

The Bureau of Painting during the Joseon Dynasty: The Transformation of Institutional Systems Responding to Political Changes

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The Operation of *Gyeongguk daejeon* (經國大典, National code) and the Official Painter System Managed by Literati Officials in the Early Joseon Dynasty

The Bureau of Painting to oversee the production of court paintings and recruit professional painters is a unique system developed in East Asia in compliance with Confucian ethics and literati governance. As the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE–935) assimilated literati culture and concepts of Confucian statecraft, it established in 651 the royal Bureau of Painting known in Korean as Chaejeon (彩典, Department of Painting). In the late Silla period, it was renamed Jeonchaeseo (典彩署, Bureau of Painting) and then became Dohwawon (圖書院, Academy of Painting) during the Goryeo era. This painter system grew more systemized during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) when Neo-Confucianism was adopted as the ruling ideology, boosting Confucian statecraft supported by literati officials. Joseon had a dual structure of governance by a bureaucratic monarchy staffed with civilian scholar-officials based on checks and balances between the throne and bureaucracy.

When the *sarim* (士林, “forest of scholars”) emerged as a powerful literati faction to dominate mid-Joseon politics, the power of the civil officials was expanded. Conversely, the

monarch’s power was increased during the late Joseon period with the introduction of Tangpyeongchaek (蕩平策, Policy of Impartiality). These political shifts influenced the structures of power and the system governance. The Bureau of Painting was a suborganization comprised of low-ranking officials supported by official painters with the requisite technical skills. Its organization and operations evolved in accordance with political fluctuations and refinements to the governmental system.

The Joseon government inherited and maintained many of the features of the Goryeo dynasty’s Dohwawon during the reign of dynastic founder, King Taejo (太祖, r. 1392–1398), a time when paintings related to the establishment of the new dynasty were in high demand. The Bureau of Painting was reorganized as bureaucratic systems based on Neo-Confucian ideology became more firmly rooted in Joseon society and as *Gyeongguk daejeon* (1458) was promulgated. Changes took place gradually during the reigns of King Taejong (太宗, r. 1401–1418) and King Sejong (世宗, r. 1419–1459). Eventually, the bureau became a subordinate organ affiliated with Yejo (禮曹, Ministry of Rites) in King Taejong’s reign, and it was reconfigured along political principles based on the predominance of civil officials during the reign of King Sejong. Consequently, the position of deputy director (實案副提調, *siranbujego*), which had been held by officials above the third rank, was abolished, and the minister of

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Fig. 1. Portrait of King Taejo. 1872. Copied by Jo Jungmuk, Bak Gijun, and others. Color on silk. 218 × 156 cm. Gyeonggi Shrine



Fig. 2. Cover page for *Gyeongguk daejeon*. Printed in 1668. Woodblock print. 36.2 × 22.7 cm. Gyujeong Library

rites served as the director of the bureau. The assistant proctor (別座, *pyeoljwa*) of the institution was recruited from among civil officials, and a literati scholar was appointed to this position to evaluate the works of the painters. The painters at the bureau were strictly distinguished from literati civil and military officials and were considered functionary officials who could only hold minor technical and administrative posts (雜職, *japjik*). Painters were regarded as mere artisans holding vocational positions and were discriminated against for their relatively low social status.

Painters were excluded from the practical operations of the bureau, and their roles were restricted to creating drawings and paintings. When a statutory code defining the structure of the Joseon government and the system of officialdom was compiled in the reign of King Seongjong (成宗, r. 1470–1494), the name of the bureau was changed to Dohwaseo. Its suffix was changed from “won” (院), an indicator of a fifth-ranked government organization, to “seo” (署), meaning “a sixth-ranked bureau,” around 1470. This was stipulated in *Gyeongguk daejeon* promulgated in 1458, which provided guidance for the management of the Bureau of Painting for the remainder of the dynasty.

The regular professional staff of the bureau consisted of twenty official painters (畫員, *hwawon*) who produced paintings and drawings. Those holding the position as painters were restricted to the inferior ranks. Of the twenty official painters, only five maintained salaried positions: one sixth-ranked principal draftsman (善書, *seonhwa*), one seventh-ranked principal painter (善繪, *seonhoe*), one eighth-ranked draftsman (書史, *hwasa*), and two ninth-ranked painters (繪史, *hoesa*). The period of a painter’s employment and the result of painting examinations determined his promotion and appointment to one of these five salaried positions. The painters holding a salaried position received a regular stipend from Gwangheungchang (廣興倉, Expansive Emergent Warehouse), the warehouse providing the salaries of government officials, but others either were provided simply a per diem fee and meals for the days on which they worked or temporary payments and incentives. This resulted in unstable financial status for official painters.

Painters were recruited and promoted through examinations called *chwijae* (literally “talent selection”). Changes made to this examination were included in *Gyeongguk daejeon*.



