

Portrait Album of Successful Candidates from the Military Division of the Special State Examination and Its Characteristics as a Collection of Portraits of Meritorious Subjects

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106 **The Special State Examination of 1774 Ordered by King Yeongjo and *Portrait Album of Successful Candidates from the Military Division of the Special State Examination***

The *Portrait Album of Successful Candidates from the Military Division of the Special State Examination*, or *Deungjungsi mugwa dosangcheop* (登俊試武科圖像帖; hereafter abbreviated as the “*Deungjungsi Portrait Album*”) in the collection of the National Museum of Korea features portraits of successful candidates from the military division of the special state examination, known as the *deungjungsi* (登俊試), held in 1744, the fiftieth year of the reign of King Yeongjo (英祖, r. 1724–1776). The album consists of 18 small half-length portraits, a list of the portrayed individuals, the year of the album’s production, the reason for the commission of the paintings, and the names of the artists (Figs. 1 and 2).

In contrast to the regular civil service examination, the *deungjungsi* was a special state examination in which only incumbent government officials were allowed to take part. Those who successfully completed the examination were promoted to a higher post. As an ad hoc examination intended to emplace a new body of officialdom favoring the ruling monarch, it was not executed on a regular basis. It was first held in 1465 during the reign of King Sejo (世祖, r. 1455–1468) and was repeated

only once, in the cyclical year of *gabo* (甲午, corresponding to 1774), coinciding with the 50th year of King Yeongjo’s reign (英祖, r. 1724–1776). The test conducted under the auspices of King Yeongjo is known as the *gabo deungjungsi*.

The *gabo deungjungsi* took place in the later period of King Yeongjo’s rule. On the day after the names of the successful candidates were announced, King Yeongjo proclaimed that the implementation of the *deungjungsi* was one of the five projects he pursued to emulate the achievements of previous kings. This indicates how the king placed special emphasis on this examination, which is further evidenced by the actions taken by the king to celebrate the *deungjungsi*. These include holding a memorial service for the successful candidates’ ancestors, bestowing various awards, promulgating type-printed rosters of successful candidates, and commissioning a documentary painting depicting the actual events.

Careful attention should be paid to the fact that the king also commissioned portraits of the successful applicants, resulting in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. This is the only surviving portrait album related to a government service examination. King Yeongjo commissioned albums of portraits of successful candidates from the civil and military divisions and ordered the former to be stored by the Yejo (禮曹), the Ministry of Rites and the latter by the Byeongjo (兵

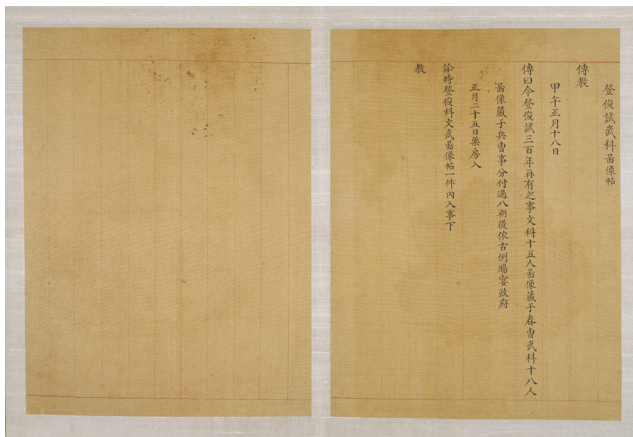


Fig. 1. "Royal edict attached to the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*" in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Ink on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 2. "Roster of successful candidates passing the military division examination" in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Ink on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea

曹), the Ministry of War. After this edict was issued, he continued to monitor the progress of the project and paid special attention through its completion.

It is exceptional that the king ordered such paintings and it reveals his respectful treatment of loyal retainers. Commissioning portraits of meritorious subjects who served the king and the state with distinction is evidence of this. During the Joseon dynasty (朝鮮, 1392–1910), portraits of meritorious subjects were traditionally rendered in a large hanging-scroll format that depicted a full-length figure wearing an official robe (Fig. 3). Magnificent representations of meritorious subjects were enriched by splendid colors that further glorify the loyal subjects and their outstanding achievements. However, the portraits of the successful candidates from the *deungjungsi* were executed in a small album format, marking a striking contrast with full-length hanging-scroll portraits of meritorious subjects (Fig. 4).

