


# Uniquely Korea

Retaining Visual Authenticity  
in Cultural Presentations

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To all my professors who challenged me to grow in my skills and gain confidence in my abilities.

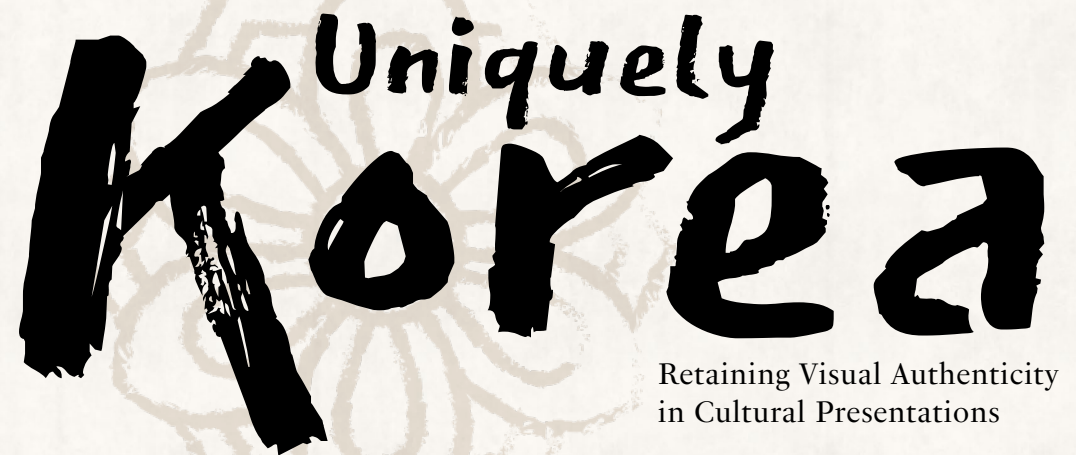
To my sisters for all their support, both academically and emotionally.

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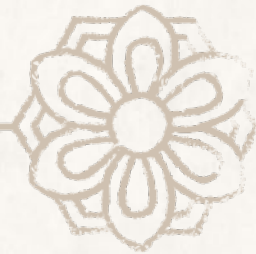
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# Abstract

As educators and creators seek to introduce students to cultures from around the world to increase cultural awareness, visual media has also become a powerful tool to disseminate the visual culture of a people. When media misrepresents a culture, the introduction to the culture can be flawed and create more problems. How then can media creators ensure that their representations are accurate? This project proposes that careful research balanced with an observation of the culture’s visual presentations can help guide cultural representations toward authenticity.

This research specifically explores the problem of misrepresenting traditional Korean culture in American media. The generalization of East Asian cultures in American media caused by both past events and current events has led to a distorted view of Korea. However, good representations of traditional Korean culture can help eliminate these stereotypes and generalizations by demonstrating the uniqueness and richness of Korean culture. Through research of traditional Korean cultural elements like hanbok, hanshik, architecture, Hangul, and pottery as well as visual observations of Korean visual media, this study aims to demonstrate the importance of viewing cultural objects in context and through the eyes of the members of the culture. Because the misrepresentation of Korean culture stems in part from limited American education on historical Korea, the end goal of this research project was to create an illustrated book for American elementary school children that will introduce them to an authentic and informative representation of historical Korea. The book’s visuals were created based on a combination of research and observation of cultural artifacts and visual presentations in drama, animation, illustration, and historical reenactments.

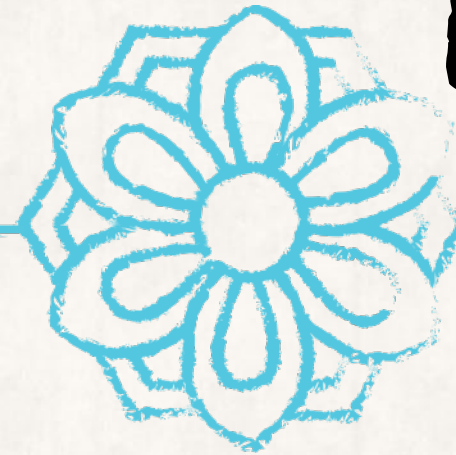


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# Chapter One



The Problem





# Introduction

To the American eye, Asian culture overall looks deceptively similar. People eat rice and use chopsticks. Red dragons decorate the clothes, furniture, and porcelain vases. Words are written as complicated pictograms. Although the names of East Asian countries like China, Korea, and Japan are recognized, their cultures are sometimes loosely categorized as 'Asian' or 'Oriental.' Hanchao Lu notes in her forward for *Culture and Customs of Korea* that while Asia's importance on a global scale has been recognized, "Asia remains for most of us a relatively unfamiliar, if not stereotypical or even mysterious, 'Oriental' land" (Clark xi).

Of course, people who are more familiar with East Asia can distinguish between the cultures of China and Japan and even identify some elements of their respective cultures. Kung fu and dragons remind one of China while ninjas and sushi remind one of Japan. However, even though Korea has become more well-known in America in recent decades, many people would still find traditional elements of Korea's material culture unfamiliar or difficult to distinguish from Chinese or Japanese culture.

Why is Korea's traditional culture less well-known in America? At first glance, it may seem to some that Korea was historically less advanced or that Korea was established as a civilization much later than China or Japan, but neither of these answers would be correct. Instead, Korea is not as well-known due to opening up to Western influence and trade later than China or Japan. While China has had contact with Western countries since ancient times through the Silk Road (Beckwith) and Japan encountered the Spanish and Portuguese in the 1500s (Latz et al.), Korea first opened to the Western

world in 1876 after signing Japan's Treaty of Kangwha (Y. Kim). Thus, when Korea became more known to countries like England, France, and the United States, their understanding of Korea's unique culture and history was limited by their earlier knowledge of China and Japan.

While global awareness of East Asia and Korea has increased since the 19th century, visual recognition of Korea's rich heritage is still limited in America. Ko, Chun, and Lee note that when "compared to neighboring countries, such as Japan and China, [Korea's] great lifestyle and traditional values are not effectively conveyed to the world" (201). Korea's efforts—both individual and national—to communicate their traditional heritage have faced obstacles throughout their history, the two most recent being the Japanese occupation and the Korean War.

However, despite these obstacles, Korea has been slowly gaining recognition in many countries including America through the spread of its popular culture such as K-pop and K-dramas. With the increasing attention towards Korean entertainment, it may seem surprising that misconceptions about Korea still exist in America and that Korea's traditional culture is still confused with Chinese and Japanese cultures. Because these misconceptions and confusion persist, there is need for Korea's traditional heritage to be distinctly and authentically presented to American audiences.

This thesis reviews the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Korea's material and non-material culture in America and attempts to provide a visual solution that authentically presents the visual distinctness of Korea's material and non-material culture.

## Research Problem

Although Korea has played an important role in East Asian history for thousands of years, the American understanding of Korean culture is limited, and American audiences often are unable to distinguish Korea's traditional culture from the traditional cultures of China and Japan.

## Research Questions

- How have American audiences misidentified Korean culture?
- What are the key aesthetics of Korea's traditional cultural elements?
- What design elements (i.e. motifs, colors, and patterns) are unique to traditional Korean culture?
- How has Korea portrayed their distinctive visual culture in modern times through visual media?

## Knowledge Gap

Research on Korean culture has been primarily limited to defining Korean aesthetics or analyzing interpretations of Korean culture in America and other countries. Some research has been conducted on promoting Korean culture in the global market and introducing Korean culture to new audiences.

The question that remains to be answered is how to visualize traditional Korean culture in order to present an authentic interpretation of Korean culture to American audiences. Both Sung and E. Lee note in their studies that cultural authenticity is vital to a beneficial presentation of culture. According to E. Lee, this authenticity can be developed through careful cultural research and cultural immersion. Thus, the balanced use of cultural research and research of authentic presentation needs to be further examined.





# Chapter Two



## Research Report

- Research Rationale
- Research Methods
- Summary of Findings
- Conclusion





# Research Rationale

The main question that this research seeks to answer is how to authentically visualize the uniqueness of Korea's traditional culture to an American audience.

Representing another culture in visual media requires good research into the details of each cultural element: What does the traditional clothing look like? What color are the houses? What kind of food did they eat? These types of details are important to an accurate depiction of a culture, and many artists will ask such questions as they prepare to visualize another culture.

This research is no different. Various elements of traditional Korean culture were examined and researched. However, this type of research direction alone could not fully answer the question of how to visualize traditional Korean culture authentically.

To authentically visualize a culture, an understanding of both the cultural objects and their context is necessary. Observing the presentation of traditional culture in Korean visual media provides context for cultural objects from an authentic perspective.

# Research Methods



In order to answer the research questions, two types of research were conducted. The first type of research was a literature review that explored the available literature on the thesis topic and questions. This research was important for establishing a good background on which to build the visual research, the second type of research used.

In preparation for the final solution, visual research was conducted to guide the direction of the visuals and to ensure a more accurate and authentic presentation of traditional Korean culture. The visual research for this project focused on three main ideas:

- Examining preserved cultural artifacts
- Observing the presentation of traditional culture in Korean visual media
- Comparing the visuals and aesthetics used in both

Observing the cultural artifacts and the visual presentations of those artifacts creates a balanced approach toward depicting a culture. Thus, both artifacts and presentations were researched for each element depicted in the final visual solution.

## Cultural Artifacts

The main categories of cultural objects that were examined include clothing, food, architecture, written language, and pottery.

These categories are typically considered some of the main elements of a culture.

### Clothing : Hanbok

This category addresses what they wore in traditional Korean culture.

### Food: Hanshik

This category addresses what they ate in traditional Korean culture.

### Architecture

This category addresses where they lived in traditional Korean culture. The category includes both the royal palaces and hanok, the traditional Korean house.

### Written Language: Hangul

This category addresses how they wrote in traditional Korean culture.

### Arts: Pottery

This category addresses how they created pottery in traditional Korean culture.

For each cultural element that was depicted, a sampling of preserved cultural artifacts were gathered and analyzed. The primary source of the sampled artifacts was online museum exhibitions and image collections. However, hanshik could not be directly examined because it is food. Instead, hanshik research was based on available literature.

Once the artifacts were analyzed, the next step in the research was to ask "How is the cultural object portrayed in context?"



## Visual Media

For the purposes of this research, the context of the object was drawn from its presentation in Korea's visual media. The main categories of visual media that were observed include drama or film, historical reenactments, and animation or illustration.

### Drama/Film

Through the live-action reproduction of Korean traditional culture in historical dramas and film (known as *sageuk*, 사극), it is possible to observe a more natural use of Korean cultural elements while also observing how Korea presents their culture to other Koreans. Korean historical dramas and films fall into several categories.

Historically-based stories draw on historical events and people. MBC's *Tree with Deep Roots* (뿌리 깊은 나무) is an example of a historically-based drama that recounts King Sejong the Great's work on the creation of the Korean alphabet Hangul.

Some dramas are set during a historical period but tell completely fictional stories. For example, tvN's *100 Days My Prince* (백일의 낭군님) is a story set during the Joseon period but under the reign of a fictional king.

Modern re-imaginings of Korea as a monarchy incorporate elements of Korea's past. MBC's *Princess Hours* (궁) presents a re-imagining of a modern Korea with a royal family.

This research drew sources from all three categories when possible in order to compare the presentations in each.

### Historical Reenactments

Historical reenactments include fashion shows and cultural productions at tourist sites as well as historical documentaries. Photographs and recordings from these shows can, like film, show cultural elements in context. Because these productions have a somewhat educational purpose, the display of cultural elements may be more historically accurate than those shown in drama or film.

### Illustration/Animation

Illustration and animations depicting traditional culture are unique because they are artists' representations of cultural objects. The artists would have researched the objects and then determined the best way to visualize those objects. Observing Korean illustration and animation provided insight into how to authentically visualize Korean traditional culture through drawing.

## Visual Observation

Both the cultural artifacts and visual media were observed to gather information about the key aesthetics and visuals. The key aesthetics that were observed based on findings from the literature review include simplicity, naturalness, and harmony. The key visuals that were observed were colors, patterns, and motifs.

### Key Aesthetics

- Simplicity
- Naturalness
- Harmony

### Key Visuals

- Color
- Patterns
- Motifs



Visual Research was conducted using image boards and artifact analysis.

## Image Boards

Image boards are collections of images based on a shared theme or category. To use this method, images are gathered and put together either physically on a board or electronically on the computer. The benefits of this method was having an organized way to compile images and an opportunity to infer trends and themes from the overall collection of images.

### Design Plan

The initial image boards were created through Pinterest, an online platform for saving and sharing images. A board was created for each cultural object category and its presentation in each of the three types of presentations. The boards included sections (sub-folders) when necessary to further subdivide. For example, the board for 'Hanbok in Drama/Film' was divided into subsections by men and women's hanboks as well as by social status.

After the image research was completed, the images on the Pinterest boards were used to create collage mood boards to help guide each illustration. The mood boards were created using Adobe Illustrator. A moodboard was also made for each cultural object category. Both images of cultural artifacts and images from visual presentations were included in the mood board. Including both sets of images in the mood board provided an overarching comparison of the original artifacts and those presented in Korean visual media.

## Artifact Analysis

The artifact analysis method was used to guide the observation and examination of both the cultural artifacts and the visual presentations. This method provided an organized structure for making observations. Observations were guided by a worksheet covering four main sections of analysis. These four sections included material analysis, aesthetic analysis, historical analysis, and interactive analysis. Material analysis referred to the physical makeup of the object, and aesthetic analysis covered the object's visual appearance. Historical analysis dealt with the object's historical background. Interactive analysis considered how the object was used. Within each of these sections, the worksheet included specific questions that helped focus the research observations.