Fig. 3. Blue and White Porcelain Jar with Plum and Bamboo Designs. H. 41 cm, D. 15.7 cm; 18.2 cm. Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art

The genres in the painting examination were expanded to five categories, from which the candidates could select two: bamboos, landscapes, portraiture, birds and animals, and flowers and plants. Those who excelled received a mark of *tong* (通, pass), while others were given *yak* (略, barely pass). The five genres were ranked in the order of bamboos, landscapes, portraiture as well as birds and animals, and flowers and plants. Differing numbers of points were allotted. For example, a work from the first-ranked genre received one point more than a painting of a second-ranked subject. In short, painters talented at subjects intended for artistic appreciation, such as bamboos and landscapes, were more likely to receive higher scores than those who excelled in paintings that had a more practical purpose. This reveals that the institutional system was structured based on the predominance of civil officials and the preferred aesthetics of scholar officials.

Because of *hanpoomsuyong* (限品絛用)—a government system that restricted the promotion of official painters beyond the sixth rank—many painters had to depart from Dohwaseo even before they turned 30. This caused a considerable loss to the government because painters could spend nearly a decade

in training. To allow the painters who had to leave Dohwaseo because of *hanpoomsuyong* to keep working at Dohwaseo, a provision called *yingsa hwawon* (仍仕畫員, painter who continues to serve) was created during the reign of King Sejong, and three posts (one each in the sixth, seventh, and eighth ranks) were allocated to such artists. Wages were distributed among *yingsa hwawon* who were ranked first in quarterly painting examinations.

It was necessary to select candidates with artistic talent at an early age and then train them for an extensive period. An apprenticeship system was established within the Bureau of Painting during King Sejong's reign that mirrored the training system established by Sayeokwon (司譯院, Office of Interpreters) and Jeonuigam (典醫監, Palace Medical Office). Promising youths around the age of fifteen who exhibited talent were selected for an apprenticeship for minor technical and administrative posts. Every three years they sat for an examination that selected fifteen successful candidates to be appointed to official positions. Unsuccessful candidates who had received three years training were dismissed from the bureau and sent to serve as soldiers. The installation of this *hwahak saengdo* (畫學生徒, student painters) system in the Bureau of Painting consisting of 15 trainees was stipulated in *Gyeongguk daejeon*. This apparently followed the regulations on apprenticeships for other minor technical and administrative posts. It resulted in the emergence of official painters as members of a distinct hereditary status group known as *jungin* (中人, middle professional) in the later period.

As discussed above, the structure and organization of the Bureau of Painting in the early Joseon era was delineated in *Gyeongguk daejeon*, which tended to minimize the monarch's involvement and center on civil officials and their active roles in the decision-making process. This is a characteristic unique to Joseon society, in which Neo-Confucianism was deeply rooted. It also marks a sharp distinction with the Chinese Imperial Painting Academy, which was primarily controlled by the emperor and the eunuchs. In China, the Imperial Painting Academies for the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1636–1912) dynasties were based out of a palace. In contrast, the buildings of the Joseon Bureau of Painting were located in Gyeonpyeongbang (堅平坊, present-day Gyeonji-dong and Gongpyeong-dong), a central area of the capital but far from the palace complex. Consequently, the king's orders and requests to the Bureau of Painting were open to scrutiny and critique by bureaucrats from the three censorate offices, and the king's access to the bureau and its painters was highly restricted.

The official painting system existed throughout the Joseon

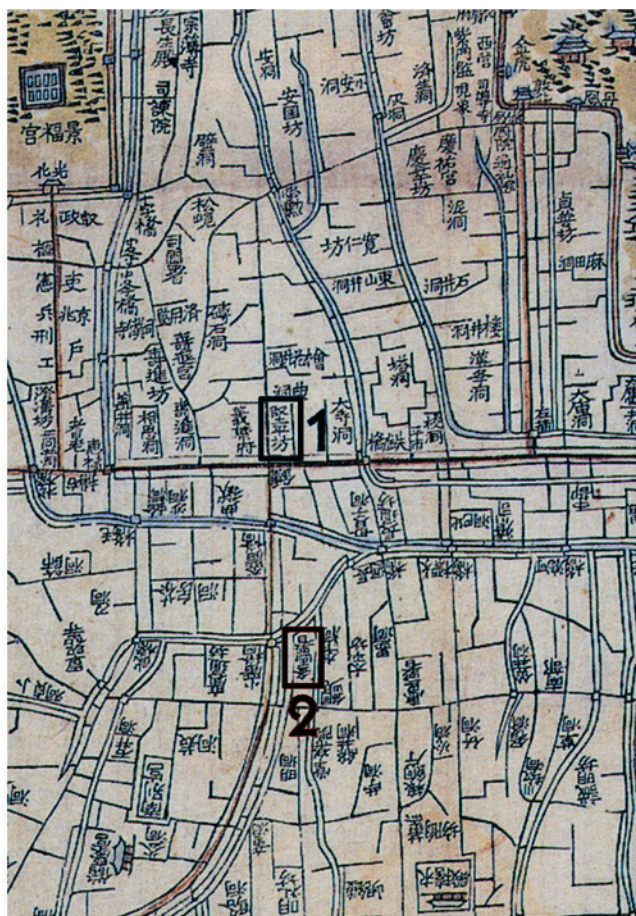


Fig. 4. Sites of the Bureau of Painting in the Gyeongpyeong District (1) in the central part of the city and the Taeyeong District in the southern part of the city from *Map of the Capital* (首善全圖). Printed in 1861. Woodblock. Light color on paper. 160.8 × 79 cm. Seoul Museum of History