The portrait albums were not distributed among those who were illustrated in them, but stored in the palace upon the command of King Yeongjo. Although the eventual fate of the



Fig. 3. *Portrait of Yi Seongyun* by unknown artist (presumed to be one of the portraits devoted to meritorious subjects attending King Gwanghae during the Imjin War). Joseon, c. 1613. Color on silk. 178.4 × 106.4 cm. Treasure No. 1490. Private collection (Entrusted to the National Palace Museum of Korea) (Cultural Heritage Administration 2007, p. 55)

Portrait Album of Successful Candidates from the Civil Division of the Special State Examination is unknown today, a colophon by Jo Gyeong (趙璫, 1727–1787), pen name Haseo (荷樓), on a portrait of his older brother, Jo Hwan (趙煥, born 1720), one of the successful candidates, survives. Entitled "*Baekssisangchan*" (伯氏像讚, Eulogy of an elder brother's portrait), Jo Gyeong's writing is included in his anthology *Haseojip* (荷樓集, Collected works of Haseo). According to this text, two portraits of each subject were produced upon King Yeongjo's order; one was sent to the court for the king's perusal and the other was entrusted to the minister of rites. In addition, Jo Hwan privately commissioned a version of the portrait for his own possession, which provides further evidence that the portraits sponsored by King Yeongjo were not released to the relevant subjects.

In this case, what would be the reasons behind King Yeongjo's commissioning of the portrait albums and why did he keep them in the palace? This is likely related to the purpose of implementing the *deungjungsi* itself and the impact of this project. The king aimed to announce his intention to emulate



Fig. 4. "Portrait of Yi Chungi" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea

the achievements of King Sejo, a powerful sovereign who made considerable progress in national restoration. He wished to live up to King Sejo's ruling ideology by conducting a *deungjungsi* himself. His actions were taken in an attempt to conform with the principles of the *Zhongyong* (中庸, *Doctrine of the Mean*), which states that "succeeding the accomplishments of preceding monarchs and carrying on with their projects is equivalent to fulfilling one's filial duty" (夫孝者 善繼人之志 善述人之事者也). The king's ultimate goal was to safeguard his own sovereignty by replicating the meritorious deeds of his ancestors. The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* evinces how King Yeongjo aptly utilized the tradition of painting portraits of meritorious subjects as a visual tool to achieve his goal.

Contents of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*

The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* can be divided into four parts: King Yeongjo's command; the list of successful candidates; their portraits; and the list of painters who worked on the commission.

King Yeongjo's royal orders were issued twice, once on the 18th and then again on the 25th day of the first lunar month (Fig. 1). The first edict states that the *deungjungsi* is to be implemented for the first time in about 300 years, that a painting album of portraits of the 15 successful candidates from the civil service examination is to be sent to the Ministry of Rites, that a portrait album for the 18 successful candidates from the military division examination is to be placed with the Ministry of War, and that after eight months a banquet is to be held in accordance with the ancient ritual protocols. The second decree details the king's orders to bring to the court a pair of painting albums featuring portraits of civil and military officials who passed the examination. The portrait albums were probably sent to the king for his appreciation. This would correspond with the aforementioned eulogy written by Jo Gyeong.

The royal edicts are followed by the section bearing the names of the 18 successful candidates (Fig. 2). One person is placed in the first-class category, three are listed in the second, and fourteen people are in the third-class category. The first-class candidate in the military division examination is Yi Chungi (李春琦, born 1737), an eighth-rank official (Fig. 4). Yi Chungi took first place in the military division of the state recruitment examination (科擧, *gwageo*) in 1756. In addition, Yi Changun (李昌運, 1713–1791), Yi Jango (李章吾, born 1724), Yi Yunseong (李潤成, born 1719), and others on the list had already earned reputations as military officers (Figs. 5 and 6). Yi Changun, listed in the second-class category, was a descendant of Yi Unro (李雲露, dates unknown), who had been awarded the title of a



Fig. 5. "Portrait of Yi Changhun" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 6. "Portrait of Yi Jango" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea

meritorious subject for his role in suppressing Yi Siae (李施愛, died 1467)'s revolt in 1467 during King Sejo's reign. Yi Changun was a renowned military official active during the reigns of Kings Yeongjo and Jeongjo (正祖, r. 1776–1800), and was designated Lord of Hamchun (咸春君, *hamchungun*) in 1754. His younger brother Yi Myeongun (李明運, born 1716) also passed this examination, which further evidences their privileged status as a noble military family.

Yi Jango is the most notable military official among the successful candidates. Prior to the examination, the king was aware of Yi Jango's reputation as an expert archer and expressed an interest in his performance in the examination by wondering how advanced his skill in archery would be. At that time Yi Jango was serving as the head of the military's Training Command. He was also the son of Yi Junggyeong (李重庚, born 1680), minister of public works (工曹判書, *gongjo panseo*). Yi Jango was the holder of a literary licentiate (進士, *jinsa*), but he was said to be most qualified as a general since he was "a man who excelled in the art of war and a skillful archer" (Entry for the fifth day of the eighth month of the 18th year, *Yeongjo sillok*, vol. 56). Acknowledged for his superb martial prowess, he assumed an important post in the military. Yi Jango descended from the house of Grand Prince Hyoryeong (孝寧大君, 1396–1486) of the Yi royal family, which produced outstanding military officials throughout the dynasty. Not only Yi Jango, but also his offspring, including his son, grandsons, and great-grandsons, occupied major posts in the central military authority. Yi Jango had already been favored by the king prior to the examination, having been appointed minister of punishments (刑曹判書, *hyeongjo panseo*) in 1769. After the *deungjungsi*, he was promoted to the post of director of the State Tribunal (判義禁府事, *panuigeum busa*), a rare honor for a military official. The promotion was unconventional and aroused strong criticism among subjects who asserted that it caused "disorders in the bureaucratic hierarchy" (Entry for the seventh day of the second month of the 50th year, *Yeongjo sillok*, vol. 122). His appointment to such high-ranking positions in the central government was not only due to his royal origins, but also a result of nepotism. He was a maternal grandson of Seo Jongje (徐宗悌, 1656–1719), the king's father-in-law, and a nephew of Queen Jeongseong (貞聖王后, 1692–1757), King Yeongjo's wife (Jang Pilgi 2004, 147–148). A sketch for Yi Jango's portrait is included in the album titled *Portraits of Revered Figures* (名賢畫像, *Myeonghyeon hwasang*) (Fig. 7) from the late Joseon period currently housed in the National Museum of Korea. This proves that he was well respected within society.

