowned painters of the time, Kim Hongdo (金弘道, 1745-after 1806) and Choe Buk (崔北, 1712-c.1786), and often commissioned one or the other to make paintings for him to appreciate. Jeong wrote that, among human endeavors, collecting art was greatly preferable to the pursuit of money or women. As demonstrated by these examples, the social acceptance of art collecting was closely related to the new perception that the obsessions of art collectors were associated with their inner psychology. These changes also led more people to believe that art appreciation could be a unique and exceptional hobby for a scholar.

Import of Chinese Theories on Art and Antiquities

One of the key contexts for understanding the rise of art collecting in the late Joseon period is the influx of Chinese books on the topic, many of which contained similar arguments in support of the practice. It is likely that many Joseon art collectors read these Chinese books and agreed with the ideas in them, and circulated them in their own writings and discussions.

While individual collectors sometimes selectively purchased books documenting certain genres and works of art, more often, detailed information about art was acquired through imported encyclopedias, such as *Gujin tushu jicheng* (古今圖書集成, *Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from the Earliest to Current Times*). The influx of Chinese books contributed greatly to the changes of perception in Joseon regarding art appreciation, authentication, and criticism. Such books often included a wealth of information about paper, brushes, and ink, as well as antiquities such as bronze vessels, so they were very useful auxiliary materials for art appreciation. The books often had a specialized focus on calligraphy and paintings (e.g., *Huajian* [畫鑑, *Examination of Painting*]; *Tuhui baojian* [圖繪寶鑑, *Precious Mirror for Examining Painting*]). Some books dealt exclusively with the writing and painting materials and accessories of the Ming or Qing Dynasties, (e.g., *Meigong miji* [眉公秘笈, *Meigong's Secret Satchel*]; *Zunsheng*

bajian [遵生八牋, *Eight Treatises on the Nurturing of Life*]; *Kaopan yushi* [考槃餘事, *Desultory Remarks on Furnishing the Abode of the Retired Scholar*]; and *Zhangwuzhi* [長物志, *On Superfluous Things*]). Other books covered a wider range of topics in regard to authentication, mounting, binding, colophons (prefaces or postscripts about the work added by later scholars), stamps/seals, paper, and silk (e.g., *Jiangcun xiaoxia lu* [江村銷夏錄, *Record of Summer in a Village*]; *Qinghe shuhuaqfang* [清河書畫舫, *Clear River Boat of Painting and Calligraphy*]; and *Shigutang shuhuaji* [式古堂書畫記, *Records on Calligraphy and Painting in Shigu Studio*]). Joseon literati took full advantage of this host of books on varied topics to accumulate expert knowledge on collecting art.

The Chinese encyclopedic books helped shift Joseon perceptions about collecting art in two main ways. First, they presented various new opinions about the benefits of appreciating art, collecting it, and becoming a collector. More directly, the books provided quotations from numerous Chinese publications offering “how-to” guidance on topics such as mounting, binding, display, preservation, and the value of art appreciation.

The first systematic discussion of art collecting in China was by Zhang Yanyuan (張彥遠, c. 815-c. 877) in his *Lidai minghuaqi* (847), which was frequently referenced by Joseon literati. Zhang initiated discussion about what qualifications an art collector should have, and his ideas provided the foundation for the first theoretical discourse on the topic, written by Mi Fu (米芾, 1052-1107), a famous painter of the Northern Song Dynasty, in his *Huashi* (畫史, *History of Painting*). According to Mi Fu, there were two types of art collectors: “connoisseurs (鑑賞者)” and “dilettanti (好事者).” In short, a “connoisseur” has a genuine expertise about art and an eye for masterful works that are worthy of esteem, while a “dilettante” merely jumps on the latest artistic trends and throws money around to purchase artworks without a discerning eye. Mi Fu’s binary conception of art collectors was still being widely cited as late as the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), and his ideas were crucial to the establishment of art appreciation as a noble and exemplary pursuit.

These and other discourses were imported to Joseon, triggering discussions of the desirable qualifications for an art collector. In particular, the Joseon literati felt compelled to distinguish connoisseurs

from dilettanti, in order to maintain a critical attitude towards those who took a blind fancy towards art, based merely on some personal whim or affinity. Some of the most representative participants in the discussion were Bak Jiwon (朴趾源, 1737-1805), Seo Sangsu (徐常修, 1735-1793), Yu Hanjun (俞漢雋, 1732-1811), and Nam Gongcheol (南公轍, 1760-1840).