Fig. 5. Portrait of An Hyang (順興畫像) from *Illustrated manual on the conduct of the three relations in the eastern kingdom* (東國新續三綱行實圖, *Dongguk sin sok sang-gang haengsildo*). Printed in 1617. Woodblock. 37.8 × 25.4 cm. Gyujujanggak Library

era from the founding of the dynasty and was referred to in *Gyeongguk daejeon* as “an institution of the preceding king.” With the emergence of Neo-Confucian literati as a powerful political body in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, civil officials took over high-ranking positions within the bureau, and painters were only assigned to minor technical and administrative posts. Instead, the position of adjunct teacher (兼教授, *gyeom gyosu*) was established to support the practical learning of minor technical and administrative skills. The adjunct teacher assumed responsibility for training painting students and conducting examinations. The installation of this post enhanced the social status of official painters as a petty functionary belonging to the *jungin* class. As a result, a number of families that produced painters for generations emerged since the mid-Joseon era, including Jeonju Yi (李上佐, Yi Sangjiwa), Yangcheon Heo (許義順, Heo Uisun), Cheongju Han (韓時覺, Han Sigak), and Indong Jang (張得萬, Jang Deukman).

Painting projects sponsored by the state, such as illustrations for *Uigwe* (儀軌, State records of royal events) and publishing the *Haengsildo* (行實圖, *Illustrated Guide to Moral Conduct*) were continued in the seventeenth century. However, many important artistic activities of the bureau were halted. The

commission of royal portraiture ceased after King Seonjo's (宣祖, r. 1568–1608) rule, and the custom of distributing *sehwa* (歲畫, New Year's paintings) to officials was abandoned following the reign of King Injo (仁祖, r. 1623–1649). The number of painters in the delegations dispatched to China was reduced in the seventeenth century. King Hyeonjong (顯宗, r. 1660–1674) issued a decree to reduce the salary of petty bureaucrats in 1662, which aggravated the already strained financial situation of official painters. The facilities of the Bureau of Painting located in the Gyeongpyeong District boasted a fair-sized building of 800 *kan* (one *kan* is equal to 2.4 meters). However, King Sukjong (肅宗, r. 1675–1720) bestowed the site of the bureau as a bridal gift to his younger sister Princess Myeongan (明安公主, 1667–1687). Consequently, the bureau was required to make temporary use of vacant government buildings and houses confiscated from people executed for political reasons until an official building was constructed in the early eighteenth century in the Taepyeong District (太平坊, present-day Suha-dong in Eulji-ro) in the southern area of the capital.

Daejeon tongpyeon (大典通編, Comprehensive national code) and the Operation of Official Painting System Centering on the King

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism and the increased influence of scholar-officials engaging in factional politics, the power of the bureaucracy superseded that of the monarch in the late seventeenth century during the first half of the reign of King Sukjong. However, the second half of his reign witnessed a reassertion of royal authority. After a sudden major reversal of the positions of the ruling factions, factional politics collapsed, and the king's authority was reinstated with the implementation of the Tangpyeongchaek (蕩平策, Policy of Impartiality). King Sukjong ordered the copying of the portrait of King Taejo and its placement in a shrine. This took place 200 years after King Taejo's portrait was first created at the beginning of the dynasty. In addition, King Sukjong commissioned his own portrait and used visual art as an effective vehicle to reinforce royal authority and revive royal ceremonies. After the national recovery from the invasions earlier in the century, the facilities of the Bureau of Painting in the Taepyeong District were restored under the king's auspices. The institution's activities were revitalized in the late eighteenth century as well.

King Yeongjo (英祖, r. 1725–1776) and King Jeongjo (正



Fig. 6. Portrait of King Yeongjo. 1900. Copied by Jo Seokjin and Chae Yongsin. Color on silk. 203.8 × 83 cm. National Palace Museum of Korea

祖, r. 1777–1800) sustained the Policy of Impartiality to augment royal authority and actively promote cultural activities such as copying royal calligraphy, painting royal portraits every ten years, and producing documentary paintings depicting state events. These two kings are well known for their keen interest in art as a propaganda tool and generous support for court painters. The system of official painters was reinstated and reformed to better support the Bureau of Painting and official painters during the reigns of King Sukjong and King Jeongjo. Royal patronage of painting and the ruler's direct involvement in supervising production and the training of court painters reached its zenith during the reign of King Jeongjo. The king established the Gyujeongguk (奎章閣, Royal Library) in 1776 and installed Painters-in-waiting to the Court (差備待令書員, *Jabidaeryeonghwa-won*) as a subordinate organ in 1783. Ten outstanding painters selected from the Bureau of Painting were dispatched to the Royal Library, and its organization was codified into the *Daejeon tongpyeon* (1785). This resulted in the bureau and official painting system entering into the realm of influence of the king.

The reformation of the Bureau of Painting since the era of King Sukjong was conducted through three channels: first,



Fig. 7. Cover page for *Daejeon tongpyeon*. Printed in 1785. Woodblock. 37 × 23.6 cm. Gyujanggak Library

the number of official painters was expanded in response to the increasing demands for paintings and drawings by the state and court; second, promotion to higher positions, including a salaried position as a civil official or third-ranked military official was awarded to painters in charge of royal portraits; and third, salaries were secured for official painters who were not appointed to otherwise paid posts.