Yi Yunseong was discharged from his position of the commander of the Capital Garrison (禁衛大將, *geumwi daejang*) on the sixth day of the first lunar month of the year of the *deungjungsi*, but he was reinstated as a government official immediately before the examination. Therefore, he became qualified to sit



Fig. 7. "Sketch for Yi Jango's Portrait" by unknown artist in the *Portraits of Revered Figures*. Joseon, 18th century. Color on paper. 50.0 × 32.9 cm. National Museum of Korea

for the examination and successfully passed. Jeon Gwanghun (田光勳, born 1722) was an examination supervisor, but he sat for the *deungjungsi* on the examination day upon King Yeongjo's command and succeeded at the test.

King Yeongjo paid special attention to the successful candidates and expressed his great expectations of them. Considering the various reasons for their application, the backgrounds of the successful candidates, and the benefits awarded to those who passed the examination, it is clear that recruiting new government officials or revealing hidden talent was not the sole reason for implementing the *deungjungsi*.

Portraits Included in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*

Following the list of successful candidates, a portrait of each was painted on a leaf divided into right and left sides, totaling 18 portraits on nine leaves. The album features half-length portraits of figures depicted in three-quarter view and wearing an official



Fig. 8. "Portrait of Min Beomsu" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjunsil Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 9. "Portrait of Min Beomsu" (detail)

robe. The subjects are dressed in green round-necked belted officials' robes decorated with a pattern of clouds and the seven treasures. In the middle of each sitter's robe is a rank badge with a *haechi* (獬豸, Ch. *xiezhi*) or tiger design that was used by military officials. The belts worn by the subjects vary according to the official ranks they received upon completing the *deungjunsil*.

With little stylistic variations, all 18 portraits present the typical characteristics attributed to mid-eighteenth-century portrait painting in the Joseon dynasty. The contours of the face and its features are drawn with clear lines and the face is lightly colored. The use of light ink washes and colored blush provides a three-dimensional effect to the faces. Several paintings in the album suggest that fine brush strokes were used to create three-dimensionality, this being a prevalent method in late-eighteenth-century portraits produced during King Jeongjo's reign.

Based on the manner of representation and style of the paintings, the portraits can be grouped into several categories. First, the portraits of Min Beomsu (閔範洙, born 1717), Yi Changun, Yi Myeongun, Min Jiyeol (閔趾烈, born 1727), Jeon Gwanghun, and Gim Sangok (金相玉, born 1727) demonstrate little interest in the representation of concave and convex aspects of the face. Shading is applied along with an outline of the face and refined brush strokes are rarely used (Figs. 8 and 9). The repeated patterns on the rank badges and the straight wings

that are attached to the back of the gauze hats indicate that the paintings were probably rendered by either a single artist or a group sharing the same painting style. The portraits of Choe Joak (崔朝岳, born 1739), Yi Jango, and Yu Jinha (柳鎭夏, born 1714) show close stylistic affinities to the abovementioned works, with the exception of the design of clothes.

In the portraits depicting Jo Wan (趙山完, born 1724), Yi Yunseong, Yi Bangil (李邦一, 1724–1805), and Jo Jip (趙嵒, born 1735), an even ink wash is widely applied to selected areas of their faces, such as the protuberant part of their eyelids and the wrinkles under their eyes, as well as around the round neck of their robes. The contrast between the dark painted areas and the bright blank space on the faces creates a three-dimensional effect (Figs. 10 and 11). Each figure wears a robe with a rank emblem bearing a *haechi* design. The shapes and colors of the cloud and mythical *haechi* designs depicted in the portraits are all identical. The forms of the drapery are also very similar; dark shade is cast on the inner part of the drapery folds in a narrow oval form in order to express three-dimensionality. Choe Dongak (崔東岳, born 1746)'s portrait resembles these paintings in its facial depiction, but the rank badge is more closely related to Yi Jango's portrait.

