

## Editorial Note

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The special topic for the 12th volume of the *Journal of Korean Art and Archaeology (JKAA)* is court painting of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897). Court painting can be defined as paintings commissioned by the court for use by the court. In researching the history of Korean painting, we discovered that a serious study of Joseon court painting began rather late compared to other fields. Aside from the study of royal portraits and portraits of meritorious officials, which began early as part of the study of portraiture in general, it was a long time before researchers began to take an interest in other types of court painting. Arguably, no other field of research has shown such qualitative and quantitative growth in a short period of time as that of Joseon court painting.

If we take a brief look at the trends in court painting research, we reveal changes in the system of court artists belonging to Dohwaseo (Bureau of Painting). These changes occurred in the list of artists and the work that the artists produced. Professor Kang Kwan-shik's investigation of the *chabi daeryeong hwawon* (or *jabi daeryeong hwawon*), the painters in waiting to the court who were attached to Gyujanggak (royal library), can be said to have laid the foundation for research on the subject of court painting, given that almost all Joseon court paintings were produced by the Dohwaseo artists and the painters in waiting. During the Joseon dynasty, after important state rites or ceremonies of the royal family, court officials would commission

these artists to produce paintings realistically recording the event as souvenirs to be shared amongst themselves. Research on such documentary court paintings has played a great part getting scholars to take notice of Joseon court painting.

The study of court painting is greatly indebted to documentary evidence provided by *uigwe*, books that record in detail state rites or other events. Research on court painting gained momentum when researchers began to appreciate the rich content and value of the paintings contained in these books. As the *uigwe* contain paintings such as *Banchado* (painting of the order of participants in a royal procession), study of *uigwe* paintings was also actively carried out as a part of court painting research.

These days, attention is focused on the paintings that were used to decorate palace interiors. As most court paintings were colored, for a long time they were treated as folk paintings (*min-hwa*). But with progress in court painting research, the origin of folk painting is now seen to be connected with court painting, and it is widely accepted that folk paintings are the works that were produced by professional artists when the court painting style spread beyond the palace to ordinary homes.

While research on court painting was based on solid documentary support provided by *Uigwe*, the opening of the National Palace Museum of Korea in 2005 provided a place

where actual examples could be seen firsthand. The National Palace Museum was established around a collection of artworks from five royal palaces in Seoul: Gyeongbokgung, Changdeokgung, Changgyeonggung, Gyeonghuigung, and Gyeongungung. Its permanent display and special exhibitions have both aroused public curiosity about court paintings and to some extent relieved that curiosity. Public interest in the culture of the royal court grew when the Joseon dynasty *uigwe* were inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2007 as well as when the *uigwe* kept in the National Library of France were returned to Korea in 2011 on a permanent loan basis. These *uigwe* were special copies for “the kings’ perusal,” and this in turn played a large role in advancing court painting studies. It is timely, therefore, that this volume is based on articles about court painting, which has led research on the art of the royal court over the past ten years.

The focus of this volume is decorative court painting, the genre of court painting that has most captured the attention of scholars recently and where many research discoveries have been unearthed. Paintings of the sun and moon, and five peaks (*ilwolobongdo*), symbols of longevity (*jangsaengdo*), peonies (*morando*), flowers and birds (*hwajodo*), and flowers and plants (*hwahoedo*) make up the bulk of decorative court paintings. Other popular themes are Guo Fenyang’s *Enjoyment of Life, The Feast of Yoji Pond*, in addition to books and scholar’s accoutrements (*chaekgado*), and white porcelain vessels (*baekjado*). Among these themes, paintings of the sun and moon, and five peaks were considered the most important. This theme has been covered quite extensively in other publications and is not covered extensively in this volume to leave room for papers on paintings that are less well-known but of high artistic value, providing rich material for discussion.

The decorative court paintings introduced in this volume are all in collections in the United States. All of them are important examples of Joseon court painting and at the same time have the advantage of being works relatively more accessible to researchers outside of Korea. Meanwhile, articles in the Feature section, devoted to works in the collection of the National Museum of Korea, all deal with material that can be placed under the category of court painting. Hence the subject of court painting has been given full coverage.

The first paper in this volume of *JKAA* is a study of the Dohwaseo artist system by Professor Kang Kwan-shik. Nearly all paintings used in the court, and indeed all the court paintings introduced in this volume, were produced by these artists. Dohwaseo was a government agency in charge of all painting-related affairs of the state and the court that existed for some 500 years, from the early days of the Joseon period until its closure as

a result of the 1894 Gabo Reform. Knowledge of changes in the Dohwaseo system, the kind of jobs commissioned to the artists and their characteristics, and the social position of the court artists is the first step to understanding court painting, which is why this paper was chosen to lead into the theme for the special report. On the premise that Dohwaseo was managed by civil officials during the early Joseon period and by the king later in the period, Professor Kang Kwan-shik explains that systematic reform of the government bureau in charge of painting following the reign of King Sukjong improved the treatment of the artists, enhanced their skills, and influenced art trends. In particular, he emphasized that the court painter in waiting system institutionalized by King Jeongjo brought radical changes to the Dohwaseo system.