In his essay “Pilseseol” (筆洗說, On Brushwashers) from *Yeonamjip* (燕巖集, *Collected Works of Bak Jiwon*), Bak Jiwon wrote, “There are two ways to pursue an interest in artworks and antiquities: simply collecting them, or truly appreciating them. Those who just use money to own art without knowing how to appreciate it can only believe in whatever works they happen to pick up along the way. Meanwhile, great appreciators might be very poor, and unable to own many artworks, but they will always be equipped with knowledge and a discerning eye.” Yu Hanjun and Nam Gongcheol also took their cue from Zhang Yanyuan and Mi Fu and divided art collectors into two groups, corresponding roughly to connoisseurs and dilettanti. All of these scholars prioritized the capacity to properly appreciate art over the actual practice of collecting and owning art, thus illustrating what Joseon art collectors ultimately hoped to achieve. Rather than seeking to collect as many artworks as possible, they aspired to cultivate expertise and professionalism in art. Published opinions about the characteristics of an ideal art collector were virtually unknown in Korea prior to the late Joseon Dynasty, so the very existence of these critiques is strong evidence of the changing attitudes of the time.

The influx of books also included important titles from late Ming writers such as Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636), Chen Jiru (陳繼儒, 1558-1639), and Mo Shilong (莫是龍, 1537-1587). The books by these late Ming literati had a major impact on Joseon literary theory, but they also proposed theories about the practice of collecting art that broke from the idea of *wanmul sangji*. Particularly, in *Gudong shisan shuo* (骨董十三說, *Thirteen Comments on Antiquities*), Dong Qichang emphasized the historical and aesthetic benefits of collecting art. Dong Qichang’s works were read by late Joseon literati Bak Jiwon, Seo Sangsu, Nam Gongcheol and Yi Deokmu (李德懋, 1741-1793), and they all promoted a similar positive attitude towards art collecting.

Another cultural idea that was imported from China during the late Joseon Dynasty was the prac-

tice of living as a recluse. Many late Joseon literati, particularly those living in Seoul, extolled the virtues of a solitary life, and this led to increasing support for collecting art and antiquities. The idea that artworks and antiquities could be crucial components for a recluse hoping to withdraw from the world was put forward by Heo Gyun (許筠, 1569-1618) in the 17th century, and the concept was popularized in the 18th century by later scholars such as Yi Yunyeong (李胤永, 1714-1759), Yun Dongseom (尹東暹, 1722-1789), and Yi Huicheon (李義天, 1738-1771). In particular, Yun Dongseom expressed his appreciation of art objects by commissioning a unique portrait of himself displaying some of his purchases from his 1771 trip to Beijing, including an incense burner, inkstone, brush holder and a book (Fig. 1). Several



Fig. 1. Portrait of Yun Dongseom (尹東暹, 1722-1789). 18th century. Color on silk, 91.1 x 57.4 cm. (Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art).

Joseon scholars utilized art and antiquities to escape the world, as a key part of their reclusive lifestyle. For example, Nam Gongcheol justified his collection of bronze and jade pieces by citing Dong Qichang, who had declared that such items were among the types of antiquities worthy of aesthetic appreciation. Bak Ji-won also left a detailed description of the bronzewares he purchased at antique stores in Beijing. Furthermore, Bak's essay "Pilseseol" quotes Seo Sangsu's argument that antiquities could be very useful for imparting lessons of Confucian tradition and history: "Studying and appreciating art is the equivalent of a lesson from the *Shi jing* (詩經, *The Classic of Poetry*)."¹ Furthermore, beginning in the 18th century, the list of objects worthy of a scholar's attention began to grow, expanding from books and paintings to antiquities, and later to stationery items.

But it is important to note that the association between art appreciation and a person's inner mind already existed in the early Joseon Dynasty. During the 15th century, scholars at Jiphyeonjeon (集賢殿, Royal Institute of Research and Academic Affairs), such as Seong Yeon (成僎, 1439-1504), Shin Sukju (申叔舟, 1417-1475), and Yi Seungso (李承召, 1422-1484), promoted Neo-Confucian thought regarding the significance of the inner mind. In fact, they believed that the inner psyche was the foundation of the entire universe, and that the psyche was associated with art appreciation. In *Jinsan sego* (晉山世稿, *Collected Works by the Jinju Kang Family*), Kang Huimaeng (姜希孟, 1424-1483) wrote that his father, the renowned scholar Kang Seokdeok (姜碩德, 1395-1459), was "fascinated by antique objects. When he is at home, he surrounds himself with books and paintings, and burns incense." So there were definitely antiquarians and art enthusiasts in Joseon prior to the 18th century, when such tastes became widely accepted and popularized due to the influx of Chinese books. Thus, the discourses on collecting art that emerged in Joseon in the 18th and 19th centuries were the result of both foreign and domestic influences, which led to art's rising popularity as a social phenomenon.