### Design Plan

Two worksheets were prepared to guide the observations of the cultural objects and the visual presentations. Each worksheet included questions about the objects and visual presentation based on the four sections of artifact analysis: material, aesthetic, historical, and interactive analysis. The questions about the cultural object focused primarily on its physical qualities while the questions about the presentation considered the context of the object. The worksheets and the questions are included in the appendix.





## Summary of Findings

The literature review provides background on the historical misidentification of Korean culture by American audiences and on Korea's history and cultural aesthetics. Visual research explored a method of observing and comparing cultural artifacts with media presentations that could be beneficial for design research.

## Literature Review

### What is culture?

To understand the problem, the idea of culture must first be defined. Culture is a broad term that covers so many aspects of a society. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines culture as “the customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.” From this broad definition, the idea of culture can be narrowed down into two types: material and non-material culture. Wagner defines material culture as “the physical artifacts of a particular group of people” (72). Material culture then covers cultural elements like food, housing, clothing, and art while non-material culture refers to beliefs and ideas of the people (Wagner 72).

This research explores the visuals of traditional Korea in material culture, specifically highlighting the cultural elements of *Hangul* (the Korean alphabet), *hanbok* (traditional Korean clothes), architecture, *hansik* (Korean food), and traditional pottery. However, identifying and understanding a culture is not an easy task because culture encompasses so much about a people and who they are. Although a culture's material artifacts can be carefully studied through research, these studies cannot fully convey the depth of an entire culture. Wagner notes that “the ideal of seeing an entire world through a handful of pottery shards...is not only ambitious, it's problematic.” (76). Thus, Wagner proposes studying material culture in context by taking into consideration the non-material culture of a people.

Even with this more balanced approach, defining culture is a complicated task that

can become misleading and filled with generalizations. Because culture is so complex, this research does not endeavor to capture or define the entirety of Korea's traditional heritage. Instead, it will hopefully provide an introduction to the beauty of Korea's traditional material culture and contribute to the discussion of Korea's rich past.

### Misunderstanding Korea

America's first glimpse of Korea culture occurred at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (K. Kim). During the exhibition, the Korean delegation was so overwhelmed with questions that confused Korea with China and Japan that a frustrated delegate posted a list of key facts about Korea to explain that Korea was not a part of China and spoke a unique language that was different from Chinese and Japanese (K. Kim 82-83). Such confusion is not surprising considering the limited access most 19th century Americans had to information about Korea, a newly introduced country. However, this story would pain many Koreans and Korean Americans even today because it is a reminder of both how much and how little has changed since then.

Korea's traditional culture has often been incorrectly identified as Chinese or Japanese by American audiences. This misidentification could be attributed to many different factors. However, three of the main factors include the influence of China historically on Korea, the impact of the Japanese Occupation, and the concept of Orientalism. Each of these factors influenced the initial American view of Korea starting in the 19th century and continues to affect the view of traditional Korea even today.



## Misconstrued Connection to China

Because of Korea's close ties historically to China, Korean traditional culture has been influenced by Chinese culture much like European cultures have alternately influenced each other throughout history. In his book *The History of Korea*, C. Kim discusses the formation of Korea as a nation and the influence that China had as the center of the Asian world. He notes that because of Korea's proximity to China, "Korea's culture and society had to progressively adapt and evolve to avoid becoming absorbed by the massive entity of China" (C. Kim 2). Thus, even while adopting ideas from China, Korea retained a distinctively Korean culture. However, China's cultural influence has often been emphasized in discussions on Korean history and culture causing Korea to sometimes be considered as only a "mere replica of China" (C. Kim 1).

## Impacts of Japanese Occupation

The Empire of Japan annexed Korea as a colony in 1910 and controlled Korea until 1945 (Y. Kim). During this period, Japan used ethnographic research to support their ideas of imperialism and colonialism (M. Shin). Japan's ethnographic and archaeological research was used to justify Japan's annexation of Korea by emphasizing common ancestry and a weak Korean state (M. Shin 124). According to M. Shin, Japan before and during the occupation period compiled information about Korea's economy, geography, laws, religion, and cultural practices (120-122). This information was used to not only "justify Japan's occupation but also to define new targets for colonial power" (M. Shin 120), including the power to define Korea's traditional culture and identity (Shin 124).

Blakemore notes in her article "How Japan Took Control of Korea" that Japan strengthened its hold over Korea by "wag[ing] an all-out war on Korean culture." According

to C. Kim, the Japanese colonial government systematically suppressed Korea's culture by banning the Korean language, requiring Koreans to adopt Japanese names, and eventually outlawing certain types of Korean traditional dress (137). S.W. Song writes that "Japanese language education was relentlessly enforced and Japanese traditions and lifestyle replaced those of a Korean nature" (315). The forced name changes challenged the Korean people's connection to their forefathers (Clark 49) and impacted their identity as a separate and distinct people because family and ancestral heritage was an important part of the Korean cultural identity.

Through propaganda advertising, the Japanese sought to influence the Korean people toward assimilation. Bae, in a study of Japanese occupation period advertising, notes that advertising helped to promote Japanese culture over Korean culture through imagery of women in kimonos and the limitation of Hangeul (Korean alphabet) text (115-116). The limiting of Korean and promotion of Japanese was essential for assimilating Koreans into new Japanese citizens (S.W. Song 314).

The cultural imperialism of Japan not only tried to remove Korea's language and clothing but also their traditional food. According to Bae, Suzuki's advertising of Ajinomoto (a chemical seasoning) that presented Japanese flavors as modern and desirable was "a form of colonization and signified a cultural strategy to degrade and discriminate indigenous cultures by advocating Japan's culture as superior" (116).

This culture war not only challenged Korea's traditional culture but also affected the view of Korea outside of Asia. K. Kim, in her research, attributes two ways that the Japanese occupation damaged the global view of Korean traditional culture. First, Japan used their position of power to loot Korean temples, excavate ancestral tombs, and demolish historic buildings. K. Kim notes that this "cultural pillage" caused

damage to Korea's cultural legacy (122). Kang agrees, noting in her study of Korean cultural artifacts that imperial Japan used the artifacts to portray to other nations that Korea was declining culturally in contrast to the rise and modernization of Japanese culture. As the primary source of information about Korea until the end of World War II, Japan's portrayal of Korea as "backwards and primitive compared to Japan made it into textbooks [and] museums" (Blakemore).

Second, Japan, to justify their colonization of Korea, distorted history and strove to remove the significance of the Korean cultural influence on their land. Jang, in his book *A Representation of Nationhood in the Museum*, analyzes the role Japanese scholars had in forming the initial discourse on Korea's historic and artistic culture and explains how "they made efforts to prove the importance of the influence of Chinese civilization on Korea in the fields of archaeology and art history" (19). If China played a larger role in the formation of Korean culture, then Korea's influence in Japan could be redefined as China's influence. With total control over Korea's historical artifacts as well as the presentation of those artifacts, Japan could easily suppress Korea's historical influence on Japan and emphasize "those aspects of Korean material culture which illustrated Chinese influences" (K. Kim 141).

According to K. Kim, Japan supported their distortion by falsely asserting that ancient Korea had been a colony of China in the north and a colony of Japan in the south. This assertion undermined Korea's position as an independent nation in East Asia. C. Kim also discusses this distortion of Korea's heritage, noting that Japan endeavored to portray Korea as being "historically dependent on external powers" like China and Japan (132). Thus, the Japanese occupation helped to fuel the idea that Korea was culturally inferior to Japan and only a miniature China.

Another effect of the Japanese occupation was an inaccurate interpretation of Korean culture. In the study "White Hanbok as an Expression of Resistance in Modern Korea," Seo explores the use and meaning of the white hanbok (Korean traditional dress) and its subsequent development into a symbol of resistance during the Japanese occupation. Seo notes that the origin of the Korean people's love of white clothing was rooted in both an aesthetic choice and the influences of Confucian philosophy. However, when Japan began interpreting Korean culture, their scholars asserted that the wearing of white was the result of either poverty or mourning for a lost cause (white was traditionally worn at funerals in Asian countries) (Seo 124-125).

K. Kim also discusses this misinterpretation, noting that Yanagi Muneyoshi, a Japanese scholar, believed that the white clothing reflected the Korean people being an unhappy and sad people and that the overarching essence of Korean aesthetics was "the beauty of sadness" (158). According to M. Shin, Yanagi also believe that the use of white showed Korea's "weakness and inferiority" (134). Thus, even those who were more sympathetic toward the Korean people like Yanagi also misinterpreted Korean culture due to the influence of the distorted historical record and imperial Japan's perspective on Korea as a failed nation.

## Orientalism, Stereotypes, and Misrepresentation

Progress in global knowledge after the liberation of Korea and the Korean War has helped to restore Korea's status as an independent culture and nation in the Far East. However, some vestiges of imperial Japanese propaganda still survive, and Korea's unique culture is often stereotyped into a mix of 'Oriental' culture.



In her dissertation, Sung examined how Korean-Americans have been misrepresented in children's picture books. Sung found that many illustrations present an "imagined" image of Korea based on "existing stereotypes and images about Chinese and Japanese immigrants" (153). Lee, who also researched the depiction of Korean culture in American picture books, attributes this stereotyped representation of 'Asian' culture to orientalism which she defines as "a structure of Western thoughts that make certain generalizations about the part of the world known as the East" (23). In other words, the Western understanding of Asian countries and cultures is often based on a generalized view of the Eastern world that distinguishes what is 'Asian' in comparison to Western civilization.

Sung found in her research that Korean culture was often portrayed using generic Asian cultural icons or cultural icons that align more with Chinese culture, including the prominent use of the color red, dragons, and dumplings. Although some Korean cultural icons were included, Sung asserts that these icons were selected for their 'exoticness' rather than for an authentic representation of Korean culture. Traditional clothing and hairstyles were often misrepresented through either faulty research or careless attention to detail. Sung notes that "a lack of research can easily dismiss the value of little details that have long term history in Korean society" (208). It is these small details that help distinguish Korean culture from other Asian cultures. Without these details and attention to authentic representation, the representation of Korean culture becomes muddled in a mix of exotic 'Asian-ness' that could be potentially interpreted as Japanese or Chinese culture.

In her research, Sung found that a comparison of the illustrations of Korean culture in Korean-American books and in Korean books highlighted the inaccurate portrayal of Korean culture as old-fashioned and outdated

in American picture books. This portrayal seems to be a continued misconception of Korea as promoted by imperial Japan in the 19th century. Lee's research also discovered a similar trend of presenting Korean culture as static and outdated. Lee notes that representations of this kind could lead to an "oversimplifying, fixating, and exoticizing [of] the Korean culture" (241). According to Sung, the problem with representing Korea as 'exotic,' 'Asian,' and 'outdated' is that these images of Korea in books (and other media) inevitably "becomes the audience's personal knowledge of Korean culture" (181).

M. Baker and Hicks both highlight this concept of representation becoming personal knowledge in their articles on the 1970s American television show *M\*A\*S\*H\** which was set in Korea during the Korean War. M. Baker notes in his article that the "hit sitcom 'MASH' distorted the views of a generation of Americans" on South Korea while Hicks writes that his initial ideas about Korea were influenced "almost exclusively" by *M\*A\*S\*H\**. Although it was a popular show in America, *M\*A\*S\*H\** sadly portrayed Korean culture inaccurately sometimes even using a blend of Vietnamese and Japanese elements to portray 'Korean' culture (Cha). According to IMDb, the writers even made mistaken references about Korea such as Korea having jungles and being located in Southeast Asia.

Since the 1970s, American audiences have become more familiar with Korea. The Korean Wave or Hallyu has helped introduce more of Korea's culture to America. However, even with the rise in popularity of Korean cultural products such as K-Drama, K-Pop, and Korean food, there continues to be problems with proper identification of Korea and its culture in America. Some of these errors are the result of faulty assumptions or just carelessness in research. In 2004, ABC's U.S. television show *Lost* included Korean characters and episodes set in South Korea (H. Kim). H. Kim explored the representation

of Korean culture in *Lost* and found that the South Korean sets often used Chinese or Japanese aesthetics and cultural elements because the production staff had difficulty finding Korean props in America (49-50). Korean news media and bloggers also pointed out the errors and misrepresentations including the use of Vietnamese hats for Korean fishermen (Baek), a Japanese-style temple for a Korean background (hama213, Fischer), and an old walking bridge for Hangang Bridge (Y.S. Kang). Cha notes that this misrepresentation of Korea in *Lost* did not happen suddenly but has grown out of past misrepresentations such as *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970s), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), and *Falling Down* (1993). According to Baek, Hong Jeong-wook, a member of South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, voiced concern over the misrepresentation of Korea in American dramas like *Lost* because of the wide reach of popular American dramas not only in America but across the world.

More recent portrayals of Korea in American film have been significantly better than the portrayal in *Lost*. Marvel's *Age of Ultron* (2015) and *Black Panther* (2018) both filmed parts of their Korean scenes in actual Korean cities like Seoul and Busan (McNary, Kil). Filming real Korean locations helped to add authenticity to the presentation of Korea although both films provide only a glimpse of the cities during action-packed chase scenes (Iwanek). The progress towards a more authentic portrayal of Korea in American film is encouraging; however, misrepresentation continues to mar these efforts. Unintelligible Korean dialogue, Macau-style interior design, and misuse of hanbok were just some of the problems that T.K. found in his review of *Black Panther*.

Korean culture also continues to be confused with Japanese culture even in 2020. Disney recently re-released their *Tokyo Mater* short from their *Cars* franchise on Disney+. Although the animated short is set in Tokyo,

Japan, the short uses a Korean pop song sung in Korean for the closing scene. The use of a Korean song with Japanese-themed content is misleading because the audience would naturally assume that the background song was in Japanese unless they were familiar with Japanese or Korean. The problem is further accentuated by Disney's actually identifying the song as Japanese in the subtitles. The English subtitles on Disney+ display "Japanese Pop Music Playing" when this song plays (*Tokyo Mater* 00:05:57). The absence of music credits on Disney+ for *Tokyo Mater* outside of credit to the score composer BT prevents even minimal clarification that the song is Korean rather than Japanese.