Portraits of Yi Dalhae (李達海, born 1731), Yi Gukhyeon (李國賢, born 1714), and An Jonggyu (安宗奎, born 1723) are marked



Fig. 10. "Portrait of Yi Bangil" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 11. "Portrait of Yi Bangil" (detail)



Fig. 12. "Portrait of Yi Dalhae" by Han Jongyu and others in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Color on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 13. "Portrait of Yi Dalhae" (detail)

by frequent use of fine brushwork (Figs. 12 and 13). Compared with the facial depiction, the drapery of the robe is represented in a rather flat manner and the shading is restrained. The figures in this group wear an official robe with a rank badge embellished with a white tiger, which distinguishes them from the rest of the portraits that feature a rank badge with a *haechi* design.

The portrait of Yi Chungi, who passed the examination in the first class, is not associated with another group of paintings (Fig. 4). A notably pale countenance creates a sharp contrast with the red hue expressed excessively around the nose and eyes. Triangular folds of drapery depicted in an archaic style cover the body in a rather crowded manner. The shapes of the cloud and the *haechi* design on the rank badge also differ from those of the other portraits in the album.

The source of the differences among the paintings in this album is uncertain. The paintings may have been executed by different painters (or different families of painters). If they were works by painters of a single family, discrepancies in the painters' abilities and skill may have led to differences in style. Alternatively, the unique appearances of the depicted figures may have produced the differences among the portraits. However, it is most likely that the distinctive features manifested in each group of paintings result from the individual style of a painter (or a family of painters), because the paintings in each group share common characteristics in the depiction of the

drapery folds, the shape of the rank badge, and the dragonfly-wing patterns in the gauze hat. These features were generally rendered in a conventional method passed down through the generations within a school of painting or family of painters.

The final leaf in this portrait album bears a list of the names of the painters who participated in the project as follows: Han Jongyu (韓宗裕, born 1737), an overseer of painting procedures, Han Jongil (韓宗一, born after 1738), Sin Hanchang (申漢昌), Jang Hong (張紉, dates unknown), Gim Jongrin (金宗隣, dates unknown), Choe Deukhyeon (崔得賢, dates unknown), and Han Jeongcheol (韓廷喆, dates unknown). Also included in the list are the supervisor Yun Cheolse (尹喆世) and the transcriber Choe Jonghyeok (崔宗爌) (Fig. 14).

Among the participants, Han Jongyu is a notable figure. He was one of the most active portraitists during the reigns of Kings Yeongjo and Jeongjo, and he achieved considerable fame for his paintings. His outstanding talent as a portraitist was acknowledged by King Yeongjo, as evidenced by his appointment as the overseer of the production of the *Deungjunsu Portrait Album* and the king's recommendation of him for the commission for the portrait of eighty-year-old King Yeongjo in 1773. In addition, he served as the primary painter for the portrait of King Jeongjo in 1781 (Jin Junhyeon 1994, 19–72).

Two portraits of Gim Wonhaeng are attributed to Han Jongyu. The portrait in the collection of the Ewha Womans



Fig. 14. "List of Painters" in the *Deungjunsu Portrait Album*. Joseon, 1774. Ink on silk. 47.0 × 35.2 cm. National Museum of Korea



Fig. 15. *Portrait of Gim Chiin* by Byeon Sangbyeok and Han Jongyu. Joseon, 1760. Color on silk. 152.8 x 81.6 cm. Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art (Ho-Am Art Museum 1999, Fig. 13).

University Museum presents a figure dressed in a scholar's black-trimmed coat and traditional headgear made from black fabric. In the portrait held in the Gansong Art Museum, Gim wears a tall, square white cap and scholar's outer garment. In both paintings, the facial features are clearly defined in sharp lines, fine lines with various tonalities are used to depict wrinkles, and a light ink wash is applied to represent the protuberances and hollows of the face. Delicate ink washes without repetition of minute brushstrokes stand out. The painting style of the two examples is closely associated with that of the first group of portraits discussed above.

The Portrait of Gim Chiin, housed in the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, was created in 1766 when the subject was 51 years old through a collaboration between Hang Jongyu and Byeon Sangbyeok (卞相璧, 1730-1775) (Figs. 15 and 16).



Fig. 16. *Portrait of Gim Chiin* (detail).

This painting allows an examination of the painting style of Han Jongyu. While the *Portrait of Yun Geup* attributed to Byeon Sangbyeok in the collection of the National Museum of Korea presents a harmonious combination of fine lines and delicate ink wash, the *Portrait of Gim Chiin* is characterized by a more-or-less two-dimensional representation and restrained use of lines and shading. These features are most closely related to the first group of paintings in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. The formal affinities between the *Portrait of Gim Chiin* and the first group of paintings in the album indicate that these works reflect the painting style of Han Jongyu.