Inherited Art Collections

The majority of art collections in the Joseon Dynasty began with works made by ancestors that were handed down within a family, and were later augmented and expanded with purchased items. Thus, there was some urgency to differentiate family collections from

collections accumulated through purchase. Accordingly, there were numerous discussions about the proper reasons for such differentiation.

Collectors were free to choose which artifacts they wanted to purchase or sell, but they had no such choice regarding the heirlooms created by their ancestors. Once inherited, objects usually remained in the family collection, and thus were handed down from one descendant to the next. Family collections tended to increase in worth over time, especially once the objects became old enough to start accumulating historical value. Artifacts from family collections were recognized as special entities that were afforded greater significance than other art objects, as demonstrated by this quote by Yi Manbu (李萬敷, 1664-1732):

Beginning with my respected ancestor Yi Ju (李樹, 1437-1490), my family has accumulated numerous great writings. However, the works were scattered, and were not gathered into a family collection....My uncle wanted to collect [them], but he did not succeed. Finally, I created this album [of writings by my ancestors], which I keep with the utmost care....The reason why it is proper to venerate our ancestors and commemorate them with such honor is so we can feel close to them, eternally and faithfully. It is said that sages of previous generations would be reduced to tears and would commemorate their ancestors even when holding something as simple as their ancestors' inkstone. But the books and other written works of our ancestors are even more sacred, since they still bear the traces of their hands! (Yi Manbu, Siksanjip [息山集, Collected Works of Yi Manbu], Chapter 18: "Yeonan semukbal" [延安世墨跋, Calligraphy Works by the Yeonan Yi Family])

Yi Manbu's words illustrate the two primary reasons why literati were especially attentive to collecting family artifacts: to enhance the honor accorded to their ancestors, and to commemorate them by taking special care of their heirlooms. There was considerable discussion regarding these goals, which marked the difference between family art collections and general art collections, which were based primarily on artistic and aesthetic value. Both of these goals could be associated with the broader Joseon practice of honoring the deceased, which was derived from the strong Confucian emphasis on filial duty, as well



Fig. 2. *Gyeongsu cheop* (敬守帖, *Album of Paying Reverence*), Yi Gwanjing's works organized by Yi Manbu. 1683. Ink on paper, 34 x 23.5 cm. (Private collection).

as the literati's overall determination to maintain the aristocratic status, power, and privilege of their families. For instance, Yi Manbu collected writings by his grandfather, Yi Gwanjing (李觀徵, 1618-1695), who was a very famous calligrapher (Fig. 2). Furthermore, in his preface, Yi detailed the process of how he organized the writings and made the albums, thereby emphasizing the strong tradition of writing in his family.

Documentation of family collections, like that of Yi Manbu, were not unusual among the late Joseon literati. Yi Yonghyu (李用休, 1708-1782) wrote a postscript on the calligraphy album of his uncle, Yi Seo (李澈, 1662-1723), a renowned 18th-century calligrapher. Yi Yonghyu emphasized that masterpieces by ancestors should be shared by everyone, but that it was the responsibility of the descendants of the person to protect and care for such works. He wrote that family collections should not be kept exclusively within the family, but should instead be available to the world. Thus, Yi Yonghyu was among the first to assert that family collections were significant not merely as heirlooms for honoring ancestors, but for their artistic and aesthetic value. For the scions of a family, the handwritten works of an ancestor served as a medium for communion with the ancestor. However, over time, the work gradually acquired more significance as an art and historical object, and could thus transcend the context of a single family, especially when one's ancestor happened to be a famous calligrapher.

Another scholar associated with an illustrious family collection was Hong Yangho (洪良浩, 1724-

1802), whose family collected and preserved the works of five generations, from his grandfather Hong Jungseong (洪重聖, 1668-1735) to his grandson Hong Gyeongmo (洪敬謨, 1774-1851). Hong Gyeongmo commented on family works in *Unseok oesa* (耘石外史, *Essays by Hong Gyeongmo*) saying, "These works are all authentic originals, and they still bear traces of the past, so they cannot be compared to ordinary books. I believe that future generations should know how my grandfather diligently collected these works, and that he had a great love for them... My grandfather's calligraphy was a revelation that transformed the hackneyed conventions of the Joseon period. He revered Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 303-361) and Wang Xianzhi (王獻之, 344-386). He always did his best, whether he was writing privately, publicly, or for some official purpose, such as making an inscription for a tombstone... His works are not only important to his descendants; they are rare and precious treasures for the entire world." Thus, Hong Gyeongmo clearly felt that the value of his grandfather's calligraphy went beyond that of a family heirloom. The reports by Yi Manbu, Yi Yonghyu, and Hong Gyeongmo clearly indicate not only that family collections were crucial for respecting and commemorating one's ancestors, but also that they were meant to be appreciated as artifacts, the same as masterpieces by other renowned calligraphers and painters.