On May 16, 2020, Cartoon Network's Twitter account posted a fanart of their characters wearing hanbok for Asian American Heritage month demonstrating that Korea's traditional culture is becoming more known in America. However, Cartoon Network angered many Korean fans, because the post used the kimono emoji and cherry blossom emoji which are both associated with Japanese culture. As in the Disney's *Tokyo Mater* case, the use of these emojis could be an innocent mistake by someone unfamiliar with Korean and Japanese cultures. These mistakes, though, are a sad reflection of how easy it is to misidentify and generalize East Asian cultures.

### The Importance of Cultural Awareness

While mix-ups like confusing two cultures' traditional dress or language seem relatively innocent, low awareness of a culture can have serious consequences. In his research on English children's perceptions of Jewish culture, Short argues that understanding Jewish culture is a prerequisite to understanding the Holocaust because the "children's initial understanding [of Jewish culture and identity] might be so ill-informed



as to prevent them from commiserating with the victims of the Holocaust despite what they subsequently learn about it” (394).

Gray furthered this research in a similar study that considered both the students’ perception of Jewish people and their understanding of the Holocaust’s cause. According to Gray’s research, some of the students’ perceptions of the Jews and Holocaust were influenced by stereotypes like the ‘Rich Jew’ that are remnants of Nazi propaganda (432). Both Short and Gray conclude that addressing misunderstandings about Jews and Jewish culture is important for teaching students about the cause and impact of the Holocaust. Although their research involves the English awareness of Judaism and Jewish culture, Short and Gray’s conclusions could be applied to America’s understanding of Korea’s culture and history.

Much like the remnants of Nazi propaganda in Europe affects the view of Jews and Jewish culture, Imperial Japanese propaganda continues to affect the American view of Korea and its culture. In 2018, Korea hosted the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and was able to highlight some of its rich cultural heritage. However, NBC’s coverage of the opening ceremony was criticized for its lack of depth and “endless generalities about what constituted ‘Asian’ culture” (Greene, Ryan). Analyst Joshua Cooper Ramo also received backlash from Korean Americans and Koreans for misrepresenting the Japanese occupation of Korea with his claim that “every Korean will tell you that Japan is a cultural, technological and economic example that has been so important to their own transformation” (Baker, Persio, Selk).

His comment overlooked the atrocities of the Japanese occupation and misrepresented Korean history to NBC’s American audience. Commentary like Ramos’ during the 2018 Winter Olympics ignores the horrors of the Japanese occupation and instead recasts Japanese imperialism in Korea as

the modernization of a backwards, exotic land—a perfect echo of the occupation-era propaganda. The evil of trying to destroy a people’s heritage will not be a serious issue to those who do not know or care that that heritage exists. With this kind of perspective, the struggles of Korean-Japanese political relations regarding issues like the Dokdo Island dispute or the reparations for the comfort women can be easily minimized or even dismissed by American audiences.

Even though information about Korean culture has become more accessible over the years, misconceptions about Korean culture still exist in America. These misconceptions have arisen due to many factors, some innocent such as just being unfamiliar with Korea and some more sinister such as imperial Japanese propaganda. Learning more about what distinguishes Korean culture from other Asian cultures could help address misconceptions while also reducing the impact of past representations of Korean culture in America.

### Preserving and Promoting Korean Culture

Since the first Korean exhibition in America in the 19th century, Korea has worked to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. The Japanese occupation of Korea took the narrative of Korea’s history and culture out of Korea’s hands. However, because of the efforts of both Koreans in the past and in the present, Korea has been able to take back their narrative.

### Resistance against Japan’s Cultural Imperialism

As discussed earlier, the view of Korean culture outside of Korea was initially

impacted by the Japanese occupation. During this time of hardship, Korean independence activists worked tirelessly to not only work toward independence but also preserve and protect Korea’s cultural heritage from Imperial Japan’s cultural genocide. Because of their selfless work, Koreans today can study and share their ancestors’ material culture and non-material culture through historical documents and artifacts.

K. Kim notes that leaders of the independence movement and upholders of Korean patriotism like Oh Se-chang (an important leader in the March 1st Movement 삼일운동) believed that “collecting and preserving the national patrimony would serve as the foundation for both individual and national strength in being Korean” (162). Korean newspapers like the *Chosun Ilbo* printed Korean literature in defiance of the Japanese (C. Kim) while Korean scholars published books and essays on Korean history, art, and philosophy that challenged Japanese assertions and strove to preserve Korea’s cultural identity (K. Lee). Bae argues that Japanese propaganda fell short in Korea because “Korea consumers in fact perceived the forced information in advertising images” and rejected the cultural assimilation (119).

During the Japanese occupation, there were many Koreans who helped Korea retain its cultural identity; however, for the study of Korea’s material culture the contributions of Jeon Hyeong-pil (전형필) are perhaps most significant. Jeon Hyeong-pil was a collector of Korean artifacts during the Japanese occupation and spent his fortune protecting Korean pottery, artwork, and historical documents (K. Kim). Through the influence of Oh Se-chang, Jeon Hyeong-pil realized the importance of preserving Korea’s cultural heritage (Cultural Heritage Administration, “Chun Hyung-pil”). Oh Se-chang is recorded to have told Jeon that “our cultural properties are our national legacies containing the spirit of our nation” (*Cultural Heritage*, “Chun” 18).

Jeon purchased thousands of Korean artifacts including books, paintings, ceramics, and sculptures to prevent them from being destroyed or sold to Japanese and other foreign collectors (K. Kim 164). These artifacts include several of Korea’s designated National Treasures (*Cultural Heritage*, “Chun”). One of the most important documents that Jeon preserved and protected from the Japanese was an original printing of the *Hunminjeongeum*, the original record of King Sejong’s Korean alphabet Hangeul (*Cultural Heritage*, “Chun” 19).

He further contributed to the preservation of Korea’s material culture through the founding of the first Korean museum Bohwagak later known as Kansong Art Museum (*Cultural Heritage*, “Chun”). The Kansong Art and Culture Foundation notes that the museum is “the result of a pioneer’s tearful effort to protect the spirit and soul of our people and awaken self-respect towards our history and culture in the future.” Jeon’s work allowed Korea to retain many important pieces from their cultural legacy and has been vital for studies of Korean art and material culture.

### The Korean Wave and Its Impact

Korea and its culture has, in the past two decades, become more prominent internationally through the Korean Wave or *Hallyu*, which refers to the spread of Korean popular culture through K-Pop (Korean music) and K-Dramas (Korean television dramas). *Hallyu* from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s mainly impacted Asian audiences, most notably in China and Japan (Chung). The 2010s saw *Hallyu*’s reach extend to countries outside Asia including Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America (Chung). Spread to North America was initially slow; however, the rise of streaming services like Hulu, DramaFever, and Netflix helped to bring K-Dramas to American audiences (Chung). Because of Korean entertainment’s international success, the



Korean government contributes and assists the industry with the hopes that Hallyu will help bring awareness to Korean culture and help improve Korea's image abroad. For example, the popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan “quickly and dramatically reshap[ed] the way the Japanese saw and understood Korea's culture and people” (Chung 19).

### Traditional Korean Culture in Hallyu

Besides introducing international audiences to Korea's popular culture, Hallyu has helped introduce Korea's traditional culture. Korean historical dramas showcase Korea's traditional culture through the costumes, historical buildings, and traditional food. Interestingly, one drama that helped increase Hallyu's global impact was a historical Korean drama also known as a sageuk (사극) that showcased Korea's traditional culture. *Dae Jang Geum* (English title: *Jewel in the Palace*) unexpectedly became popular in many countries starting in 2003, and KOCIS reports that over 87 countries purchased the rights to air *Dae Jang Geum* between 2003 and 2011 (Chung 23). Through *Dae Jang Geum*, international audience saw “depictions of traditional architecture, music, attire, food, and medicine [giving] foreign fans a distinctive taste of Korea's culture and heritage” (Chung 24). The international popularity of *Dae Jang Geum* was unexpected because its historical and traditional content was created for a Korean audience.

The recent success of Netflix's *Kingdom* (2019), a zombie-thriller series set in Korea during the Joseon era, has introduced new audiences to Korea's traditional culture and prompted online conversations on Korea's traditional clothing and customs. From Reddit to Twitter, viewers have posted their questions about the historical clothing in the series prompting bloggers (Berman, Poh) and journalists (Y. R. Yeo, Martin) to explain the costumes and their meaning. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, the writer and director of *Kingdom* Kim Eun-hee and Park In-je

expressed their surprise at the interest shown in online discussions toward the hanbok costumes by international audiences (Keeley). The current interest in Korea's history and traditions demonstrates the significance of the production team's effort to present “the distinct look of the Joseon dynasty” through costuming and set design (James).

Although K-Dramas tend to showcase Korea's traditional culture more, K-Pop has also helped introduce audiences to Korea's traditional material culture—hanbok in particular. Popular K-Pop groups have introduced fans to the hanbok through their yearly Chuseok (추석, Korean Thanksgiving) greetings posted on social media. For these greetings, the artists wear hanboks and do a ceremonial bow. Although these photos and videos are created for Korean fans, they do help introduce international fans to hanbok.

BTS, a widely popular K-Pop group, was recognized in 2019 by the Korean government for their exemplary promotion of hanbok through their performances (L. Kim). In 2020, BTS promoted traditional Korean culture to American audiences while performing a special stage of their song “IDOL” on NBC's *Tonight Show* (MSN). For the performance, group wore hanbok-inspired costumes and performed in front of Gyeongbokgung, a palace that showcases the architecture from Korea's Joseon period (MSN).

Perhaps gaining energy and inspiration from the success of the hanbok with international audiences, Samsung recently showcased traditional Korean designs in their *Real SK Experience* commercial. Models wore colorful modern hanboks with traditional embroidery in sets that included traditional Korean furniture, accessories, and paintings (Samsung). The recent popularity of Korea's hanbok through the success of BTS and *Kingdom*, according to Park Yang-woo, Korea's minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, shows that Korea's traditional culture is becoming more a part of the Korean Wave.

### Hallyu and Cultural Interpretation

Although the impact of Hallyu in spreading more awareness about Korea cannot be denied, the effectiveness of Hallyu in helping international audiences learn about Korean culture has been questioned. According to Shulze's research of online fan discussions, international fans' understanding of the culture presented in K-Dramas is based on their collective, imagined idea of “K-Dramaland” rather than Korea specifically. Thus, Shulze argues that K-Dramas “do not transmit a set definition of “Korean culture” and warns against assuming that international audiences will “easily decode this culture” through a drama's influence (393). G.M. Kim also mentions the idea of an imagined culture in her study on the interpretation of Korean culture by international audiences and notes that the imagined understanding of other cultures can lead to faulty and harmful interpretations. The reason for these faulty interpretations, according to G.M. Kim, could be due to the limited education on Korea in U.S. schools which usually places Korea “on the margins of World History with a possible glance at the Korean War” (485).

There seems to be limited research on the actual extent of Korea-related topics in American education. However, Takeda's study of Asian-Pacific American representation in 28 American Government textbooks provides an interesting look at the coverage of Asian history in American schools. Takeda found that mentions of Asian Pacific Americans and their contributions covered less than 0.50% of each textbooks with a mean coverage of only 0.19% which is considerably low when compared with the representation of other minorities. Although Takeda's concern is that a low awareness of Asian American accomplishments will discourage Asian American students from participating in politics, his research also points to the general deficiency in American education on Asian topics.

Interest in Korea because of Hallyu has led some fans to move beyond an imagined understanding and toward active learning. In her research of Korean studies students in Israel, Lyan notes that “hallyu has become a gateway to a broader interest in Korean language, history, and society” (3772). Several of the students that Lyan interviewed believed that by studying Korea they could address the inferior perceptions of Korea and encourage others to see their interest in Korea as legitimate rather than strange (3773-3774). While Lyan's research is limited to the perspective of Israeli students, it does highlight how Hallyu fans' interest in Korean popular culture has increased their desire to learn more about Korea's history and traditional culture.

### Korean Culture

As Korea has become more known on a global scale in the last decades, both Korean and non-Korean scholars alike have examined what makes Korean traditional culture unique. The typical categories of Korean traditional culture that have been studied include clothing, architecture, food, art, and language. Chung et al. in their study “Aesthetics of Korean Foods: The Symbol of Korean Culture” assert that the unique Korean culture can be seen in Korea's “basic food, clothing, and shelter” (179). Overarching these categories are the ideas of traditional Korean aesthetics. However, before examining the elements of Korean culture, it is important to understand a basic history of Korea and its cultural beliefs.

### Overview of Korean History

American contact with Korea began in the 19th century. However, Korea's history had begun thousands of years before. The first ancient Korean kingdom of note was GoJoseon (고조선) established in 2333 B.C. (Y. Kim). However, typical studies of Korean culture begin with the development of



Gogoryeo (고구려), Silla (신라), and Baekje (백제) during the Three Kingdoms Period in the 7th century. According to Chang, each of these three kingdoms “developed their own cultures marked with distinctive ethnic characteristics” that differed from the culture in China (22). Gogoryeo, Silla, and Baekje would eventually be unified under Unified Silla (676-935) and later evolve into Goryeo (고려, 918-1392 AD) and finally Joseon (조선, 1392-1910) (Korean Culture). In 1896, King Gojong established the Empire of Korea which lasted until Japan forcefully annexed Korea in 1910 (Y. Kim). Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945 following the end of World War II and placed under the Soviet Union control in the north and U.S. control in the south (Y. Kim). From this division, today’s North Korea and South Korea emerged.