As the authority of the king was enhanced and a number of court events were conducted during the reign of King Sukjong, the demands for drawings and paintings expanded apace. The number of official painters prescribed in *Gyeongguk daejeon* was insufficient to manage the workload. The recruitment of additional painters was required, so 10 painters and 15 students were added to bring the number of artisans and apprentices to 30 each, or 60 in total. This number is almost twice the painters stipulated in *Gyeongguk daejeon*, which called for only 35 painters in total (20 full-fledged painters and 15 students). A record from 1726 in *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (承政院日記, Daily records of the royal secretariat) states that the total number of painters in the Bureau

of Painting was 30. This indicates that the number of official painters had already reached 30 in the second half of King Sukjong's reign and the early period of the reign of King Yeongjo. According to the *Sok daejeon* (續大典, Supplement to the national code) (1744), 15 additional painting students were recruited. The Comprehensive national code compiled in the reign of King Jeongjo states that 30 painters were associated with the bureau. Considering this codification, it can be confirmed that the expanded number of painters continued into a later period.

Upward mobility for the painters was achieved through special promotions to the high positions allowed to royal portrait painters. They were often assigned to sixth-ranked positions in the civil officialdom, such as government posts outside the capital, including Country Magistrates and Official of the Post-station, a third-ranked post for military officials, or a third-ranked post for civil officials hoping to ascend to a position in the palace. For example, Jang Jauk (張子旭) was appointed to the sixth-ranked post for civil officials at the Yebinsi (禮賓寺, Office of Receiving Foreign Dignitaries) (1699) and Ham Taeseok (咸泰碩) held a sixth-ranked position (1703). Jin Jaehae (秦再奚) was assigned as a third-ranked guard officer (1725) after he served as a junior third-ranked army officer at Sogeun Port (1718). Byeon Sangbyeok (卞相璧) was appointed as a third-ranked army officer in Gusan (1763) and county magistrate in Goksan (1773). Kim Hongdo (金弘道) received various salaried positions as a civil official starting in his twenties. These include a sixth-ranked official of the Office of Royal Procurement (1773), a sixth-ranked official of the Office of the Royal Garden (1773 and 1774), a keeper of horses in Ulsan (1776), a sixth-ranked official of the Office for Storing Ice (1781), a chief of the post-station in Angi (1783), and a county magistrate in Yeonpung (1791). Numerous painters such as Yun Sangik (尹商翊) (1688), Hyeon Yugang (玄有綱) (1724), Byeon Sangbyeok (1763), Kim Yuseong (金有聲) (before 1763), Yi Bokgyu (李復圭) (1771), and Kim Husin (金厚臣) (1773) were all appointed to salaried positions as third-ranked civil officials. Jang Gyeongju (張敬周) (1757) even received the title of second-ranked civil official, which is equal to the status of a minister.

When civil official posts with a sixth-grade ranking were bestowed on painters, they ironically became overqualified to return to the Bureau of Painting since this institution did not hold a civil official position of the sixth ranking. To support these skilled painters and allow them to go back to the bureau, two posts for sixth-ranked *sagwa* (司果, administrative assistant) were newly created. Meritorious painters and instructors also received these salaries starting in the second half of the reign of King Yeongjo.

In order to improve the working conditions of official



Fig. 8. *Gyujianggak* by Kim Hongdo. 1776. Color on silk. 144.4 × 115 cm. National Museum of Korea

painters, Kings Sukjong and Yeongjo ordered the addition of at least 24 salaried positions and established the *hwasagungwan* (畫師軍官, painters at military posts), also known as the *hwasabijang* (畫師裨將, painters appointed as adjunct generals)

system. King Sukjong dispatched painters to the headquarters of provincial military commanders and naval headquarters as Adjunct Generals in 1703 and 1704. Military official titles were awarded to these court painters, accompanied by regular