Importance of Managing and Preserving Art

Joseon collectors of artworks and documents considered security and preservation to be crucial aspects of collecting. They carefully compiled works into albums or mounted them on folding screens in order to keep them from being scattered. As part of their keen preservation efforts, they also experimented with ways to prevent damage from insects, light and general wear and tear. For example, in *Jasan munjip* (紫山文集, *Collected Works of Geum Uyeol*) Geum Uyeol (琴佑烈, 1824-1904), a 19th-century Joseon literatus, reported that he diligently repaired damaged texts or artworks by re-binding them or by pasting extra layers of paper or silk.

Beginning around the 17th century, the influx of art-related books from China played a key role in the increase in awareness about preservation and management issues, by providing Joseon collectors with abundant technical details about mounting, binding,

and airing documents, as well as information about different types of paper, silk, ink, and inkstones. Some of the most frequently referenced Chinese books for collectors in late Joseon included: *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (圖畫見聞誌, *Overview of Painting*) by Guo Ruoxu (郭若虛, c.960-c.1127); *Dongtian qinglu ji* (洞天清祿集, *Collection of Pure Happiness in a Daoist Heaven*) by Zhao Xigu (趙希鵠, 1180-1240); *Qinghe shuhua fang* (清河書畫舫, *Clear River Boat of Painting and Calligraphy*) by Zhang Chou (張丑, 1577-1643); *Zunsheng bajian* (遵生八牋, *Eight Treatises on the Nurturing of Life*) by Gao Lian (高廉, 16th century); and *Zhangwuzhi* (長物志, *On Superfluous Things*) by Wen Zhenheng (文震亨, 1586-1644).

In the 18th century, art collection expanded from the literati to the *jungin* (中人), the class just below

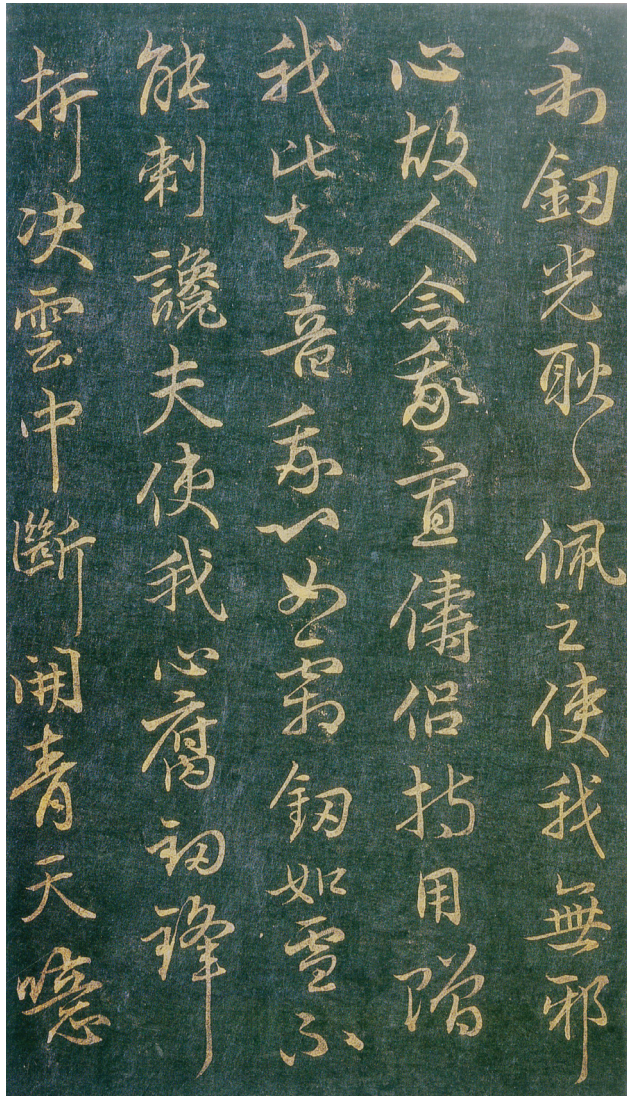


Fig. 3. Han Ho's calligraphy from *Han Gyeonghong jinjeok* (韓景洪眞蹟, *Calligraphy Album of Han Ho*).