Through each period in Korea’s history, the culture of Korea built upon the work of the previous generation. According to the Korean Culture and Information Service, “the unique artistic sensibility reflected in the diverse artifacts and tomb murals of the Three Kingdom Periods became richer and more profound as Korea progressed” (64). Today, the most recognizable traditional Korean culture draws upon the culmination of Korea’s cultural development during the Joseon period. Thus, most studies on Korean culture predominately cover the culture of Joseon while alluding to influences from earlier periods such as Unified Silla and Goryeo.

### Korean Beliefs and Philosophy

During Korea’s long history, different belief systems became prominent at varying times. The earliest key beliefs of the Korean people in GoJoseon were a reverence for heaven and a belief in the universe’s harmony (Jung et al.). Universal harmony was understood by ancient Koreans through the concept of *Cheon Ji In* (Hangul: 천지인, Hanja: 天地人) which considers the relationship of the heavens, the earth, and people (Jung et al.).

Organized religious systems became more prominent during the Three Kingdoms period with the rise of Confucianism and Buddhism. These two belief systems coexisted in Korea in an interesting balance as each influenced Korea’s political and social beliefs. According to C. Kim, Gogoryeo and subsequent Korean kingdoms “adopted both Confucianism and Buddhism as convenient political ideology and social morality” (25). Confucianism influenced the state’s structure while Buddhism provided moral thought for the people.

Under Unified Silla, Buddhism became more prominent as the monarchy used Buddhist beliefs to support their rule (K. Lee). McCallion explains that Buddhism found early success in Korea because it supported the Korean people’s existent philosophy of respecting nature (408). Buddhism continued to be the state religion under Goryeo, and Buddhist leaders became influential gaining great power and wealth (Clark 40). However, their power eventually led to the corruption and fall of Goryeo. Thus, when the kingdom of Joseon was founded in 1392, the new government worked to reduce the influence of Buddhism (Clark 41) and established Confucianism as the primary religion of Korea (Jung et al. 25). Buddhism became less prominent in society joining shamanism and other folk beliefs as religions of the lower classes (Clark 42). Confucius thought permeated Joseon’s society impacting not only the customs of the people but also their clothing and arts. McCallion notes that Confucianism impacted the societal regulations on “fabrics, colors, motifs, and accessories” (409).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Christian books were brought to Joseon from China, introducing a new faith to the Korean people (C. Kim). However, Christianity was soon outlawed and persecuted because of conflicts with Confucianist ancestral rituals (Clark 47). Despite this persecution, Christianity

began to grow in Joseon (Hill 495). When Joseon opened to Western trade and influence, Christianity became more tolerated allowing many missionaries to come to Korea (Hill).

The Japanese occupation renewed the persecution of Christians when Japan began using their Shinto religion to force assimilation (Clark 49). Christians who refused to worship the Shinto gods were arrested for their defiance of Imperial Japan (Hill 496). Korean Christians played an important role in Korea’s national independence movement as they fought religious persecution and Japanese imperialism. South Korea today practices religious tolerance, and the major faiths held by Koreans are typically Christianity or Buddhism while Confucianist thought continues to influence Korean traditions and thought (Clark 30).

Although the predominant religion of Korea underwent changes at different periods of history, some values and philosophies remained consistent in Korean thought such as *Cheon Ji In* and *Hongik Ingan* (홍익인간). *Cheon Ji In* as mentioned earlier is the idea of universal harmony. According to Jung et al., this concept is “found in almost all aspects of traditional Korean culture, including language, music, art, architecture, scientific inventions and even cuisine” (7).

Like *Cheon Ji In*, *Hongik Ingan* was a belief held since ancient times in Korea. Meaning “living for the benefit of humankind,” *Hongik Ingan* is considered the founding philosophy of Korea and is attributed to Dangun, the first ruler of GoJoseon (Jung et al. 8). This philosophy is evident in Korea’s history through the lives of revered people such as Queen Seondeok of Silla, King Sejong the Great, and Heo Jun who all selflessly worked to help improve the lives of the common people and through the various Korean kingdoms’ peaceful attitude toward other countries (Jung et al. 8).

### Korean Aesthetics

Although Korean culture evolved over thousands of years, there are some aesthetic qualities that were retained from period to period. Korean aesthetics have been generally described as having a focus on simplicity, nature, and harmony.

#### Simplicity

In his book *Korean Ceramics: The Beauty of Natural Forms*, Koehler examines the history of Korean ceramics beginning with the Goryeo period and ending with the Joseon period. While highlighting the differences between Korean, Japanese, and Chinese pottery, Koehler notes that Korean ceramics have a quiet stateliness that reflect the simplicity and naturalness that are an integral feature of traditional Korean aesthetics (2013). Kwon and Lee in their study on the “Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics Traced in South Korean Contemporary Fashion Practice” also signified simplicity as a key trait of the Korean aesthetic. However, they proposed that the aesthetic of Korean culture could be more accurately described as naturalism with four unique characteristics: “pure formality, symbolic decoration, playful spontaneity, and naturalistic simplicity” (158). Thus, Kwon and Lee argue that the symbolism, playfulness, and simplicity found in traditional Korean culture can better be explained as variations of naturalism.

#### Nature

Rutt, while describing a foreigner’s perspective of Korean culture, presented spontaneity as his overarching impression of Korean culture. He describes spontaneity as being in touch with life and refers to an “atmosphere of the country people” even in aristocratic art (33). Thus, Rutt like Kwon and Lee ties the idea of spontaneity to a desire for naturalistic presentation. Hammer agrees stating that the “emphasis on nature also inspired the creation



of artworks that convey an impression of accident and spontaneity, objects that capture the liveliness and spirit found in the natural world” (16). W. Kim presents undecorated pottery and twisted wooden beams as examples of the Korean spontaneity and highlights the avoidance of “artificial pretense” in traditional art (44). Korean aesthetics then places emphasis on a natural presentation rather than “technical perfection” (W. Kim 44).

In the essay “Some Characteristics of Korean Art: Quiet, Discrete and Humorous,” Ch’oe discusses the marked differences between Chinese and Korean art and explains that Korean art in contrast to opulent Chinese art is unpretentious and natural. According to Ch’oe, the natural aesthetic “is a beauty created not against the reasonableness of things and the movements of nature, but instead based on an attitude that respects nature” (55). Ko et al. also mention this respect of nature in their comparison of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese aesthetics noting that Korean beauty is defined by “natural sense and representation” (203).

In the Cultural Heritage Administration’s publication *World Heritage in Korea* which highlights the various UNESCO heritage sites in Korea, the gardens of Changdeok Palace are presented as examples of the Korean preference for unaffected nature. Rather than artificially creating a man-made and heavily regulated landscape, the “ancient Korean preferred natural streams and waterfalls to ornate fountains as they felt obliged to obey the laws of nature” (*World Heritage* 61). Because the focus of the Korean aesthetic was on being natural and simple, attention was given to how the finished work would look in its surroundings. Ch’oe refers to this aspect of the Korean aesthetic as harmony (55).

### Harmony

Thus, in addition to simplicity and naturalism, the Korean aesthetic is harmonious. In his article “Korean History: An Introduction,”

Shultz describes the Korean flag as an example of the harmony in Korean culture. He notes that “the harmonizing of opposing forces has been a theme in Korea’s history and cultural heritage” (14). This focus on harmony is apparent in the clothing, food, and even architecture of traditional Korea.

The National Academy of the Korean Language highlights the use of harmony in Korean clothing aesthetics noting that the hanbok (traditional Korean dress) is a “harmony of simple lines and soft curves” (12). While discussing the aesthetics of traditional Korean food, Chung et al. present two Korean dishes *bibimbap* (비빔밥) and *tangpyungchae* (탕평채) as examples of how Korean food uses a harmony of colors to create beauty (180-181). Each dish includes a colorful mix of thinly sliced vegetables arranged over rice (bibimbap) or mixed together with mung-bean jelly (tangpyungchae).

Koehler touches on the harmony found in Korean architecture in his book *Joseon’s Royal Heritage: 500 Years of Splendor* noting that the royal tombs of the Joseon period were built with a balance of nature and man-made structures to produce a beautiful harmony of “nature and artifice” (77). According to Ch’oe, this type of harmony is related to a discretion in choosing the “right materials...in scale with the surroundings” (56). Changdeok Palace is an example of this harmonization with nature due to its unique, fluid layout that departed from the popular symmetrical layout inspired by Chinese palaces (*World Heritage* 52). Because of its unique layout that sought to adapt itself to the terrain, Changdeok Palace “is revered as a preeminent repository of unique Korean traditions and aesthetics humbly but elegantly harmonized into nature” (*World Heritage* 63). Thus, whether one looks at the hanbok, Korean food, or even Korean architecture, there is a concentrated effort to harmonize man’s touch with the natural world.

## Elements of Korean Culture

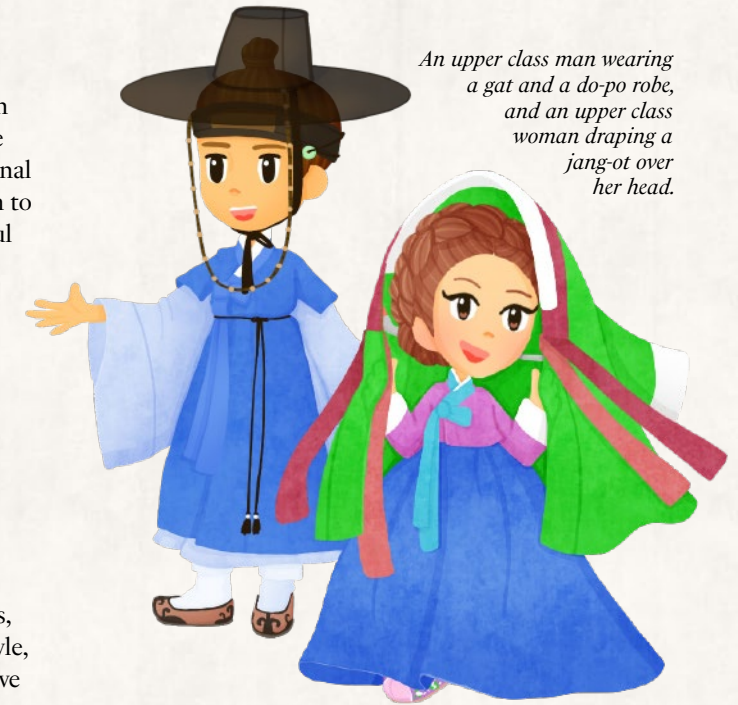
As can be seen in the previous section, when discussing Korean culture, the predominate elements that are discussed are the traditional clothing, architecture, and food. In addition to these elements, the Korean alphabet Hangul and Korean pottery are also presented as important parts of Korean culture.

### Hanbok

The traditional clothing of Korea is called *hanbok* (한복). According to KOCIS (the Korean Culture and Information Service), the hanbok has evolved over Korea’s 5,000 year history and can be traced from the Three Kingdoms periods on through to the kingdoms of Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon. Thus, the “hanbok offers a glimpse into the lifestyle, aesthetic tastes and social structures over five millennia of Korean civilization” (KOCIS 3).

The basic hanbok is a two-piece ensemble that consists of a jacket-like top and a skirt (for women) or loose pants (for men). The recognizable traditional form of the hanbok was worn during the Joseon period after developing through the earlier periods of Korean History (*Guide to Korean Culture* 87). The women’s top is called a jeogori (저고리) and is fastened in the front right with a ribbon. The jeogori’s length is short and sits above the waistline. The skirt is called a chima (치마) and is worn by wrapping and tying it securely above the chest. Men wear a longer and looser fitting jeogori that is also fastened to the right. Their pants are called baji (바지) and “are roomy and bound at the ankles” (*Guide to Korean Culture* 87).

Over this basic hanbok ensemble, men and women could wear a variety of different clothing pieces often determined by their status and wealth. For example, women of the upper class often draped over themselves an outer cloak called a *jang-ot* (장옷) when going out in public (McCallion 412). Upper class men often wore a long jacket with wide



An upper class man wearing a gat and a do-po robe, and an upper class woman draping a jang-ot over her head.

sleeves called a *do-po* (도포) that was tied with a thin belt over their baji-jeogori ensemble (McCallion 412). Over the do-po, men might wear a *kweja* (쾌자) or *jeonbok* (전복), two similar style jackets that were both sleeveless and collarless with slits on the side and in the back (“쾌자,” “전복”).

In addition to outerwear, traditional Korean clothing also includes many different types of hats worn by both men and women for functional and sometimes aesthetic reasons. Women’s hats like the *noh-eul* (너울), *jeon-mo* (전모), and *nambawi* (남바위) were typically worn as modesty coverings, as protection from the sun, or as protection from the cold, respectively (Wooh). Men’s hats often represented their rank or occupation as in the case of the *gat* (갓) worn by noblemen and the *samo* (사모) worn by palace officials (McCallion 414).

Beyond the basic, everyday hanbok, there were many special hanboks that were worn for special ceremonies and by the royal family. McCallion notes that “the most



The King wearing a red gonryongpo.



The Queen and her upper ladies-in-waiting wearing dangui. The lower ladies-in-waiting are wearing jeogori.

exquisite examples of traditional Korean costume are of the Choson dynasty royal costumes” (411). The King’s official robe was called the *gonryongpo* (곤룡포), and like the robes of the noble men, it was long with wide sleeves (“곤룡포”). However, the King’s robe was decorated with *bo* (보), special royal emblems that displayed dragon motifs. These bo were placed on the shoulders, chest, and back of the King’s royal robes.

Other royal family members like the crown prince, the queen, the crown princess, and princesses also wore bo on their clothes. However, the motifs were slightly different to signify their relative status in the royal family. The queen’s bo displayed a five-toed dragon called *ohjo-ryong* (오조룡) (Wooh 124) while the crown prince and crown princess wore a four-toed dragon or *sajo-ryong* (사조룡) (“흥배”). Princesses also wore the sajo-ryong bo but only until they were married (Wooh 124). The crown prince, like the King, wore a gonryongpo. However, in contrast to the King’s red robe, the crown prince wore a lapis lazuli colored robe (“곤룡포”).