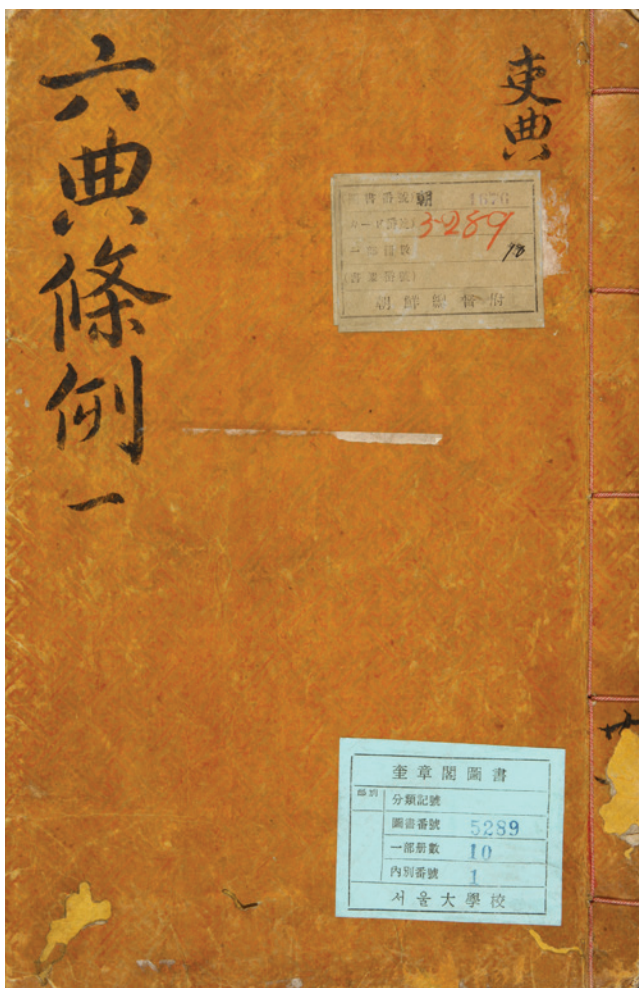


Fig. 9. Cover page for *Yukcheon chorye*. Printed in 1866. Movable type printing. 29.8 × 19.4 cm. Gyujianggak Library

wages from provincial governments. In addition, painters were assigned to the navy headquarters at Chungmu in Gyeongsang-do Province in 1714. Accepting a proposal from the official painters, King Yeongjo ordered the installation of salaried posts in the provincial administrations of seven out of eight provinces (excluding Gyeonggi-do Province) and painters from the capital were sent to fill the posts of adjunct general. Furthermore, three painters were dispatched to the Hullyeon Dogam (訓練都監, Military Training Directorate), Geumwiyeong (禁衛營, Capital Garrison), and Oyongcheng (御營廳, Royal Guards Commands) in 1773 by King Yeongjo's edict.

The system of appointing painters at the military post was established in provincial barracks as well. According to *Yukcheon chorye*, a painter from the Bureau of Painting was dispatched to the administrations of seven provinces, as well as to military camps in Pyeongan and Chungcheong-do Provinces. One painting student from the bureau was dispatched to each of six military base camps, excluding only those in Chungju and Anju, and five navy commands.

This notable improvement in the social status of official

painters led to a change in the organization and structure of the Bureau of Painting. When the royal portrait painters' positions were elevated to the third-ranked civil official, the *hwawon* position, formerly classified as a "minor technical and administrative post," was reclassified as an "official post in the capital." According to *Daejon tongpyeon* promulgated in the reign of King Jeongjo, most of the minor technical and administrative posts listed in the National code were discontinued at that time and all those that had formerly been assigned to official painters were listed under the category of official posts in the capital. Every position in the bureau, including the director and sixth-ranked principal draftsman, was recorded. The five salaried positions available to the 20 official painters belonged to the category of "minor technical and administrative posts" in the early Joseon era, while the five posts for the 30 artists then in the bureau became official posts in the capital following the reclassification. This suggests the improved status of official painters as they were allowed access to positions in the civil and military officialdoms in the capital that in previous centuries had been exclusively reserved for *yangban* (兩班, gentry) officials.

Moreover, King Jeongjo appointed an adjunct teacher of sixth rank to the position of representing the Bureau of Painting as its supreme member, while an assistant proctor from the minister of rites who formerly managed the bureau was excluded from the position. He established the Painters-in-waiting to the Court which operated as a sub-organ of the Royal Library where ten painters were selected. Painters-in-waiting to the Court refer to a group of official painters summoned to the court in response to the king's requests. King Jeongjo established the Gyujianggak as a major monarchic body that was responsible for copying royal calligraphy and publishing royal writing. The system had been set up as an ad hoc office during the reign of King Yeongjo. Inheriting this system, King Jeongjo reorganized this system as subsidiaries of the Gyujianggak, and its operating rules were codified in *Daejon tongpyeon*. Unlike the official painters from the Bureau of Painting, Painters-in-waiting worked on commissions from the king and communicated with him via royal letters. The king was directly involved in the appointment and dismissal of these painters. Thus, Painters-in-waiting were affiliated with the Royal Library. Their office was located near the Guemcheon (禁川, Forbidden Stream) within the confines of Changdeok Palace and near the office for scholars in the Royal Library. Exempted from the ordinary duties required of official painters in the Bureau of Painting, Painters-in-waiting undertook major tasks commissioned by the king related to the royal rituals over which he presided.

The Painters-in-waiting gained a more stable financial

situation and higher social standing compared to ordinary official painters due to their proximity to the king. They enjoyed all the benefits granted to official painters of the Bureau of Painting and shared the salaries allocated to three posts for a *sajeong* (司正, seventh-ranked administrative associate). In addition, the painters who achieved the highest two marks in an examination held every three months had the opportunity to receive special appointments to a paid position as a sixth-ranked *sagwa* and a *sajeong*.

Once official painters were selected to be Painters-in-waiting, they retained their tenured posts unless they committed serious misconduct. Skilled painters who had produced great works were exempted from the painting examinations and enjoyed the special privilege of receiving a salary equivalent to that of a sixth-ranked country magistrate, the highest position an official painter could obtain, or of a sixth-ranked *sagwa*, who is one grade higher than the director of the Bureau of Painting. For this economic benefit, official painters who had served as county magistrates or the director of a bureau wished to become Painters-in-waiting. In addition, Painters-in-waiting were allowed direct communication with the king, which proved to be the most valuable benefit to the painters.