Dr. Park Bonsoo’s article is a study of the *Ten Symbols of Longevity* (*Sipjangaengdo*, 십장생도) folding screen in the collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon in the United States. For the government officials of the Joseon period, it was customary to produce and distribute amongst themselves commemorative folding screens, called *gyebyeong*, in memory of a state rite or ceremony. The folding screen at the University of Oregon was also produced for a similar purpose, indicating that the ten symbols of longevity, a popular theme for decorative court paintings, was applied to other types of works such as *gyebyeong*. These commemorative folding screens include a list of participants at the particular event and information about who commissioned the screen and when. The University of Oregon screen was produced in the late 19th century and presents a standard for the style of colored court paintings produced by Dohwaseo.

Dr. Kim Sujin’s article deals with a folding screen entitled *Sea, Cranes, and Peaches* (*Haehakbandodo*, 해학반도도), produced during the Korean Empire (1897–1910) and now preserved at the Honolulu Academy of Art. The Joseon royal family placed great importance on longevity and the birth of many sons and expressed these wishes in paintings. Longevity paintings featuring interminable natural objects and plants and animals known to live for a long time were hence widely used to decorate the palace. The date and purpose of production of the *Sea, Cranes, and Peaches* folding screen can be surmised from the inscription on the surface of the artwork. The composition of sea, cranes, and a peach tree is rooted in Joseon tradition, but the treatment of the background in gold leaf is a style somewhat removed from it. The folding screen is therefore an example reflecting new trends of the early 20th century influenced by Japan. Accommodating paintings of this new style at the royal palace suggests that Emperor Gojong’s sense of beauty, which

recognized new trends, converged with the availability of large spaces where such folding screens could be installed.

Professor Park Jeonghye's article, "Production and Significance of Paintings of Tribute Missions to the Son of Heaven in the Late 18th Century" explores how the Chinese theme of "princely gathering" (*wanghoe*) was assimilated by Joseon and became a popular subject for decorative court paintings. Unlike the ten symbols of longevity or peonies, the princely gathering was not a theme traditionally found in Joseon paintings. Like *chaekgado*, or paintings of books and scholars' accoutrements, *wanghoedo* were first produced during the reign of King Jeongjo, when original new subjects for court painting emerged and works produced by the court artists greatly improved in quality, becoming firmly established with iconography suited to the folding screen form. Indeed, *Wanghoedo* screens are considered to be one of the major achievements of 18th century court painting, an example of Chinese source material expressing a reign of peace and prosperity and rule by virtue transformed to suit the situation in Joseon. The paper focuses discussion on the *Wanghoedo* folding screen in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural Science, considered to be one of the finest examples of its type in terms of quality and artistry.

Though not included in the special topic section, Curator Lee Hyebyeong's study of a ten-panel folding screen entitled *Peonies (Morando, 모란도)* is also about court painting. Paintings of peonies had the most varied uses in the palace, and this folding screen is a masterpiece that can be considered the most beautiful extant peony folding screen in Korea. The composition forms one continuous painting that runs over all ten panels of the screen, evocative of a peony filled garden. During conservation treatment, it was discovered that documents from the 1820s were recycled for the mounting paper, allowing us to guess that the folding screen dates to that time.

If we consider that the king's portrait was the most important artwork in the palace during the Joseon period, Kwon Hyeoksan's paper, *The Production and Copying of Portraits of Meritorious Subjects: Portraits of Jo Gonggeun and their Related Drawings* is also worth discussing in the court painting context. Portraits of meritorious officials were also commissioned completely to the Dohwaseo court artists. Twelve sketches (*chobon*) of such portraits have survived and are important items that not only enable us to confirm the way sketches for portraits were produced but also surmise how copies (*imobon*) were made as well.

This volume closes with an archaeological study on the production and characteristics of the birch bark saddle flap

excavated from Cheonmachong (Tomb of the Heavenly Horse). The tomb was so named after the two birch bark saddle flaps decorated with a flying horse, or so-called "heavenly horse," the major treasures yielded by the tomb. The painting of a heavenly horse (*Cheonmado*) is so famous that most Koreans have heard of it, but not everyone is aware that it was painted on a saddle flap. This fascinating study uncovers the manufacture of the saddle flaps, from the collection of the birch bark, to the joining of the front and back panels, finishing of the edges, and painting of the heavenly horse design.

Court artists did not leave their signature or seal on works commissioned by the court. Hence decorative court paintings are generally anonymous and their date of production is also difficult to work out. But the papers published in volume 12 of *JKAA* all deal with works whose date of production is known, or can at least be guessed, and can therefore be adopted as a standard for understanding Joseon court painting. Marked by high quality and artistry, they are major works of court painting from the late Joseon period.

New Joseon court paintings continued to be introduced through auctions and the collections of clan groups. As serious study of the topic began rather late, gaps still remain in the research, but this problem is being addressed through newly introduced works. The characteristics and excellence of Joseon court painting are less well known to the international audience than that of other genres. It is hoped that through the articles in this volume readers will appreciate that Joseon court paintings have a unique formative beauty and sense of color as well as a dignified character that distinguishes them from the court paintings of China or Japan.