Women in the palace, including the royal family and ladies-in-waiting, wore a special long jeogori called a *dangu* (당의) over the typical chima-jeogori ensemble (Wooh 122). The decorative elements on the dangu such

as the bo and also gold print would signify the wearer’s status in the palace (Wooh). Thus, based on a person’s clothing during the Joseon period, one could determine their status and role.

#### Architecture

When studying traditional Korean architecture, the royal palaces in particular provide an important glimpse into Korean culture. Koehler notes that the royal palaces are “architectural expressions of Joseon society and its ruling philosophy” (7). The royal palaces include Gyeongbokgung (경복궁), Changdeokgung (창덕궁), Changgyeonggung (창경궁), Deoksugung (덕수궁), and Gyeonghuigung (경희궁) (“Five Palaces”). Each palace originally was divided into three major sections that housed the necessary buildings for government work, the royal family’s living quarters, and gardens (B. Kim 194). Government work was conducted in the *jeongjeon* (정전) or throne hall, the *pyonjeon* (편전) or council hall, as well as offices for the various departments (B. Kim 196). The royal living quarters housed the royal family as well as their servants. B. Kim notes that each “royal personage...occupied their own cluster of buildings, which formed a small palace within the palace” (196). Near the royal living quarters were the pleasure gardens



A traditional hanok house

that provided the royal family with a view of nature’s harmony (B. Kim 196).

Of the five palaces, Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung are the most famous and were the first two to be built. Gyeongbokgung was built in 1395 by King Taejo (태조), the first king of the new Joseon dynasty, in the new capital of Hanyang (present day Seoul) (Koehler). However, Changdeokgung (built in 1412) became the royal residence for much of the Joseon dynasty (Koehler). Changgyeonggung was built during the reign of King Sejong the Great (세종대왕) and became an “auxiliary palace of Changdeokgung” (Koehler 45).

Deoksugung was converted into a palace during the reign of King Seonjo (선조) due to the Japanese invasion in 1592-1598 (Cultural Heritage Administration). During this time, the invading Japanese army destroyed all of the royal palaces (Koehler). King Seonjo’s son Gwanghaegun (광해군) began rebuilding the palaces and returning them to their former glory during his reign. However, the palaces were again damaged by Japan during their occupation beginning in 1910 as they demolished buildings to build government buildings, parks, and even a zoo (Koehler). Gyeonghuigung, the last of the five palaces, was completely destroyed by the Japanese to

build a school and later an aid raid shelter (Koehler 54). In recent years, extensive effort has been made to restore all the royal palaces because they are an important part of Korean history and the Korean cultural identity.

Traditional Korean houses outside the palace are today referred to as *hanok* (한옥). These houses were built on a base of flat rocks and clay using wood pillars and clay bricks (Clark 94). Wooden door and window frames were filled in with rice paper that blocked out wind and other elements while still letting in outside light (Clark 94). Around the house, there would be a wall that fenced in the house and courtyard. The size and quality of a house indicated both the status and wealth of its owner. For example, houses of the common folk had thatched straw roofs while those of the wealthier classes typically had tiled roofs (Clark 95). Wealthier families had large estates that included sections for men’s, women’s, and servants’ quarters called the *anchae* (안채), *sarangchae* (사랑채), and *haengnangchae* (행랑채), respectively (Lim & Ryoo 53).

Perhaps the most unique aspect of traditional Korean architecture is the use of heated floors called *ondol* (온돌). The ondol used a special heating system that was built under the house using stones and channels. When the fire in the kitchen fireplace or *agung-i* (아궁이) was



lit, the smoke and heat from the fire would travel under the house and heat up the floor before exiting through a chimney (Jang, Clark 94). In the channels, a system of fire ridges or *bunomgi* (부넝기) and smoke pits or *gaejari* (개자리) helped to keep the heat moving along the bottom of the floor (E. Yi 7). Lim and Ryoo note that both the lower classes and the upper classes used this technique to keep their homes warm (53).

### Hanshik

At the heart of every culture is the traditional food of the people. Traditional Korean food is referred to as *hanshik* (한식). A Korean meal typically consists of rice and many different side dishes called *banchan* (반찬) (The National Academy of Korean Language 31). Of the various types of banchan, the most important is *kimchi* (김치), a traditional Korean pickled dish which has been considered “the most representative Korean food” (National Academy 33). In addition to banchan, a traditional Korean meal will include a main dish that is either grilled, steamed, or a soup (Yun 44). For special occasions, special noodle dishes were prepared. For example, *janchi guksu* (잔치국수) would be eaten at weddings and other celebrations (Yun 48).

Most traditional Korean food use the three traditional Korean sauces or condiments: *ganjang* (간장, soy sauce), *dwenjang* (된장, bean paste), and *gochujang* (고추장, hot pepper paste). All three of these are prepared from a base of fermented soybean called *meju* (메주) which has “existed since the era of the ancient states ...fascinat[ing] the appetites of Korea for a long time” (National Academy 63).

From these three sauces, traditional Korean food creates a multitude of dishes with flavors unique to Korea. Some of the more well-known Korean food include *bulgogi* (불고기, Korean barbecue), *bibimbap* (비빔밥, a mixed dish of vegetables and rice), and *yakgwa* (약과, a fried flour cookie).

Traditional Korean food is characterized by a focus on health and harmony. Yun notes that the Korean people believe that food was medicine and used many medicinal herbs in their daily cooking (68). The color and arrangement of *hanshik*, particularly the food served by the royal family and the upper classes, demonstrates the high value placed by the Korean people on harmony. A traditional Korean table spread included all the dishes for the meal set together (Yun 57) allowing for the representative five colors of Korea (green, white, red, black, and yellow) found in the dishes to complement and contrast each other in a beautiful display of the bounty of nature (Yun 65).



### Hangul

The Korean alphabet *Hangul* (한글) was created during the reign of King Sejong the Great, the fourth king of the Joseon dynasty.

Before the creation of *Hangul*, the Korean people used Chinese characters called *hanja* (한자). However, *hanja* was ineffective for capturing the Korean language and thoughts in writing. Because there were thousands *hanja* characters to memorize in order to learn how to read and write, literacy was primarily limited to the upper classes and scholars who had the time to study. Thus, the common people were often unable to read official notices or write any records of their knowledge causing the dissemination of knowledge to be difficult.

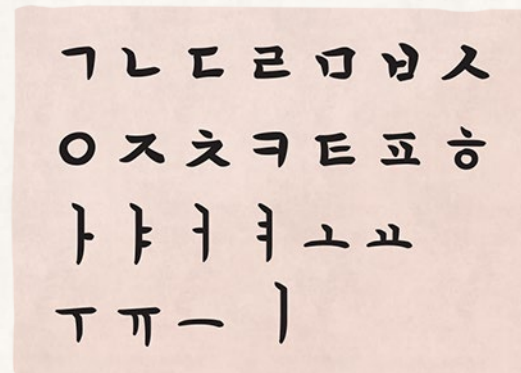
King Sejong the Great believed that a Korean alphabet that was easy to learn and that captured the Korean language was the solution to his people’s difficulties. Thus, in 1446, King Sejong the Great presented his people with the *Hunminjeongeum* (훈민정음) which literally meant “the Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People” (*Guide to Korean Culture* 67). His proclamation highlighted the need for the alphabet as well as his desire that the Korean people could express themselves freely in an authentically Korean way:

*Being of foreign origin, Chinese characters are incapable of capturing uniquely Korean meanings. Therefore, many common people have no way to express their thoughts and feelings. Out of my sympathy for their difficulties, I have invented a set of 28 letters. The letters are very easy to learn, and it is my fervent hope that they improve the quality of life of all people.*

(King Sejong in the *Hunminjeongeum*, translated in *Guide to Korean Culture* 69)

The new *Hangul* alphabet consisted of 28 characters; however, over time, the alphabet was reduced to 24 characters (*Guide to Korean Culture*, 71). *Hangul* is an important part of

*Hangul Alphabet*



Left to Right: Baekja, Goryeo Celadon, and Buncheong pottery

Korean culture because it demonstrates the philosophy of Korea’s past and has become an icon of Korean independence and identity (*Guide to Korean Culture* 75).

### Korean Pottery

One of the first areas of traditional Korean culture that gained international interest was Korean pottery. Hammer notes that “Westerners first became aware of Korean art in the late nineteenth century, largely by collecting Korean ceramics” (8). Korean pottery or ceramics can be divided into three main categories: early pottery during the Three Kingdoms period, ceramics from the Goryeo period, and ceramics from the Joseon period. Each period build on the techniques and traditions of the previous. Of the three periods, Goryeo and Joseon’s ceramics receive the most attention because of the advances and aesthetic quality of the ceramics produced in these periods. Korean ceramics have been more widely studied than other Korean cultural artifacts because they “embod[y] a different aesthetic in every period” reflecting the cultural and political changes in Korean history (Park 11).

Goryeo is famous for its celadon that attained a unique blue-green color that differentiated it from the ceramics produced in China. According to J. Im, “such was the quality of bisaek-colored Goryeo celadon...[that] the Chinese called [it] ‘the best under heaven’” (9). Although the techniques for creating celadon ceramics originated in China, Goryeo artisans



further developed celadon producing not only the unique blue-green color but also a new type of celadon called *sanggam* (상감) celadon which was decorated with inlaid designs (Koehler, *Korean Ceramics* 25). Koehler notes that *sanggam* celadon was entirely unique to Korea (*Korean Ceramics* 7).

Joseon is famous for its buncheong ware (분청사기) and baekja (백자) white porcelain. Buncheong ware, another uniquely Korean creation, was built on the development of *sanggam* celadon (Koehler, *Korean Ceramics* 7). According to Koehler, buncheong ware follows the same technique as *sanggam* celadon's inlaid designs but has an additional white slip coating (*Korean Ceramics* 39). Because buncheong ware was created mainly outside of official royal control, Koehler argues that buncheong reflected the individual artistic expression of the people (*Korean Ceramics* 46). After Japan invaded Korea in the late 1500s, the creation of buncheong wares rapidly declined as the nation was in turmoil and many Joseon potters were kidnapped and taken to Japan (Koehler, *Korean Ceramics* 69).

S. Lee notes that once Joseon's pottery industry was restored after the invasions, the focus of ceramics shifted to white porcelain. Joseon's white porcelain like the celadon was initially influenced by contemporary Chinese ceramics. However, Joseon's white porcelain soon developed uniquely Korean features in its "form, decoration, and composition" (Koehler, *Korean Ceramics* 49). White porcelain soon became the most valued porcelain in Joseon. Y. Chung notes that the Korean people "craved" the simple purity of Joseon's white porcelain (121). However, its availability for many years was restricted to the royal household (Y. Chung 121).

## Visuals of Korean Traditional Culture

Through the various elements of Korea's visual culture discussed above, the aesthetic concepts of simplicity, naturalism, and harmony are interwoven in a unique and beautiful way. These concepts are often reinforced through the use of symbolic colors and images. Thus, Korean traditional cultural elements can be recognized by the distinctive colors and motifs used to visually present their cultural beliefs and ideas.

### Obangsaek

Lee and Kim note in their study of color in Korean clothes that an understanding of cultural colors can "be used as a tool to analyze the peculiarities of a nation's culture" (79). Korea's traditional color scheme is called *obangsaek* (오방색) which literally means 'five colors.' The five colors are white, black, blue, red, and yellow. This color scheme permeates Korea's cultural artifacts and has deep significance. The Cultural Heritage Administration notes that the five colors were "broadly applied in clothes, architecture, handicrafts, amulets and various objects for everyday use, remaining indelible in Korean aesthetics until nowadays" (*Korean Heritage*, vol. 1). The most significant use of *obangsaek* today is the Korean flag which uses red, blue, white, and black (Jang, Soo-hyun).

According to Moon, *obangsaek* was developed during the Three Kingdoms period and represented the five directions: north, south, east, west, and the center (20). The colors are also tied to the five elements of metal, water, wood, fire, and earth (*Korean Heritage*, vol. 1). Jang Soo-hyun notes that although China and Japan also use these five basic colors in their traditional culture, Korea's *obangsaek* has unique "hues, meanings, and uses."



Folding screen decorated with peony flowers

From this traditional palette, five additional colors are obtained through mixing. The colors that result from the standard two-color combinations are referred to as *ogansaek* (오간색) (Jang, Soo-hyun). According to Jang Soo-hyun, *ogansaek* includes green, light blue, a brighter red, sulfur yellow, and violet.

### Traditional Motifs

Like much of Korean culture, the traditional motifs developed throughout the major periods of Korean history and were influenced by the beliefs of the Korean people. KOIS notes that during all the periods from the Three Kingdoms to Joseon, Korean art was filled with motifs influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (*Patterns* 8). The Sookmyung Women's University Museum *Korean Symbols of Wishes* exhibition presented three categories of traditional Korean symbols: those representing longevity, those representing desire for success, and those representing family blessings. G. Kim in his discussion of traditional wood carvings presents three similar categories of symbols: "longevity, good fortune, and fertility" (35).

#### Longevity

The ten longevity symbols include the "sun, mountains, stones, water, clouds, pine

trees, elixir plants, turtles, cranes, and deer" (Sookmyung). Y. Park, in his article on animal symbols in Korean culture, explains that the crane has been a symbol of longevity in Korea since ancient times (25). According to the *Korean Symbols of Wishes* exhibition, the ten longevity symbols are unique to Korean tradition. J. Im, in her article "In Blue and White: Porcelains of the Joseon Dynasty," notes that the ten longevity symbols were often used to decorate white porcelains (17).