King Jeongjo was actively involved in the operation of this system. The Painters-in-waiting were closely connected to the king and managed under his direct authority. King Jeongjo educated and trained the Painters-in-waiting by presiding over painting examinations and conveyed orders that reflected his political ideology and artistic philosophy to the painters. He even provided detailed instructions on how and what to paint, and corrected in person the examination results that were assigned by officials from the Royal Library. The king was so enthusiastic as to discharge incompetent or insincere painters and to reward outstanding painters with exceptional benefits.

With the emergence of the Painters-in-waiting, two separate organs became responsible for the production of painting in the Joseon dynasty: the ministry of rites managed the Bureau of Painting throughout the dynasty, while the Royal Library oversaw the Painters-in-waiting under the king's direct command. Subsequently, the governmental responsibility for producing paintings shifted from the minister of rites to the king and his Royal Library. The Painters-in-waiting under the Royal Library took the lead in art production of the state and assumed important tasks formerly executed by the painters of the Bureau of Painting. This system continued from the seventh year of King Jeongjo's reign (1783) to the eighteenth year (1811) of King Gojong's (高宗, r. 1864–1881) rule. A total of 103 official painters eventually held posts as Painters-in-waiting to satisfy

the demands of the king and his closest courtiers. The definitive painters of the late Joseon period, such as Kim Eunghwan (金應煥), Sin Hanpyeong (申漢枰), Kim Hongdo, Yi Inmun (李寅文), Kim Deuksin (金得臣), Kim Hajong (金夏鐘), Yi Hyeongnok (李亨祿), Yu Unhong (劉運弘), Yi Hanchol (李漢喆), and Yu Suk (劉淑), all served as Painters-in-waiting to the Court.

Artistic Activities of the Painters of the Bureau of Painting as recorded in *Yukcheon chorye* and *Naegak ilryeok* (內閣日曆, Daily record of the Gyujanggak)

The National codes of the Joseon dynasty simply define the duties of official painters as the production of drawings and paintings. Official painters also worked on private commissions alongside their public commissions as government officials. To contextualize the system of the official painters within a broader institutional perspective, this study focuses on the painter's activities in the public realm, which can be divided between drawings for practical purposes and artistic works for appreciation.

As public servants, producing practical drawings was the key duty of court painters. The painters of the Bureau of Paintings had the responsibility of creating practical, especially didactic paintings and drawings to support the royal regime based on the administration of Confucian scholar officials and the Neo-Confucian percepts of governing according to propriety. Their most significant task was producing paintings related to the king and state events. When sovereign power was expanded in the eighteenth century, royal patronage of art and support for court painters increased. Well aware of the political potential of art, the Joseon kings made apt use of visual materials to impose, solidify, and augment royal authority and power. The only concrete regulation on the duties of the painters, which was recorded in the Supplement to the national code, was that “(official painters) are responsible for drawing the stone statues and grass of royal burial mounds to monitor damage.”

However, official painters also assumed a wide range of official duties under various circumstances. *Yukcheon chorye* documented the artistic activities of official painters. Their primary tasks as described were mostly related to the king and the royal household, and their labor was highly organized and specialized. Most of their works were executed in a collaborative manner since the procedures required specialized skills and



Fig.10. *Portrait of Seo Jiksu (徐直修)* by Yi Meonggi and Kim Hongdo. 1796. Color on silk. 148.8 × 72 cm. National Museum of Korea

a division of labor to distribute the limited salaries between as many painters as possible.

Besides the duties listed in *Yukcheon chorye*, the public tasks of the official painters were to produce numerous paintings and drawings for practical purposes. Based on archival research on existing historical texts, their responsibilities can be summarized as follows: portraits of kings, meritorious statesmen (功臣像), elder doyens (耆老像), and government officials; didactic paintings depicting sages, wise monarchs, and wise concubines; figure paintings, such as illustrations of moral conduct, the *Odes of the State of Bin* (豳風圖), *Painting of a Busy Life* (無逸圖), *Paintings of Agriculture and Sericulture* (耕織圖), and genre paintings (風俗圖); topographical paintings and maps; documentary paintings depicting government offices, literati gatherings (契會圖), royal visits to the tombs of preceding kings (陵行圖), and royal banquets (進饌圖); illustrations and drawings included in *Uigwe* (儀軌, State records of royal events) and books, drawing ruled lines and diagrams; decorative paintings installed at the palace or used in royal ceremonies, such as screens of peonies, ritual flags, four auspicious animals, paintings of books and scholars' accouterments (冊架圖), New Year's paintings; and designs on blue-and-white porcelain. In addition, official painters accompanied envoys on diplomatic missions. Dispatched official painters produced topographic images during their journey and documentary paintings depicting government buildings, copied illustrations and drawings during their stay in other countries, and produced paintings related to reception ceremonies with foreign officials. Buddhist paintings enshrined in royal tombs and temples were executed by court painters as well. In particular, those under the Bureau of Painting actively participated in producing Buddhist paintings during the early Joseon period when the influence of the Buddhist tradition was more pervasive.