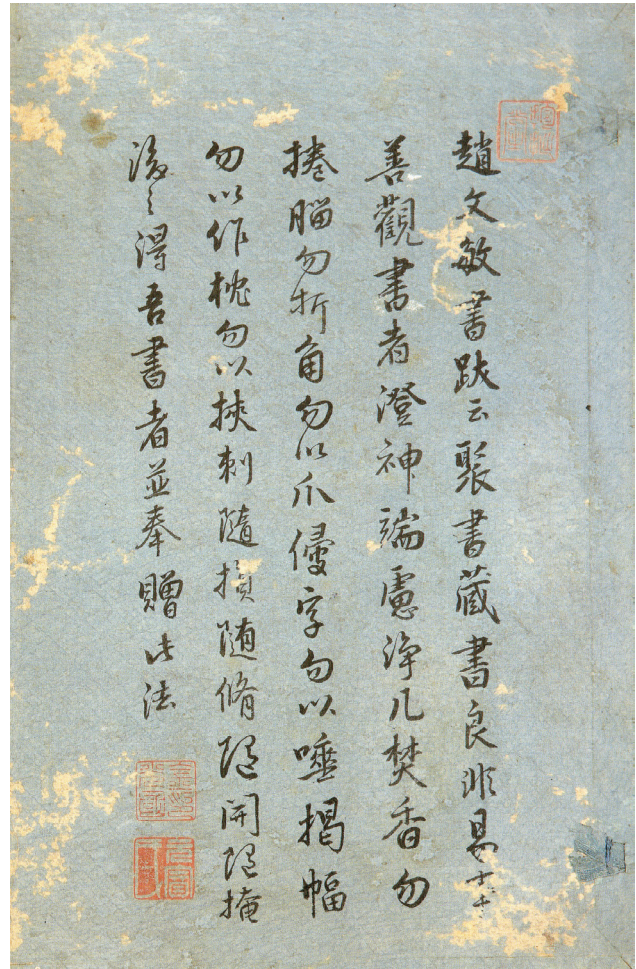


Fig. 3a. Kim Gwangguk's postscript on *Han Gyeonghong jinjeok* (韓景洪眞蹟, *Calligraphy Album of Han Ho*). 18th century. 26.2 x 16.5 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

the literati. For example, the *jungin* Kim Gwangguk (金光國, 1727-1797) had an album of calligraphy by Han Ho (韓濩, 1543-1605) in his collection (Fig. 3), on which he wrote a colophon, quoting a list of instructions originally provided by Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322): "Don't roll it, don't dog-ear it, don't harm it with your nails, don't moisten your finger when you turn the pages, don't use it as a pillow, don't carry it under your arm. If it gets damaged, it must be repaired. Once it is open, it should be closed" (Fig. 3a). Zhao's original quotation, which was widely known in both Joseon and China, was published in two Ming Dynasty documents: *Meigong miji* (眉公秘笈, *Meigong's Secret Satchel*) by Chen Jiru (陳繼儒, 1558-1639) and *Kaopan yushi* (考槃餘事, *Desultory Remarks on Furnishing the Abode of the Retired Scholar*) by Tu Long (屠隆, 1543-1605). Kim Gwangguk's

colophon serves as an example of the proliferation of Chinese art books in the 18th century.

Art collection continued to expand its base in the 19th century and beyond. Accordingly, collectors inevitably pursued superior and more specific methods of securely and efficiently storing and managing their artworks and documents. Seo Yugu (徐有榘, 1764-1845) extracted relevant passages from Chinese sources and systematically compiled them into a book entitled *Imwon gyeongje ji* (林園經濟志, *On a Farm Life*). Yu Jungim (柳重臨, 18th century) in his *Jeungbo sallim gyeongje* (增補山林經濟, *On a Farm Life: Expanded Edition*), cited an essay called “Calendar for Hanging Paintings” (顯畫月令) from Wen Zhenheng’s *Zhangwuzhi*. Such writings reflect the burgeoning demand for reference books on art authentication, preservation, and appreciation as art collecting became more popular.

Chinese reference books certainly contributed to making discourses on collecting art in the late Joseon Dynasty more complicated and elaborate. More investigation is still required to examine exactly how this knowledge was circulated or put into practice within Joseon society. Nonetheless, the above examples demonstrate that encyclopaedic art reference books from China were being read by scholars of the late Joseon period, and were also important sources of knowledge for individual art collectors.