In addition to the ten longevity symbols, G. Kim presents peaches and chrysanthemums as symbols of longevity. Kwon agrees that peaches symbolize longevity noting their use on the *hwarot* (활옷, a traditional Korean women's wedding garment) (9). Another fruit that symbolized longevity was the watermelon due to a play on words: the Korean word for watermelon *subak* (수박) was similar to the word for longevity *subok* (Hangul: 수복, hanja: 壽福) (Eom 91).

#### Success

The desire for success was represented through images that supported a "scholarly spirit" such as books and brushes and images that pointed toward wealth and power such as peacock feathers (Sookmyung).



## Family Blessings

Family blessings would include not only wealth but also fertility. Thus, these blessings were symbolized by peony flowers which represented wealth and pomegranates which represented fertility (Sookmyung). The hwarot often included embroidered phoenix designs “which symbolizes a happy family” and white herons “to represent conjugal bliss” (Kwon 6)

## Nature

Traditional Korean art was also filled with symbols from nature such as flowers, plants, and animals. Research on traditional Korean roof tile and brick patterns from The National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (NRICH) has shown that “the most popular pattern was plants, especially flowers [which] were symbols of beauty, splendor, magnificence, and prosperity” (Seung-ah Lee). Koehler while analyzing Korean ceramics noted that the lotus flower was frequently used during both the Goryeo and Joseon periods across many forms of artistic expression (*Korean Ceramics* 54). The lotus was originally associated with Buddhism, particularly during the Goryeo period, but later, its symbolism evolved to include government officials and authority (Eom 87).

A popular set of plant motifs was the common East Asian theme of the Four Gracious Plants (plum blossom, orchid, chrysanthemum, and bamboo) which were used in Korea to symbolize “a virtuous and erudite noble man” (Sookmyung). According to McChune, each of these four plants represented a Confucian virtue: courage (plum blossom), refinement (orchid), productivity (chrysanthemum), and integrity (bamboo) (190). These motifs were used in paintings, ceramics, and other artifacts. G. Kim notes that the Four Gracious Plants also known as the Four Gentlemen of the literati or *sagunja* (사군자) were popular designs for paper stamps used by scholars and other educated nobles(37).

Besides the animals that were included in the ten longevity symbols, the Korean people also decorated objects with animal motifs inspired by real animals like the tiger, magpie, turtles, and fish and by mythical creatures like dragons, phoenixes, haet’ae (horned lion-like creature), and the chirin (maned deer-like creature) (Eom, McChune). The mythical creature motifs were used almost exclusively by the royal family and government officials. McChune notes that the Korean palaces were decorated with dragons, tigers, phoenixes, and tortoises due to their importance as an ancient reference to the four cardinal direction and their symbolism of power (186). The dragon especially was used to symbolize the king’s authority. Government publications often had book covers imprinted with dragons, phoenixes, and turtles (Y. Im 183).

Both the traditional colors of Korea and the traditional motifs draw heavily from nature attesting to the preference for naturalness in Korean aesthetics.

## Presenting Korea's Uniqueness

The need to better present Korea’s cultural uniqueness has been recognized in recent years and is reflected in the research on traditional Korean culture.

Studies such as Sung’s dissertation and E. Lee’s dissertation on Korean representation in children’s books discussed the misrepresentation of Korean culture in both narrative and visual media in English books. According to Sung, although children’s books that are multicultural can help increase a child’s cultural awareness, culture misrepresentation in such books is a problem that must be solved through proper attention to the authenticity of individual cultures rather than to a generic ‘Asian’ culture (299-301). Sung notes that incorporating feedback

from “cultural-insiders” is vital for removing generic stereotypes and making room for authentic expression (300).

E. Lee’s study also came to similar conclusions noting that “going beyond cultural accuracy, authenticity also matters” (247). According to E. Lee, to achieve authenticity in cultural representations, research into and experience with the culture is important (248).

Other studies examined how traditional Korean culture could be used as a cultural commodity in the global market. Ko et al. provided marketing strategies for incorporating the concept of traditional Korean beauty into Korea’s national brand while Chung et al. presented support for using traditional Korean food as a cultural product.

Yum analyzed the traditional clothing of Joseon’s royal family to extract colors and traditional patterns that could be used in modern fashion design. Shin tested the use of graphic design to convey cultural themes by creating a hypothetical visual identity system for the National Museum of Korea based on the visual characteristics of Korean traditional culture. After creating the identity system, Shin analyzed feedback from non-Asian viewers and found that the designs were correctly identified as being inspired by East Asia (49-50). Although these studies focused on the unique qualities and design of traditional culture, their main purpose was to research Korean culture from a marketing perspective rather than an educational one.

A. Park and H. Lee both researched Korean culture with a more educational purpose in mind. In A. Park’s thesis *Exploring Cultural Identity: Learning Culture Through Effective Interactive Design*, A. Park explored how games could be used to introduce Korean culture visually to second-generation Koreans in America through the creation of a game prototype. H. Lee also investigated the effectiveness of using interactive media to present Korean culture by creating an app

prototype that introduced a traditional Korean mask dance. Both A. Park and H. Lee focused their projects on the use of interactive storytelling to introduce Korean culture.

H. Lee found that visually presenting Korean stories without sufficient background could cause misunderstandings (29-30). To resolve this problem, H. Lee included short clips of the actual mask dance allowing the user to watch real performances along side the interactive narrative.

## Conclusion

Although Korea as a country has become more well-known globally in the past few decades, Korean traditional culture is still less recognizable to American audiences, especially when compared to their awareness of Chinese and Japanese cultures. The confusion on Korean traditional culture is in part due to unfortunate historical circumstances that limited and distorted the American view of Korea during a time when East Asia was becoming more prominent in world history. To resolve this issue that not only prevents people from recognizing Korea’s rich cultural heritage but also affects international relations with Korea, the unique qualities of Korea’s traditional culture needs to be communicated.

Korea’s culture has a unique aesthetic that is often described as being a balance of simplicity, naturalism, and harmony. These qualities can be seen in the various categories of Korean culture including traditional clothing, architecture, and food. By understanding the uniqueness of Korean culture, American audiences could expand their understanding of East Asia and more accurately identify the visuals of Korean traditional culture.



## Visual Research

Visual research was conducted to see how traditional Korean culture objects looked in context.

To begin, a list of sources for both artifacts and presentations was compiled. The next step was creating the image boards on Pinterest. A special account was created to focus on this research. As artifacts were selected from online museum exhibitions, they were added to a spreadsheet and then posted to the image board. Visual media presentations from the list were reviewed, and images from the presentations are also added to the various image boards. These image boards will provide a collection of artifacts and their presentation to refer to during the design process.

Image boards can be viewed at [pinterest.com/deannacannon2](https://www.pinterest.com/deannacannon2)

To provide an example for the design process, a cultural object was observed and analyzed through different visual media presentations.

### Joseon White Porcelain

First, a white porcelain jar was selected from the *National Museum of Korea*. This porcelain vase is from the Joseon period (15th-16th century) and is designated as *National Treasure 170*. The Cultural Object Analysis Worksheet was used to guide the observation of the images for this artifact on the *National Museum of Korea* website.

The material analysis revealed that the jar is a white porcelain jar with a cobalt-blue underglaze design. The overall texture of the vase looked smooth in the image. According to the information on the website, the jar is approximately 16.5 cm tall. Because the images only show the jar, the size of the object would be difficult to determine through observation alone.

The aesthetic analysis determined that the key colors in this jar were white and blue. The blue designs had varying shades with the birds being darker and the flower designs being lighter. This variation, however, could be due to the aging of the artifact. The style of the designs is stylized but still shows attention to a realistic depiction of the birds and plants. The main motifs are from the natural world: bamboo, plum blossoms, and birds. The natural designs on a simple white background make the overarching mood of the artifact one of calmness. The composition is asymmetrical but balanced through the placement of the plants and animals. The artifact shows the three aesthetic qualities of simplicity, naturalness, and harmony. The extra white space throughout the composition shows simplicity. The illustration uses images from nature. Harmony is shown through the balance of the two birds with the plum blossoms as well as the flow of the illustration as it conforms to the shape of the jar.

The jar's use could not really be completely determined through only observation. However, the jar's lid suggests that it was probably used as a container. Because it has detailed design and is a white porcelain, the jar could have also served a decorative purpose for an upper class person.

After completing the analysis of *National Treasure 170*, the presentation of white porcelain was analyzed across several visual media presentations.

### White Porcelain in Drama

An interesting discovery during the research was the use of a replica of *National Treasure 170* in the drama *Goddess of Fire: JungYi* (불의 여신 정이). *Goddess of Fire: JungYi* is a sageuk drama by MBC and would be considered

a historically-based story. The jar that was examined appears in episodes 21 and 22.

The material and aesthetic qualities appeared the same as the original artifact. When viewed in the drama scene, the jar appears to be around a medium size allowing it to be picked up easily with two hands. The drama setting places the jar in the Joseon period but specifically during the reign of King Seonjo who ruled from 1567 to 1608. In *Goddess of Fire: JungYi*, the jar's use is both functional and decorative. King Seonjo uses the jar both to store items and to admire its design. Based on the context in the drama, the jar is portrayed as a priceless work of art that is treasured by the King. Throughout the episodes, the jar is displayed from almost all angles to showcase the illustration, and the jar's simplicity contrasts with the colorful clothing in the scene. The jar is used to show that creating porcelain is an art form and looking at beautiful pottery is calming. The overall presentation of the jar seems to point toward an aesthetic ideal that uses simple beauty to bring peace to the observer.

### White Porcelain in Illustration

In Wooh Nayoung's illustration 이상한 나라의 엘리스 or *Alice in Wonderland*, a white porcelain vase is included in the background scene. The style of the illustration tones down the glossiness of the vase, but the vase still appears to be relatively smooth. Based on the size of the other objects in the scene, the vase seems to be a large one. Although the design is different than *National Treasure 170* and the bird jar in *Goddess of Fire: JungYi*, the vase has similar aesthetic qualities. The main colors again are blue and white, and the design has varying shades of blue that give texture and some detail to the illustration.

The style of the vase's design is stylized but still realistic. The main motif is a flowering tree branch, possibly a plum blossom. The overarching mood of the vase is one of peace and stability, and the white and blue design

of the vase contrasts with the neutral tones of the other objects and with the brighter tones of the characters. The vase's position emphasizes the illustrated design, and the aesthetic shows simplicity through the single motif of the flowering tree branch. The design mirrors the blossoming tree branch that the vase holds reflecting both a sense of nature and harmony. Because the vase is being used as a flower vase, the purpose of it appears to be primarily decorative. This illustration also places the vase in the Joseon period based on the hanbok style that Alice wears.

### Observation Conclusions

The observations of Joseon white porcelain artifact and its presentation in two visual media affirm the description that traditional Korean aesthetics is simple, natural, and harmonious. The limited use of decoration and the nature-inspired motifs create simple but beautiful reflections of the natural world. The white and blue colors of the white porcelain contrasted with the brighter colors of the clothing in both visual media presentations. This contrast according to the message presented in *Goddess of Fire: JungYi* refreshes the observer's eye through its elegant simplicity.







## Conclusion

The literature review provided background into the problem of misunderstanding and misrepresenting traditional Korean culture in America. Three main ideas from this background research helped to guide the direction of the proposed visual solution and the target audience:

- **American schools provide limited teaching on Korean history.**
- **Being aware of traditional Korean culture is important for understanding the seriousness of the Japanese Occupation.**
- **Generic stereotypes of Asian culture can be combatted with research and cultural immersion.**

The first two ideas lead to seeing the problem from an educational standpoint. The problem of not being able to identify Korea's traditional culture seems to stem from the classroom. A cursory study of Korean history leads to students associating Korea mostly with the Korean War and North Korea. The images of a war-torn Korea allows the remains of Imperial Japanese propaganda to continue to echo in the misrepresentations

of traditional Korean culture. Because the problem could be considered as sprouting in part from the classroom, visual solution was directed toward a school audience, specifically American elementary students.

The third idea demonstrates that cultural authenticity in the presentation of culture is crucial. Having more representation of traditional Korean culture would not be beneficial if the representations are not accurate. Thus, as Sung and E. Lee's research demonstrates, effective representations will strive toward authenticity. Their research proposes that research balanced with cultural immersion can help the artist present a more authentic representation that does not emphasize generalizations or stereotypes.

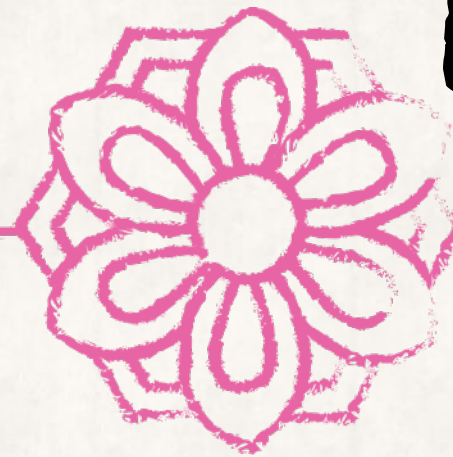
The visual research method sought to use this kind of balance by observing both cultural artifacts and their presentation in Korean visual media. The example observation of the Joseon white porcelain supplemented the research on Korean traditional aesthetics and revealed more about the use and meaning of the white porcelain in context. As the visuals were developed for the final solution, this kind of visual research helped guide the visuals toward an more authentic representation.







# Chapter Three



## Visual Process

- Design Plan
- Design Process





# Design Plan

Korea's traditional culture is often misunderstood and misrepresented in America. Even with the increased attention toward Korean popular culture through K-pop and K-Dramas, this problem continues to persist. Two factors that have contributed to the confusion regarding Korea's traditional culture are education and media representation. American schools have limited coverage of Korean history and culture beyond the Korean War and the Modern Age, and generic Asian representations of Korean culture continue to fuel and reinforce the remains of imperial Japanese propaganda from the occupation period.