Han Jongil, a figure included in the list of painters, is the younger brother of Han Jongyu. This means that two of the leading painters involved in this project were members of the Sinpyeong Han family, one of the most influential families of

painters of the late Joseon period. No known painting by Han Jongil remains today. However, we can assume that his style is most likely closely related to Han Jongyu's, which sustained the Sinpyeong Han family's tradition of painting. The details of Han Jeongcheol's life remain unknown, and his name does not appear in court archives such as the *Uigwe* (儀軌, state records of royal events). However, literati anthologies reveal that he was a painter active during King Jeongjo's reign.

The careers of the other portrait painters, including Sin Hanchang, Jang Hong, Gim Jongrin, and Choe Deukhyeon are a mystery, but they are known to have participated in the production of *Uigwe* (Park Jeonghye, 221–290). This implies that court painters who frequently worked on state projects were also summoned for the creation of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*.

In sum, the list of painters included in the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* provides information on portraitists active in the late eighteenth century. It is almost impossible to discern the individual painter of each work. However, a comparison between paintings by artists listed on the duty roster and portraits in this album reveals the style of portraiture developed by Han Jongyu and his family members in the eighteenth century. Based on stylistic analysis, the 18 portraits can be divided into three groups. The paintings in each group were presumably produced by a single painter or a school of painters who shared the same techniques. This reflects the manners and customs of portrait paintings of this time, when an individual painter or group of painters typically followed a particular painting style. Nevertheless, subtasks such as drawing the face and shading might have been delegated to different painters according to the strengths of each painter. When multiple portraits were produced simultaneously to create a painting album, this type of collaboration was highly likely required. The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* must have been commissioned in the same vein.

The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* as Portraits of Meritorious Subjects

King Yeongjo paid special attention to the production of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. In the fifth month of 1774, three months after the royal commission for the painting album, the king followed its progress and encouraged its production. He stated that the production of the album was unique across all generations and was considered a “Qilin Pavilion (麒麟閣, *gŭrŭngak*) accomplishment.” He ordered the album to be presented to the court upon its completion.

In ancient Chinese palaces, there was a building for enshrining the portraits of meritorious subjects and for preserving documents on the heroic exploits and laudable deeds

of prominent subjects, which was called Qilin Pavilion, named after the ancient pavilion which the Han Emperor Xuandi (宣帝, r. 74–49 BCE) ordered constructed to house portraits of loyal retainers. King Yeongjo compared the production of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* to the tradition of enshrining portraits of meritorious subjects in Qilin Pavilion. The king considered this portrait album to be of equal importance to portraits of meritorious subjects. The king paid particular attention to the successful candidates from the special examination, and they were offered special consideration in the same way as meritorious subjects. This suggests that King Yeongjo regarded them as faithful subjects to assist him and his grandson [Jeongjo].

That successful *deungjungsi* candidates received the same treatment as meritorious subjects is demonstrated by the fact that the painting albums featuring them were sent to the court and placed with the Ministry of Rites and the Ministry of War. Complex implications underlie the retention of loyal subjects' portraits in a palace. Producing a portrait of a subject and keeping it in a specially designated building, often referred to as Qilin Pavilion, was considered a time-honored practice inherited from ancient Han China. This is evidenced by the abovementioned king's comments on Qilin Pavilion. However, even portraits of meritorious subjects from the earlier Joseon period had not been officially preserved within a royal palace prior to the production of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. Portraits of meritorious subjects who suppressed Yi Injwa (李麟佐, died 1728)'s rebellion in 1728 were copied and the later copies were bound as a painting album entitled *Portrait Album in the Office of Meritorious Subjects*, or *Hunbu hwasangcheop* (勳府畫像帖; hereafter referred to as the “*Hunbu Portrait Album*”). This album was enshrined in Gigonggak Pavilion (紀功閣), a pavilion for the listing of meritorious subjects affiliated with the Chunghunbu (忠勳府), the Office of Meritorious Subjects, with the permission of King Yeongjo in 1750. It seems to be the only prior case in which meritorious subjects' portraits were collected and preserved in a dedicated space inside a royal palace.

The extant portraits of meritorious subjects who crushed the 1728 rebellion have survived in various versions, including full-length large hanging scrolls featuring subjects in official robes and small half-length versions in both album and hanging scroll formats (Kang Kwanshik 2007, 102–104). Among them, the portraits in album format are probably linked to the *Hunbu Portrait Album*, which is known to have been stored in the Office of Meritorious Subjects (Fig. 17). It is doubtful that these works are from the original painting album stored in the Office of Meritorious Subjects at that time, because it is unlikely that individual portraits were produced as separate pieces. Instead, it is more probable that multiple portraits of subjects were produced and then combined into an album, as in the case of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album*. It is assumed that the portraits surviving



Fig. 17. Portrait of Yi Sam by unknown artist. Joseon, mid-18th century. Color on silk. 41.8 × 28.8 cm. Private collection (National Palace Museum of Korea 2008, Fig. 16)

in the form of album leaves were separately produced when the *Hunbu Portrait Album* was created.