Changes Resulting from the Spread of Art-Collecting Theories

The rising interest and acceptance of the practice of collecting material objects had many diverse social effects during the late Joseon Dynasty. One important new development was the increased need for storage space and greater attention to facilities for keeping and displaying artifacts and artworks. The example of the 18th-century literatus Yu Manju (俞晩柱, 1755-1788), which will be examined at the end of this section, demonstrates how theories and discourses on art collection were materialized in the real life of a collector.

Emergence of “Art Space” and the Sujangcheo

I use the term “art space” broadly to refer to any place where people shared and appreciated antiquities or works of art, whether a storage unit or a space

where artworks were sold or circulated. The concept of “art space” changed dramatically from the early to the late Joseon period. In the early Joseon, people were generally able to look at artifacts from another person’s collection only by borrowing them or receiving them as a gift. On the other hand, in the late Joseon Dynasty, art dealers became much more involved in the circulation of artworks, and more information about sharing artworks became available in various books. Of course, these phenomena did not simply appear out of nowhere, as there are a few confirmed cases of books and artworks being purchased through a dealer in the 16th century. For example, Yu Huichun (柳希春, 1513-1577), a famous book collector, who worked at Gyoseogwan (校書館, Office of Publications), was closely involved with several booksellers who frequented the office. As such, he enjoyed the privilege of having them bring in books and albums that interested him for his own personal viewing.

Nonetheless, despite this unique access to materials, Yu Huichun and other 16th century collectors did not usually have a close network of other experts with whom they could knowledgeably discuss and assess the artistic value of the materials. This was the main difference between the 16th and 17th century collectors. In the 17th century, as more people became interested in collecting art and antiquities, greater attention was paid to determining the value of artworks, as a network of artists and connoisseurs developed, helping to expand the understanding, appreciation, and experience of art. For example, in the hopes of developing a discerning eye, Prince Inheung (仁興君, 1604-1651) surrounded himself with famous calligraphers, painters, connoisseurs, and collectors, including Prince Uichang (義昌君, 1589-1645), Jo Sok (趙淾, 1595-1668), Yun Sinji (尹新之, 1582-1657), Shin Ikseong (申翊聖, 1588-1644), and Yi Jing (李澄, b. 1581). Such associates were also valuable resources for finding out the latest news about where artifacts were collected, changes in ownership, or updates on the market for Chinese antiquities. Hoping to enhance his understanding of art from China and Japan, Prince Inheung acquired forty works by the 17th-century Chinese painter Meng Yongguang (孟永光) and multiple paintings and folding screens by the Japanese master Sesshu Toyo (雪舟 等楊, 1420-1506). The Joseon painters Jo Sok and Yi Jing viewed these works and gave them a very high appraisal, thus increasing the value of

the prince's collection. In return, the two artists benefited from the rare opportunity to examine foreign works, which enabled them to expand the realm of their own art appreciation.

In the 17th century, artistic excellence was the main criteria. Beginning in the late 18th century, however, art started being evaluated in different terms, in conjunction with the development of commercial space. The biggest change was that artworks began to be assessed according to their monetary value, apart from their artistic quality. For example, according to some reports, works by the famous painter Yu Deok-jang (柳德章, 1694-1774) were selling for as little as 12 *nyang* (ounces [of silver]), while a painting by Heo Ryeon (許鍊, 1809-1892), a representative literati painter, sold at the much higher price of 500 *nyang*. So the standard by which the prices were determined remains obscure. The increasing concern over price led to the appearance of art dealers who were responsible for authenticating and appraising artifacts. And in many cases, the role of the art dealer was filled by those with the widest knowledge and experience of art: the calligraphers, painters, and collectors themselves. It is known that some Confucian scholars of the late Joseon period, such as Jeong Yakyong (丁若鏞, 1762-1836), also served as art dealers, reflecting the notion that artworks were increasingly becoming known as commodities, rather than just objects of appreciation.

The increased circulation of art in the late Joseon period resulted in a sudden demand for previously unknown or unheralded artistic styles. For example, according to Yu Manju, the influx of Chinese books printed from woodblocks led to a surge in demand for the ancient Chinese calligraphy styles known as seal script (篆書) and clerical script (隸書). This comment shows how the circulation of various new materials and references related to calligraphy made a great impact on late Joseon calligraphy, effectively shifting the entire development of the field. About one hundred years prior to Yu's assessment, the calligrapher Kim Sujeung (金壽增, 1624-1702) had described a much different situation in *Gogunjip* (谷雲集, *Collected Works of Kim Sujeung*), when he complained about having to go all the way to China to purchase albums of calligraphy for learning clerical script, since he could not find any in Joseon. Yu Manju's comment shows how much the art environment had changed by the 18th century.