This gap in American students' awareness of Korean history and culture is being addressed by educators and parents as they seek to supplement the students' cultural learning. Books and other media that portray Korean culture have been used in the classroom and at home to introduce American children to Korea. These attempts to expand cultural awareness and inform children about Korea and its culture are laudable, but, as Sung and E. Lee's research demonstrates, presentations of cultures need to be both accurate and authentic to truly benefit the reader.

Thus, culturally accurate and authentic representations of Korean cultural are needed to help introduce American children to the rich history and heritage of Korea.

This project sought to demonstrate that such representations can be created with a balance of research and cultural immersion.

## Design Solution

The design solution for this project is a search-and-find book that depicts different elements of Korea's traditional culture. The book's illustrations will visually communicate the distinctive aesthetic of Korean culture while also providing an opportunity for the reader to learn about and identify specific elements of Korean culture within their native environment. By looking closely at the illustrations to discover the 'hidden' objects, the reader is exposed to traditional Korean culture through an interactive and memorable experience. The placing of the cultural objects within an illustrated scene is intended to prevent the objects from being viewed in isolation and instead show Korea's traditional culture in a more authentic context.

The design solution was created as both a print book and an interactive e-book because schools and students are increasingly using digital media in the classroom and at home. The key message of the solution is that Korea's culture is unique and worth learning about. The illustrations visualize traditional Korean culture providing the reader with a new look at Korea's traditional culture.

## Target Audience

The primary audience for this visual solution was elementary students aged 8-12. These students are interested in learning about other cultures and are naturally curious. History class can be boring, so culturally-themed lessons are often viewed as a welcome break from the usual lessons. These students love books with lots of illustrations and interesting things to observe. Although they gravitate toward digital technology, they may sometimes enjoy the tactile feel of a real book.

The secondary audience includes educators and parents who wish to expose their students and children to other cultures. The educators may teach history or Korean language classes and desire a fun way to introduce Korea's traditional culture as a supplement to their main lesson content. These teachers often look online for illustrated picture books to use in class as well as interactive activities that introduce their students to cultural concepts. The parents place high value on educational books and activities but also want their children to have fun and enjoy learning new things.

# Design Process



## Competitor Research

The first step in the process was to research key competitors to understand the current market in books presenting culture. Key competition for this project would include traditional books and e-books that present either traditional Korean culture specifically or even other cultures and histories.

## Books on Korea

Researching educator blogs revealed several popular books that are often used to teach about Korean culture. Interestingly, many of these books were analyzed in Sung and E. Lee's research studies on misrepresentation in American children's books. These books highlight certain aspects of Korean culture, both modern and traditional, to either introduce students to basic facts about Korea or to provide an exotic/cultural setting for the story.

## Informative Books

Tuttle Publishing focuses on publishing books that cover Asian culture. Some books specifically on Korea include *Korean Celebrations: Festivals, Holidays and Traditions*, *All About Korea*, and *My First Book of Korean Words*. These information books present facts about Korea and show glimpses of Korea's traditional cultural elements in the illustrations. Because they focus on breaking down key facts and information, these books from Tuttle Publishing would work well in an educational setting.



## Traditional Fairytales and Stories

Storybooks that use traditional Korean culture typically retell Korean folk stories and fairytales. *The Korean Cinderella* by Shirley Climo is an illustrated picture book that tells the Korean fairytale of Konji and Patji which is similar to the familiar Cinderella fairytale. The author and illustrator set the story during the Joseon period and make an attempt to show some visuals of traditional Korea. Because this book is older, it is only available in print.

*The Legend of Hong Kil Dong* by Anne Sibley O'Brian is a comic book retelling the Korean story of Hong Kil Dong, a Joseon novel by Heo Gyun. Available both in print and as an e-book, *The Legend of Hong Kil Dong* is also set in the Joseon period. The comic book format places the focus on the characters and dialogue somewhat limiting the attention to the background and setting in the illustrations. However, the comic book format does provide a unique way to introduce a Korean story to a young audience.

## Historical Fiction

Other books tell new stories that are set in the historical Korea, usually the Joseon period.

*The Firekeeper's Son* by Linda Sue Park is an illustrated picture book that tells a story about a young boy whose father is in charge of lighting the signal fire for their village. The story focuses on the main character's thoughts and struggles, so the setting serves as mainly a backdrop with a few historical references added in. This book is available in print and as a Kindle e-book.

*Good Fortune in a Wrapping Cloth* by Joan Schoettler (2011) is an illustrated picture book set during the reign of King Yeongjo. The story is about a young girl who learns to sew in order to join her mother who sews for the royal family. The story and illustrations work together to present a glimpse of

traditional Korean sewing crafts. This book is also available in print and as a Kindle e-book.

Although these books on Korea sometimes misrepresent Korea's traditional culture and tend to focus more on the story elements in the illustrations rather than giving the reader a lot of visual detail into the culture, they have helped to introduce a little of Korea to children.

## Books on History and Culture

DK Books and Usborne Books are two publishers that are well-known for their educational books on history, cultures of the world, and other information topics. Of particular interest for this project are the books that use large spreads to show elements of a culture.

DK's *A Child Through Time: The Book of Children's History* by Phil Wilkinson explores cultures all over the world and presents full-page spreads that showcase a child's life in a particular culture. For Korea, the book presents Korea during the Joseon period and introduces the reader to a young girl studying medicine.

*Stephen Biesty's Cross-Sections Castles* use incredibly detailed illustrations to give readers a glimpse of the medieval world while learning key facts about castles. Various elements of the illustrations are labeled and followed by a short description.

DK's *China Through Time* introduces readers to China's history and culture through illustrated scenes that readers can explore. The margins include short captions and point out key characters and elements to guide the reader's exploration. All three of these DK books are available in print and as e-books.

Usborne's *Step Inside Long Ago Ancient Rome* by Abigail Wheatley is an illustrated picture

book that released in January 2021. The book uses colorfully illustrated scenes in ancient Rome to teach readers about Roman culture and history. Captions throughout the illustrations explain what is happening and point out key information.

## Other Resources on Culture

Educators and parents sometimes look beyond illustrated books. Educators can find resources like study units and educational apps through sites like Teachers Pay Teachers.

Video resources can be found on YouTube and other streaming services. PinkFong has produced short animated videos for children that introduce traditional Korean music, martial arts, clothes, and architecture as well as cultural activities and aesthetic designs. These videos are easily accessible through their YouTube channel. What is unique about PinkFong's videos is that they were originally created for a Korean audience before being translated into English. The bright animations and catchy songs make these videos very appealing for children and ideal for educating while still entertaining.

## Brainstorm

Once the design brief and competitive research was complete, ideas for the book's content were developed through a simple brainstorm. The brainstorm explored how key information about Korea's traditional culture could be best presented to the target audience in both an interesting and age-appropriate manner.

Through the brainstorm, two possible directions for the book content emerged: informative non-fiction or fictional but informative storyline. Because the target audience was elementary school children, the fictional storyline seemed an appropriate approach for making the information interesting and easy to understand.

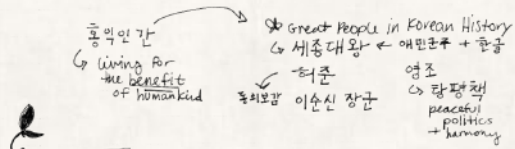
The brainstorm then focused on developing ideas for the story plot and characters. The plot needed to connect the different search-and-find scenes showcasing various elements of Korean culture into a smooth narrative. The final story idea was a short narrative about a young girl named Bitna who is transported to Joseon while studying Korean history. The reader then follows Bitna as she explores Joseon to find information for her essay on Joseon culture.





## Story & Character Brainstorm

target audience → American Elementary Students

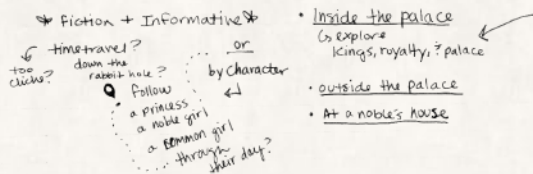


나무가  
A tree with deep roots  
Because it does not sway in the wind  
Blossoms abundantly  
and has much fruit.

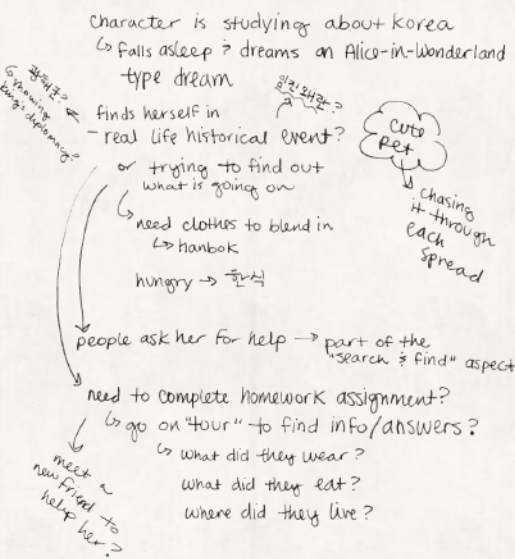
overcoming adversity → invasions by Yuan, Ming, Qing, Japan  
↳ affecting the arts

nature & harmony  
정성 + 조함?

Introduction  
What did they wear?  
What did they eat?  
What did they live?  
What did they make?



down the rabbit hole



walk-through a cultural event?

royal wedding  
regular wedding

Fiction Story → 흥미? 판지?

Information Book

tour guide characters?  
intro to Joseon  
↳ about kings  
↳ about customs

About Joseon → cities, maps, name, dates  
↳ 조선 초기, 중기, 말기 (timeline?)

About kings → highlight important kings  
↳ 세종대왕, 정조

About the Palace → royal family, palace servants

About the People → classes, clothes, food

About the Land/Houses → Yangban & house  
↳ commoner house  
doctor, ceremonies, learning, language?

search & find  
adventure  
manhwa

Character  
fun, cute, cheerful  
↳ young girl → elementary age  
Korean or American?

Bitna  
Korean-American?  
↳ has to write a report about her trip to Korea?

Pet  
↳ chipmunk?  
↳ \*반사?  
↳ kitten? → white tiger?  
↳ 진도개?



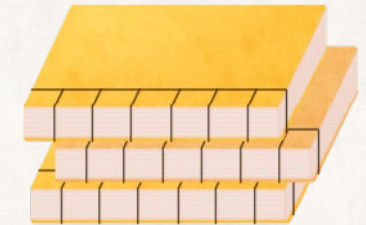
## Story

From the initial story idea, the plotline was expanded into a rough draft of the story. The rough draft divided the plotline across spread sections that each covered a set of traditional Korean elements. The division was based on the categories of traditional Korean elements established during the initial research of Korean culture.

Because the book was to be created to be a search-and-find book, the story's rough draft also highlighted the key objects that the reader should identify in each scene. The book development followed the rough draft's breakdown of the plot and categories, and the rough draft was edited and refined as the visuals for the book were created.

## Story Sections

- What did they wear?
- What did they speak?
- Who lived in the palace?
- Where did they live?
- What did they eat?



## Character Design

After the overall story was in place, the next step in the design process was to begin designing the main character of Bitna. Bitna's character concept was an elementary student with a fun and cheerful personality.

Because the story involved Bitna traveling from a modern setting to a historical era, she needed a design that could transition smoothly between the two time periods. Thus, inspiration for her design was pulled from both a modern elementary student and a girl from the Joseon period.





**Moodboard**  
Bitna Character Design

Removed to comply  
with copyright

The inspiration was compiled into a moodboard which was then used as guide for initial character sketches. These sketch ideas were then further explored to solidify Bitna's overall design.

The final concept included a few design elements that linked Bitna's modern look with her historical look. Modern Bitna wears a headband that morphs into a baetsshi danggi for historical Bitna. The stripe and v-necked collar on her modern tank top changes into the cross-over collar and tied ribbon of her historical jeogori. Her pink shoes/socks with white toes and heels become pink and white unhye shoes.

Bitna's final character design was created as a full-color illustration to serve as a guide for the book illustrations. The color scheme was based on the traditional Korean color scheme obangsaek but brightened to appeal to the intended elementary-age audience.