Exploring how the *Hunbu Portrait Album* was enshrined in Gigonggak Pavilion in the Office of Meritorious Subjects provides clues regarding the function and meaning of the *Deungjinsi Portrait Album*. In 1750, Bak Munsu (朴文秀, 1691–1756), the Minister of Taxation and one of the meritorious subjects who suppressed the 1728 uprising, asked that the painting album depicting meritorious subjects from the 1728 rebellion be placed with the Office of Meritorious Subjects. Earlier during the reign of King Taejong (太宗, r. 1400–1418), there was a debate over whether the meritorious subjects' portraits should be placed alongside royal portraits as this was considered to be a departure from ancient customs (Cho Insoo 2004, 136–138; Kwon Hyuksan 2007, 33–44). Since the debate ended without a clear consensus, it is likely that thereafter portraits of meritorious retainers were not kept in palace buildings but distributed to the subjects' families instead. Their placement with the office would have been unprecedented, so Bak cautiously raised the issue of whether the *Hunbu Portrait Album* could be placed together with the inscriptions of kings' names (御諱, *ehwi*) preserved within the palace. However, Bak was in fact resuming the old and still-debated question of constructing a pavilion inside a royal palace to house

subjects' portraits. After debating the matter with his courtiers, King Yeongjo agreed to keep the *Hunbu Portrait* in the Office of Meritorious Subjects, and storing subjects' portraits in the palace became a regular practice thereafter.

The younger brother of King Gyeongjong (景宗, r. 1720–1724), King Yeongjo ascended the throne in 1724. However, just four years after his enthronement, his authority was seriously threatened by a military coup. King Yeongjo endeavored to consolidate his power at court and overcome factional conflicts. He repeatedly expressed his trust in meritorious subjects and gratitude for their contributions toward suppressing the 1728 rebellion. The portraits for the *Hunbu Portrait Album* were produced in a small album format rather than in large hanging-scroll form. However, he decided to house this album in the palace after a long discussion among his retainers. This is indicative of his attempts to broaden the trust between the monarch and his subjects.

King Yeongjo's sustained actions and steady attention to this matter were not only directed at celebrating the faithful relationship between a ruler and his subjects. The king initiated various projects designed to elevate his political status by superimposing his own image on the "dynastic restorers" of the past who were considered comparable to the founder of the dynasty (Yoon Jeong 2007, 69–92). The king required assistance and support from reliable subjects in order to achieve his political goals as a dynastic restorer. Before King Yeongjo began the discussion over the placement of the *Hunbu Portrait Album* with his courtiers, he paid a visit to the Office of Meritorious Subjects accompanied by selected subjects. Afterward, he bestowed wine on these subjects. Jo Hyeonmyeong (趙顯命, 1690–1752), a meritorious subject who crushed the 1728 rebellion and later became the chief state councilor (領議政, *Yeonguijeong*), enthusiastically supported the king's policy and assisted with royal projects. On this occasion, he noted the following:

"Twenty-one rituals related to a pledge of loyalty by the attendants to the king have occurred since King Taejo's reign. This dynasty was successfully established and flourishes to this day thanks to the contributions of loyal subjects. As a successor to the great achievements of previous rulers, [the king] is obliged to make constant day-and-night efforts and continue to work toward dynastic revival." (Entry for the 27th day of the second month of the 23th year, *Yeongjo sillok*, vol. 65)

With the approval of King Yeongjo, the *Hunbu Portrait Album* was enshrined in the Office of Meritorious Subjects along with the inscriptions of kings' names in 1750. The portraits were understood as a visual representation of the king's intention to treat loyal subjects with honor and respect, strengthen the political partnership between the monarch and subjects, and

urge them to continue their mission of restoring the state.

The debate over the construction of a pavilion for subjects' portraits, which had started during King Taejong's reign, was settled by placing the *Hunbu Portrait Album* with the Office of Meritorious Subjects, and thus the ancient custom for preserving portraits of loyal subjects in the palace was finally actualized. Enshrining the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* in the palace in 1774 did not deviate from King Yeongjo's original intentions expressed in 1750; it further extended the scope of the subjects whose portraits were allowed to be placed in the palace. The *deungjungsi* promoted the status of loyal subjects favored by the king in a manner similar to that traditionally conferred on meritorious subjects. It links to the broader intentions of King Yeongjo, who placed a higher value on his subjects' allegiance to him than on any other meritorious deeds.

The successful candidates politely declined any receipt of preferential treatment from the king by offering a joint petition to the ruler. For example, Hong Yangho (洪良浩, 1724–1802) made an appeal asserting that portraying and preserving images of subjects originated in the Han dynasty when portraits of meritorious subjects were preserved in either Qilin Pavilion or Cloud Terrace (雲臺) to celebrate their accomplishments, and that the only case of depicting subjects in Joseon was a painting of a gathering of elderly officials which was produced in emulation of a painting of elderly literati gathering at Luoyang during the Song dynasty. If such special treatment was provided only due to a successful result in the state examination, he argued that the candidates might feel undeserving of such an extraordinary reward. He further stressed that there was no royal commission of portraits of successful candidates on the past occasion of the *deungjungsi* during King Sejo's reign. Hong's appeal suggests that candidates passing the *deungjungsi* were well aware that the painting of portraits by royal order was an exceptional commendation given exclusively to meritorious subjects and elderly officials at the court, and that portraits of successful candidates in a state examination had never previously been officially commissioned by the king. Given this, why did King Yeongjo order portraits of subjects who successfully passed the state examination and why did he house their portraits in the palace? What could be his intention behind this?