The growth of art appreciation and collection led to the emergence of more commercial spaces that aimed to stimulate collectors, and the construction of physical facilities for storing and displaying artifacts. One resultant trend that appeared among wealthy people with a substantial collection was the *sujangcheo* (收藏處), a separate building that served as a personal library or museum where books, paintings, and other precious artifacts were gathered and displayed for viewing and learning. There are various mentions of *sujangcheo* in the literature from the late 17th century onwards, when the discourses justifying art collection were becoming more prevalent. Some of the most famous *sujangcheo*, known for both the quantity and quality of their contents, included Jang Yu's Munhoedang (文會堂); Yi Hagon's Wanwigak (宛委閣) and Mangwollu (萬卷樓); Nam Gongcheol's Godong seohwagak (古董書畫閣); Hong Gilju's Pyoronggak (縹蘿閣); Sim Sanggyu's Gaseonggak (嘉聲閣); Kim Gwangguk's Pojoldang (抱拙堂); O Gyeong-seok's Cheonjukjae (天竹齋); and King Heonjong's



Fig. 4. Seunghwaru at Changdeokkung Palace. (Cultural Heritage Administration Korea).

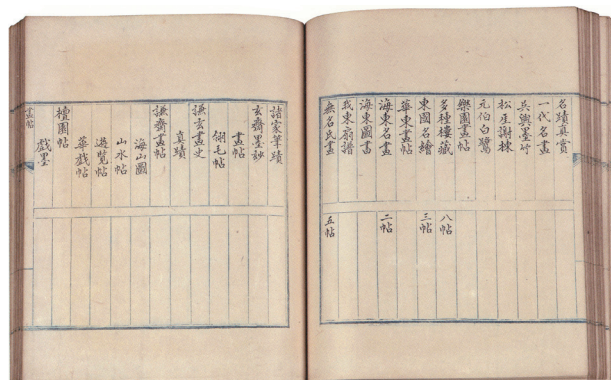


Fig. 5. Seunghwaru seomok (承華樓書目, *Catalogue of Books and Artifacts of Seunghwaru Collection*). 19th century. 30.9 x 27.4 cm. (Academy of Korean Studies, Jangseogak).

Seunghwaru (承華樓). In particular, Yi Hagon's Mangwollu was praised by Kang Junheum (姜浚欽, 1768-1833) as one of the four greatest libraries in Joseon, while Seunghwaru, which still exists today inside Changdeokgung Palace, once held around 900 books and paintings that were cherished by King Heonjong (Figs. 4 and 5).

For fear of objects being lost, damaged, or stolen, most collectors did not open their *sujangcheo* to the public. However, most collectors occasionally invited friends and colleagues to visit, and several of those who were privileged enough to be invited felt compelled to write about the size and grandeur of the collections they saw. Yi Yuwon described his experience visiting the collection in Sim Sanggyu's Gaseonggak:

Gaseonggak is the best library in our country. There are some other grand and fabulous libraries, but they cannot match Gaseonggak in terms of tranquility and elaborateness. Sim Sanggyu spent his life working hard to collect the best books and paintings, as well as uniquely shaped stones and antiquities of all ages, and then building this library to house his collection. (Yi Yuwon, Rimha ilgi [林下筆記], Chapter 34: "Hwadong oksampyeon: Gaseonggak" [華東玉穆編: 嘉聲閣, On Gaseonggak])

In addition to being used for private viewing by collectors and their select invitees, *sujangcheo* also served as places where art transactions were conducted and forums where scholars gathered to discuss issues about the authenticity, quality, and historical value of art. Scholars often showed their reverence for a work of calligraphy or painting by writing a colophon that they attached to the main work. Thus, when a scholar was invited to view a work at a *sujangcheo*, he sometimes honored the host and the work itself by adding a colophon, either as a preface or a postscript. Numerous colophons have survived, and many of them attest to the importance of the *sujangcheo* as the setting for activities related to art appreciation.

All this evidence indicates that art collecting had evolved into more than just a private, refined hobby, taking on social meanings that were stimulated through the *sujangcheo*, a physical "art space" for the display of collections, where preservation, appreciation, exchanges, loans, and commercial sales also took place. The *sujangcheo* is truly one of the most important and iconic structures in the art history of

the late Joseon Dynasty.