In addition to drawings for practical purposes, paintings for artistic appreciation were created by the official painters. There was no clear line of distinction made between drawings for practical purposes and arts for aesthetic viewing. In several cases, paintings served both purposes. However, we can identify certain paintings intended for artistic appreciation which were not necessary for practical uses. For example, by order of King Jeongjo, Kim Hongdo and Kim Eunghwan painted true-view landscapes (眞景山水) depicting Mount Guemgang (金剛山, Diamond Mountain) and nine counties in the Yeongdong Provinces, the most famous excursion sites in the Joseon dynasty. In the early Joseon period, paintings of Mount Guemgang and *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (瀟湘八景圖) were prepared as diplomatic gifts to Ming envoys and Japanese



Fig. 11. *Return Procession to the Capital* (還御行列圖) by Yi Inmun, Kim Deuksin, Jang Hanjong, and others. The seventh panel from *Screen of King Jeongjo's Visit to the Royal Tomb in Hwaseong in the Year of Eulmyo* (圖幸乙卯整理契屏). 1796. Color on silk. Eight-panel folding screen. 151.5 × 66.4 cm (each), National Museum of Korea

delegations. These paintings bear a dual nature in that they were produced for practical purposes, but the subjects include artistic elements purely for appreciation. King Jeongjo's commission to Kim Hongdo to draw *Painting after Zhu Xi's Poems* (朱夫子詩意圖) as a New Year's painting can be understood in similar context.

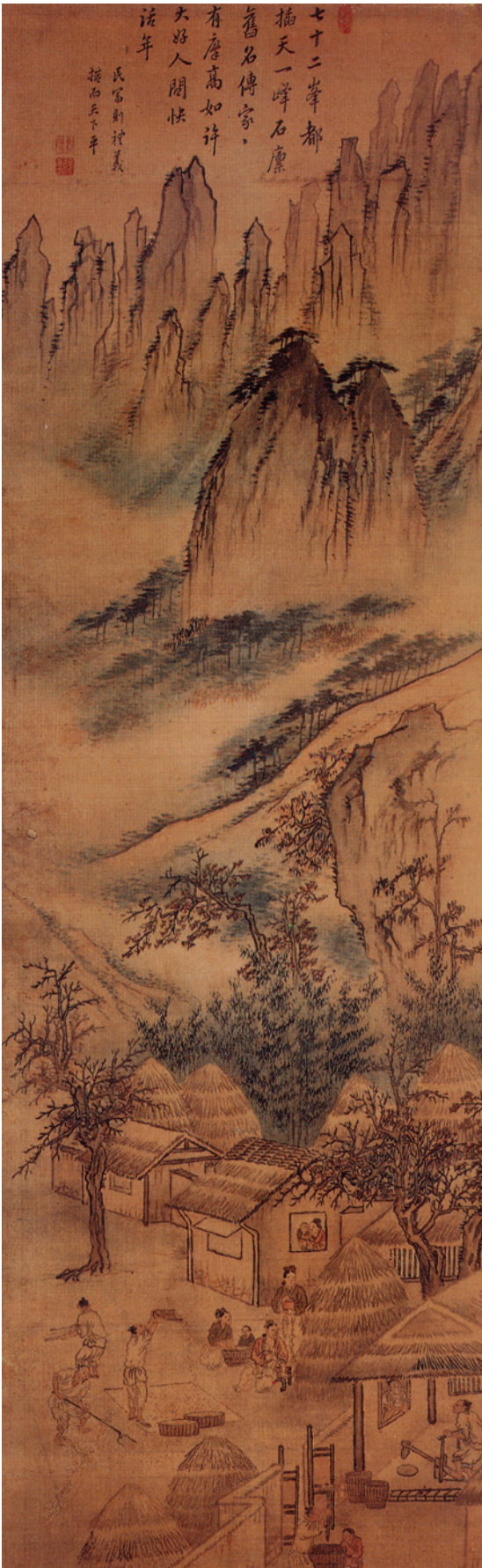


Fig. 12. "Stacks of Harvested Rice Plants in All the Houses" (家家有廩圖) from *Painting after Zhu Xi's Poems* (朱夫子詩意圖屏) by Kim Hongdo. 1800. Color on paper. Eight-panel folding screen. 125 × 40.5 cm (each). Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art