King Yeongjo expressed his feelings on implementing the *deungjungsi* in "King's Writing on the Special State Examination and Its Meaning as Succession of Past Accomplishments" (御製登俊試意繼述, *Eoje deungjungsi ui gyesul*):

"The *deungjungsi* has been conducted in ancient times and the present. The exam was held in the *byeongsul* (丙戌) year in the past, while it is now implemented in the *gabo* year. The former event took place in the old palace [Gyeongbokgung], as it does now. Counting the number of years, 309 have passed since the first occasion. . . . Two splendid achievements are gained by

conducting this event inherited from the past: the succession of the achievements of a previous king and the commemoration of ancestors. After bowing at the Munsojeon Hall (文昭殿), I sat in Geunjeongjeon Hall (勤政殿) to announce the list of successful candidates. I returned to the palace shortly."

The *deungjungsi* held in the *gabo* year was planned as a reenactment of an accomplishment of King Sejo, who was considered a representative dynastic restorer, and also as an inheritance of his legacy. Three days after the *deungjungsi*, King Yeongjo declared an edict that described five principal projects that he had conducted during his fifty-year reign and that served as continuations of the achievements of preceding kings: the royal farming ceremony; the rites for Confucius in spring and autumn; the rite of sericulture in the palace; banquets for the elders; and the *deungjungsi*. In addition, he listed three life-long projects ascribed to himself: the Equal Service Law, known as *gyunyeokbeop* (均役法); the dredging project for the Cheonggyecheon Stream; and the Policy of Impartiality, known as *tangpyeongchaek* (蕩平策). King Yeongjo spared no effort over the course of his long reign in conducting a variety of projects designed to sustain the achievements of previous kings with the core aim of solidifying the legitimacy of his governance.

As expressed in the above royal message, King Yeongjo attached great importance to the commemoration of ancestors and the succession of previous kings' accomplishments. In preparation for the *deungjungsi*, King Yeongjo stated that "Conducting rites is done to succeed the achievements of preceding kings, and eliminating the complications in performing rites is a commemoration of forbearers" (Entry for the 13th day of the first month of the 50th year of King Yeongjo's reign, *Seungeongwonilgi*). Whatever his political intent in executing the projects of replicating inherited ancestral achievements, King Yeongjo's actions were firmly rooted in the ideology of filial piety. As filial piety was considered an absolute value that took precedence over subjects' judgment and reasoning, King Yeongjo set the highest priority on demonstrating his filial duty in order to achieve his goals (Yoon Jeong 2007, 117–122).

The king's commission of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* was issued on the same day that he delivered the message quoted above. This suggests that the production of the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* extends beyond more than simply treating his subjects with honor. As noted earlier, the successful candidates submitted a joint petition asking to be allowed to refuse this special award. King Yeongjo replied to the petition by citing a poem from the Tang dynasty, which is included in the *Igeyijip* (耳溪集), Hong Yangho's literary collection, along with Hong's own appeal:

"I heard a poem from the Tang dynasty which reads: 'A young emperor went to view portraits of loyal subjects, thinking of their meritorious service guarding the frontier. The emperor

sought out meritorious subjects and ordered the painting of their portraits. The paintings were mounted in a screen format and displayed in the Hall of Longevity (長生殿, Jangsaengjeon).’ Ah! I used to recite this poem since it was transcribed in a former king’s calligraphic work. If portraits of meritorious subjects who defended the border were painted, how much more appropriate it would be to produce portraits for the event [*deungjungsi*] that is done again 309 years later. If a screen of portraits of those ancient loyal subjects was presented in the Hall of Longevity, why can we not have our album stored with the Ministries of Rites and War? This is not only for rewarding loyal subjects. It is for preserving the portraits and transmitting them to posterity for commemoration. How can you refuse this? Since the royal edict is already issued, do not decline the offer.”

King Yeongjo further attempted to convince his subjects as they politely declined his exceptional treatment equivalent to the honors given to a meritorious subject. He asserted that implementing the *deungjungsi* formed part of his project to succeed the accomplishments of previous kings.

King Yeongjo proclaimed that the significance of furthering his ancestors’ achievements and deeds was far greater than that of the meritorious deed of defending the frontier. This reveals the king’s determination to reestablish the glory of the dynasty and solidify his status as a dynastic restorer. In addition, King Yeongjo asserted that this practice should be transmitted to his grandson, the heir to the throne, for commemoration and preservation. To this end, King Yeongjo ordered the printing of the list of successful candidates from the *deungjungsi* and had it be sent to the palace and the residence of the Crown Prince. King Yeongjo clarified that the purpose of producing the portrait album was not just to celebrate the merits of subjects, but also to “preserve and transmit to posterity,” as this was the meaning of the *deungjungsi* project. Thus, the subjects were urged to accept this special treatment.