Professional Collectors

During the 17th and 18th centuries, collectors with financial means benefited from the increased circulation of artworks and new information about them, and they expanded their family collections by purchasing books and paintings to add to those they had inherited. Some major collectors began to amass huge collections, distancing themselves from the average aficionado. This new breed of collector usually came from powerful families with strong academic reputations and political connections, which gave them easier access to rare objects and the latest information. They included Kim Gwangsu (金光遂, 1696-1770), who enjoyed a direct relationship with Chinese literati, as well as Yi Hagon (李夏坤, 1677-1724), Yi Byeongyeon (李秉淵, 1671-1751), Yi Yeongyu (李英裕, 1734-1804), Yi Yunyeong (李胤永, 1714-1759), Seong Daejung (成大中, 1732-1809), Seo Sangsu (徐常修, 1735-1793), Nam Gongcheol (南公轍, 1760-1840), and the *jungin* Kim Gwangguk, mentioned above.

The way that the changing artistic discourses and practices were reflected in the lives of collectors can be exemplified through the case of Yu Manju (俞晩柱, 1755-1788), who built Heumyeonggak (欽英閣) to house his collection. Yu Manju left behind a thorough description of his daily life in the form of a vast diary called *Heumyeong* (欽英). According to the diary, there was not a single day between 1775 and 1787 when Yu did not view art objects or antiquities. He avidly studied Ming and Qing books to determine which works to purchase, and then took advantage of the expanding art market of the time. He was so engrossed in collecting and appreciating art that he sometimes viewed as many as 120 works in a single night, forgetting all about sleeping or eating. His artistic activities only ceased in 1788, when he became ill and died at the young age of 34. The diary states that Yu viewed and purchased a variety of artifacts, including calligraphy, paintings, epigraphs, maps, and art books from both Joseon and China. For him, studying, appreciating, and purchasing art was an indispensable everyday activity.

Yu's family status and his prolific network of acquaintances were crucial in helping him establish a solid position as a collector. By constantly engaging in intellectual exchanges, he was able to receive the



Fig. 6. Western engraving from Kim Gwangguk's collection. 18th century. Engraving on copper, 21.0 x 25.7 cm. (Private collection).

latest information about new materials and artworks, and even to venture into an entirely new field. For example, on the 11th day of the eighth month, 1779, Yu reported that he viewed a western painting, and on the 7th day of the sixth month, 1785, that his uncle Yu Hannyong (俞漢寧, 1743-1805) let him borrow a map of the West drawn by a westerner. On the 25th day of the first month, 1786, with the help of Kim Gwangguk, he was able to view a foreign map of Russia's border area. Kim Gwangguk also allowed Yu to borrow an album entitled *Seongnong hwawon* (石農畫苑, *Painting Garden of Kim Gwangguk*), which included a western copper engraving (Fig. 6). Yu's valuable network of family and acquaintances clearly gave him unique access to western paintings and maps drawn in the western style. Thus Yu, although he was merely a scholar, not a civil official, was able to experience not only the cultural trends of Ming and Qing, which Joseon intellectuals recognized as the most up-to-date information, but also the western visual system, which represented a completely different world.

Conclusion

In the 17th century, Joseon society, especially the literati class, began looking past the prohibitions of *wanmul sangji* and engaging in positive discussions of art appreciation. At the time, a person's fondness for art objects was usually considered a private trait

or personal tendency that was unique to the individual, so discussions on the topic centered around the qualities of an ideal collector. In other words, Joseon literati tended to consider any attachment to objects in relation to a person's inner psychology, which demonstrates the emergence of a new human character, despite the dominance of strict Confucian values and thought.

Furthermore, the influx of art-related books from China enabled collectors, in their discussions, to encompass issues related to art appreciation, authentication, and preservation, while also building the social and theoretical foundations for affirming the value of art collecting. The social changes that occurred in conjunction with the scholars' keen reading of newly-imported texts included a more active circulation of artworks, a sudden boom in the construction of sujangcheo as places for private collecting and viewing, and the rise of prominent professional collectors such as Yu Manju.

The discourses about art collecting that circulated in the 18th century are crucial for understanding the social and aesthetic perception of art at that time. They also provided a broad frame for promoting art appreciation with Joseon, which eventually led to the development of art history and the emergence and reception of new artistic styles. In sum, the discourses on art collecting formed the basis for all the art theory of the late Joseon Dynasty. ㄸ

TRANSLATED BY PARK MYOUNGSOOK

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