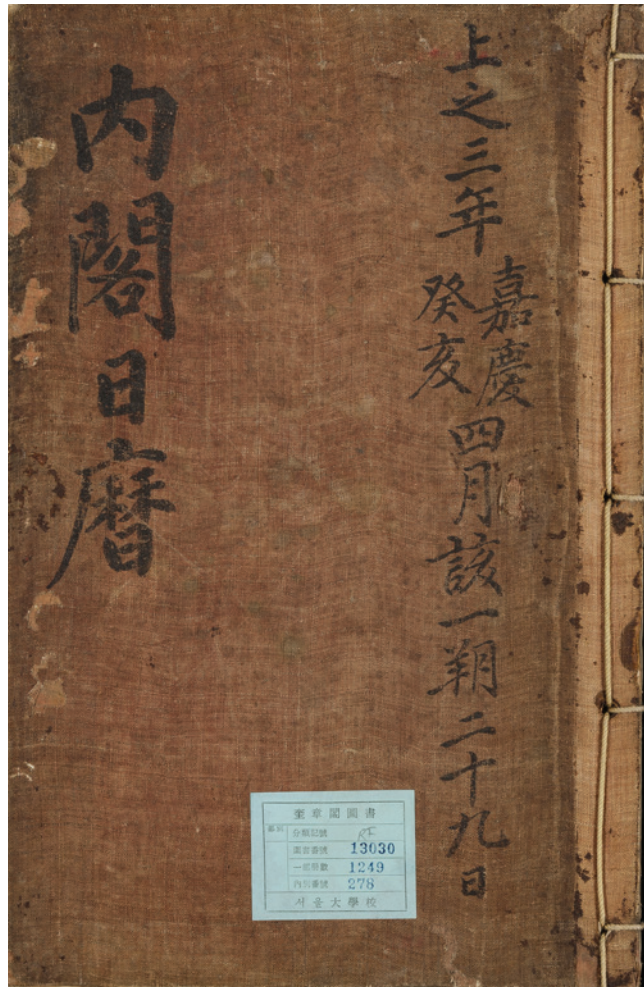


Fig. 13. Cover page for *Naegak ilryeok*. 1779–1883. Manuscript. 42.8 × 26 cm. Gyujeong Library

The abovementioned paintings executed by the official painters assumed practical characteristics in term of their purpose, but their contents conveyed aesthetic aspects for artistic contemplation. Such multilayered meanings are exemplified by the subjects for the painting examinations as recorded in the national codes. "Bamboos, landscapes, portraiture, birds and animals, and flowers and plants" served as the painting genres tested during the entrance examination for official painters for almost 400 years from the promulgation of the National code (1485) in the early Joseon period to the Comprehensive compendium of the national code (1865) in the final decades of the dynasty. The Regulations for the six boards (1865) and the *Naegak ilryeok* (1783–1881) detail the implementation of painting examinations, the lists of subjects, and the painters' marks. This allows us to scrutinize the contents of paintings executed by official painters in the public realm.

The genres of paintings and the topics selected for the painting examination vary according to the Regulations for the six boards. Numerous tests were frequently conducted



Fig. 14. "Threshing" from *Screen Depicting the Wandering Life* by Kim Hongdo. 1778. Light color on silk. 90.9 × 42.7 cm. National Museum of Korea

and many works for artistic appreciation, such as landscapes, figure paintings, bird and flower paintings, and Four Gentlemen paintings, were created by professional court painters for these examinations. Nearly all official painters sat for the painting examinations, from skilled and seasoned official painters to students. The diverse examinations took place on various

occasions. These included the highest-level examination for determining a painter's salary, which was overseen by the director of the bureau, and tests of lesser importance for rewarding successful painters with painting materials such as silk, paper, brushes, and ink, which were presided over by an adjunct teacher and instructor. The topics of the examinations



Fig. 15. *Books and Scholar's Accoutrement* by Yi Eungnok. Mid-19th c. Color on paper. Ten-panel folding screen. 153 × 352 cm. National Museum of Korea

were relatively simple, and subjects selected from the five genres listed in the National code were used for tests.

King Jeongso expanded the subjects on which Painters-in-waiting were tested from five to eight and altered the form of the examinations, known as *nokchwijae* (祿取才, talent selection to make payment). The Naegak ilryeok provides detailed lists of subjects for the examinations and painters' scores, which allows a further exploration of the artistic activities of painters at court. The king and his close subjects at the Royal Library selected topics and evaluated works of Painters-in-waiting. "Bamboos" and "flowers and plants" as subjects in the examination to appoint official painters to the Bureau of Painting was expanded to "bamboos and plum blossoms" and "plants and insects." Genre paintings, scholar's stationery (文房, *munbang*), and architecture paintings were newly added as examination topics. The tests were expanded to cover a wide array of subjects derived from literature, history, and philosophy, as well as those reflecting contemporary costumes and lifestyles.

The investigation of changes in painting genres and subjects for the examination exclusively for Painters-in-waiting (i.e., *nokchwijae*) reveals changes of artistic trends and painting themes among official painters in the late Joseon dynasty. In the reigns of King Jeongjo and King Sunjo (純祖, r. 1801–1834), genre paintings were most frequently selected and paintings that reflected the contemporaneous society were favored.

However, under the rule of King Heonjong (憲宗, r. 1835–1849), figure paintings declined while the number of landscape and architecture paintings increased, revealing a shift in artistic trends. Paintings presenting the realities of society and human activities were replaced by paintings featuring nature. During the reign of King Cheoljong (哲宗, r. 1849–1863), landscape paintings were rarely selected and animal and bird paintings outnumbered any other genre. The preference for nature continued, but an emphasis on aesthetic value emerged. Flowers, plants and animals, and birds were preferred as representatives of a static atmosphere in place of large-scale landscapes. Birds and animals, plants and insects, and bamboos and plum blossoms remained favored themes during King Gojong's reign. However, the proportion of these genres reduced, and paintings more closely associated with courtly tastes favoring decorative qualities increased. These include genre paintings, scholars' stationery, and architecture paintings that portray cityscapes and urban life.

This shift coincides precisely with the development of court painting in the late Joseon period, which implies the substantial influence of the assessment system for Painters-in-waiting to the Court on the production of paintings focused on aesthetic appreciation. It also reflects the significant roles played by the king and the impact of institutional interventions on the artistic activities and training of the official painters of the era.

This article is an abridged and revised English version of “The Official Painting System of the Joseon Dynasty” (조선시대 도화서 화원 제도), previously published in 2011 in *Joseon hwawon daejeon* (조선화원대전).

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