Conclusion: Changes in the Relationship between Sovereign and Subjects and the Emergence of Portrait Albums

The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* is a collection of portraits bound in a single album, and is thought to have been modeled after the *Hunbu Portrait Album* from 1750. The *Painting Album of Elderly Officials in Commemoration of King Sukjong’s Entrance into the Office of Elder Statesmen in 1719* (耆社契帖, *Gisagyechep*) (1720) and the *Painting Album in Commemoration of King Yeongjo’s Entrance into the Office of Elder Statesmen in 1744* (耆社慶會帖, *Gisagyehoecheop*) (c. 1744) also serve as precedents for the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* in that multiple

portraits were combined and mounted in the form of an album. The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* shows that the scope of portrait albums, a new format of portraiture, had broadened beyond its conventional subjects, such as meritorious subjects or elder officials, to include incumbent subjects closely attending the ruling monarch.

Traditionally, a portrait of a meritorious subject depicted a full-length figure in a large hanging scroll format. This convention changed in the late Joseon period. After the official title of meritorious subject was given to loyal retainers who suppressed the 1728 rebellion in the fourth year of King Yeongjo’s reign, the bestowal of the title of meritorious subject was officially discontinued and the royal commission of meritorious subjects’ portraits was suspended. However, by this period, large full-length portraits of figures in official attire were no longer reserved for meritorious subjects. As seen in *Portrait of Nam Guman* from the early eighteenth century, scholar-officials in an official robe were frequently presented in a large hanging scroll format similar to a meritorious subject’s portrait. In the late Joseon period, it simply became a conventional portrait format for literati officials (Fig. 18).

The title of meritorious subject was conferred to reward loyalty to the king (or the state). Meritorious subjects committed to a firm alliance with the king by swearing an oath of allegiance and they were bound by a common destiny. Even a king could not sever these close ties unless the retainers betrayed their allegiance and committed an act of treason. When rewarding meritorious subjects, a temporary office called *dogam* (都監) was established to evaluate each subject’s merits and set clear criteria and causes for the distribution of honors. The commission of large hanging scroll portraits was intended to visually represent these value systems and practices.

Late Joseon society witnessed changes in the relationship between the king and his subjects. In the eighteenth century, it was claimed that the ruler and retainers should be fettered by the bonds of obligations and be faithful to one another. Absolute criteria for evaluating officials’ deeds and their loyalty to the throne were established by the ruling monarch according to his own standards. For example, retainers who won power during the Political Reverse of 1680, known as *gyeongsin hwanguk* (庚申換局), during the reign of King Sukjong (肅宗, r. 1674–1720) were given the title of meritorious subject, but soon after were driven out of politics when the ruling faction was replaced by a rival party. The status of meritorious subject, which used to be completely protected as long as they remained loyal to the king or the state, was no longer guaranteed. Officials who had once been designated meritorious subjects could lose their privileged status and be branded traitors upon the judgment of a leading political figure at the court. Under these circumstances, the traditional manner of rewarding meritorious subjects by offering



Fig. 18. *Portrait of Nam Guman* by unknown artist. Joseon, 18th century. Color on silk. 163.4 × 88.5 cm. Treasure No. 1484. National Museum of Korea

honorary titles as meritorious retainers and distributing awards based on an official evaluation of a subject's meritorious deeds did not affect the relationship between the ruler and his subjects.

Bound in a format which was unprecedented for portraits of subjects, the *Hunbu Portrait Album* copied in 1750 marks a watershed reflecting the political shift that occurred in the late Joseon dynasty. Unfortunately, this painting album no longer survives, but it presumably provided an important inspiration for the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* of 1774.

King Yeongjo dedicated efforts to reenacting the *deungjungsi*. The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* was not a mere collection of commemorative portraits of the successful candidates. It was a visual medium to demonstrate that the monarch himself evaluated the candidates and appointed talented ones as his subjects. Following the precedent of the *Hunbu Portrait Album* which portrayed meritorious subjects who guarded his throne against the enemies in the early years of his reign, King Yeongjo commissioned portrait albums of the successful candidates of the *deungjungsi* and ordered them to be housed within the palace. As King Yeongjo asserted, the *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* was similar

in nature to portraits of meritorious subjects. This indicates a change in the perception of meritorious subjects as well as a shift in the relationship between a king and his retainers, which called for a new visual representation to replace the large hanging-scroll portraits of meritorious subjects that had previously provided the standard through the history of portraiture in the Joseon dynasty. The *Deungjungsi Portrait Album* is significant in that it presented a new format for portraits of incumbent subjects, other than meritorious subjects, who closely attended the king.

Translated by Seo Yoonjung

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