**Character  
Exploration**



**Final Character Design**





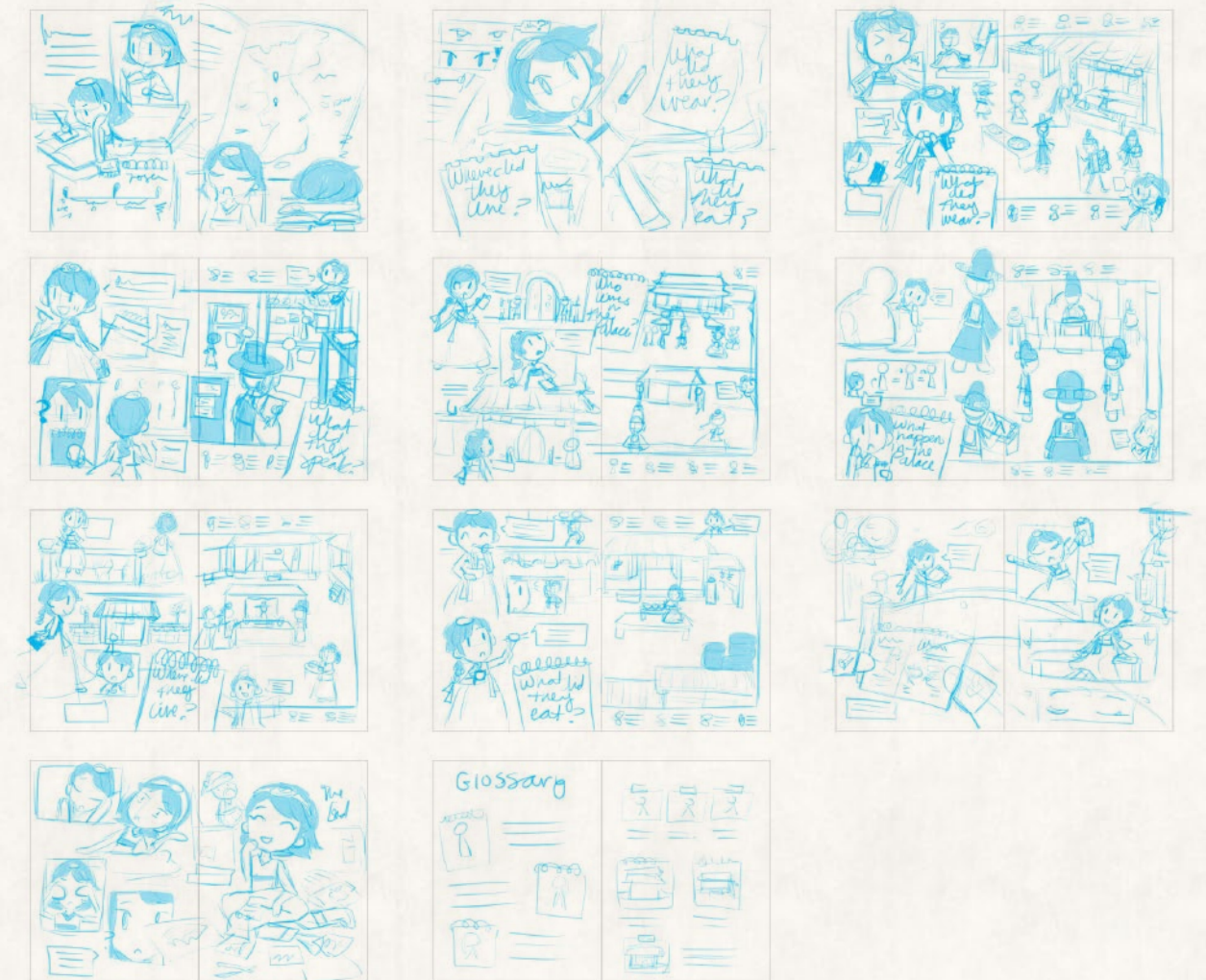
## Book Illustrations

The spread divisions in the rough draft helped provide organization for the illustration process. Each spread illustration was developed using a general moodboard, thumbnail sketches, element moodboards, and roughs before being refined into final artwork.



### Moodboards

The first step for designing the illustrations was to compile a general moodboard for each spread using images from the visual research. These moodboards alongside the rough story draft helped to guide the overall direction for the initial thumbnail sketches.



### Thumbnail Sketches

Key considerations for the thumbnail sketches were creating a layout that presented all the necessary content in a visually pleasing way and a format that would work well with an elementary audience. The final style used in the thumbnails blended a graphic novel with a search-and-find book. The storyline would progress through the graphic novel-style panels as Bitna thinks and explores while the elements of Korean traditional culture are displayed in the large scene illustrations. The reader would then observe the overall scene and identify the highlighted elements that were in that scene.



## Element Moodboards

Images from Yangban Man Moodboard



The next step was to create moodboards for each cultural element in a scene. These moodboards served the dual purpose of being not only inspiration but also references. Like the general moodboards, the element moodboards compiled images from the visual research. The images included images of historical artifacts, drama and animation screencaps, historical reenactment photos, and illustrations.

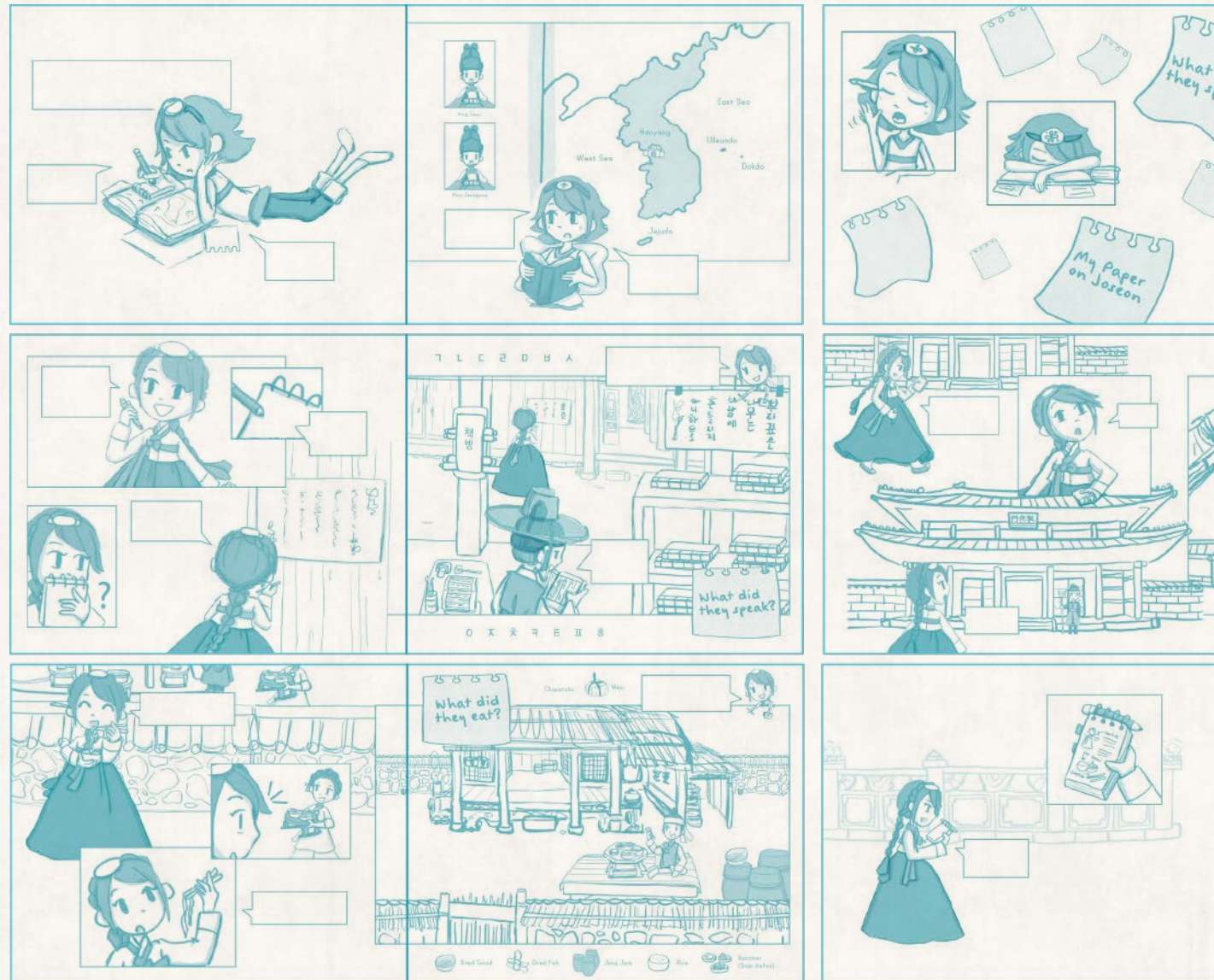
Images from Yangban Woman Moodboard





## Roughs

The thumbnail sketches were then expanded into illustration roughs. During this stage, much of the layout was reworked to fit the final 8x10 page size and to fix the overcrowding of elements on each page. The basic process for creating the roughs was to look over the thumbnail sketch and the element moodboards before drawing the



scene in greater detail. Whenever any questions about part of an element arose while being drawn, the reference images were referred to for help. These images were carefully studied and then compared to the sketch to help ensure accuracy.

Once the roughs were completed, they were imported into InDesign to test the overall book layout and flow. The story text and composition were then edited to help improve the storyline and make the content clearly for the target audience.

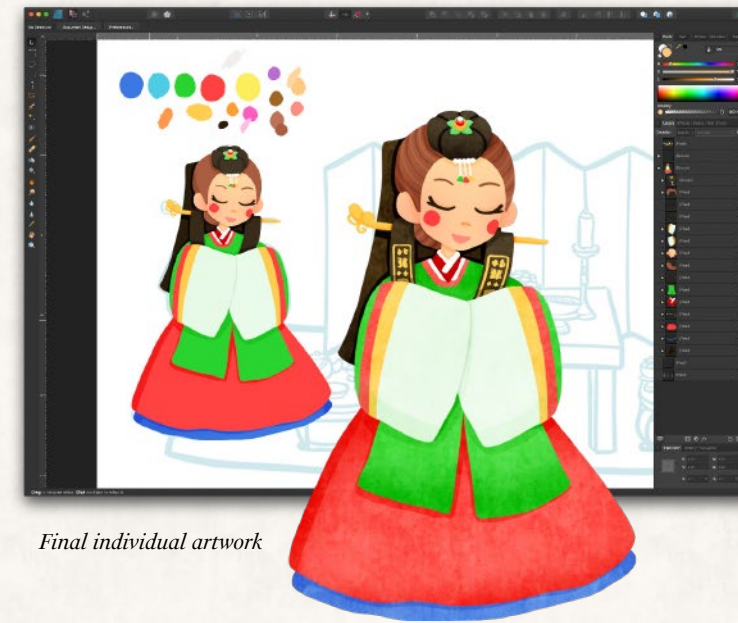




## Final Artwork

The final step in preparing the illustrations was to refine the roughs into full-color artwork. As with the process of creating the roughs, the artist referred to the moodboards to double-check the drawings.

Final background illustrations



Final individual artwork



The background illustrations were painted first in Photoshop to ensure that sufficient attention was given to the design of the buildings. The goal was to capture the historical architecture as accurately as the drawing style allowed. Each background was painted using the original rough sketch as a base. The rough was refined to adjust the perspective and important details. Various textures were added to the illustrations as a finishing touch.

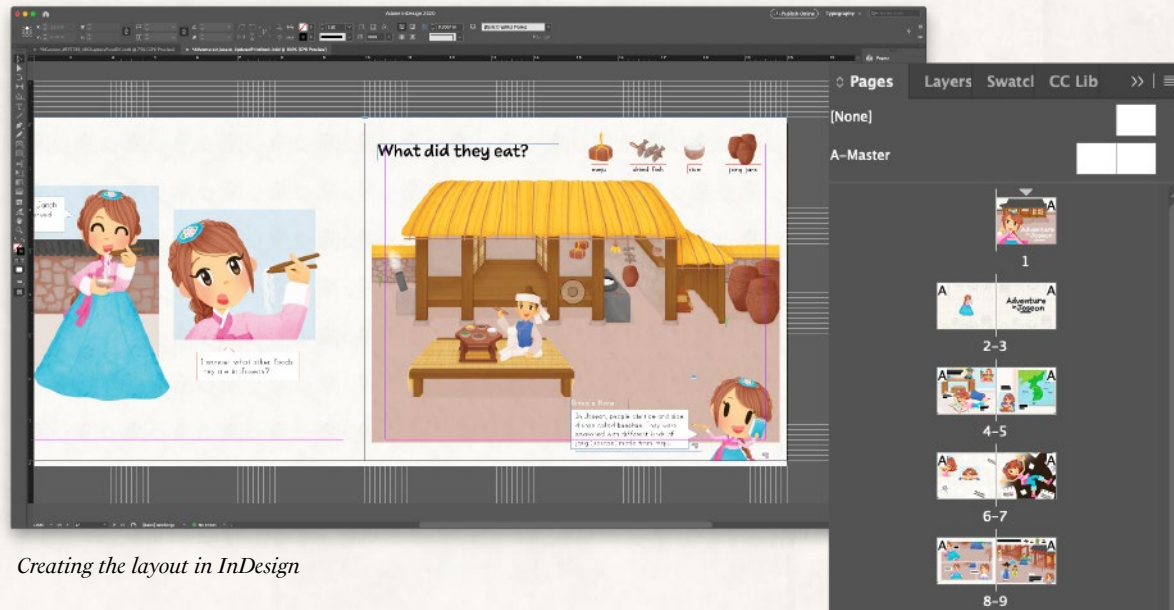
After the background illustrations were complete, they were exported as high resolution image files. The people and objects that were needed in each scene were then separately painted in Affinity Designer following a similar process. The rough sketch was used as a base to guide the color illustration, and textures were added to help add interest and detail to each illustration.

Once all the various illustrations were finished, they were all composited together in Illustrator for the final book illustrations. The completed illustrations were then imported into InDesign for the final layout.



Compositing the elements in Illustrator

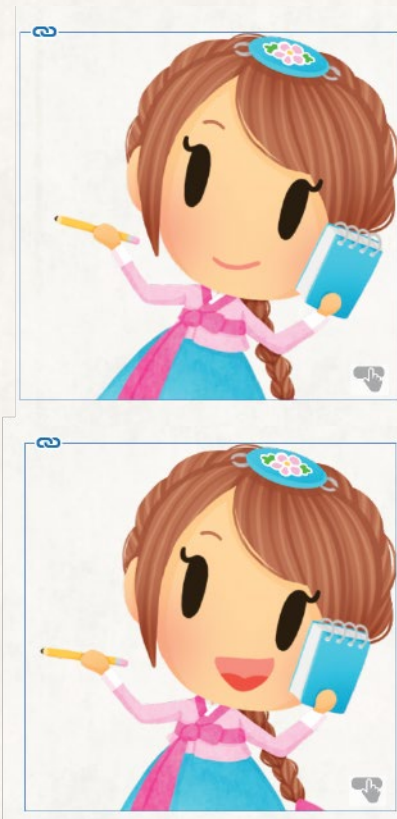




Creating the layout in InDesign

After finishing the layout for the print book, the layout was modified to fit the needs of the interactive e-book. Page numbers and extra end pages were removed, and interactive features were added in. The first interactive feature was a linked glossary. The original layout of the glossary from the print book was kept. However, each entry was given a hyperlink that linked to the page in the book that included the highlighted term.

The second interactive feature was an animated touch point. In each spread, Bitna presents a short note about the scene. The print version was static, but the e-book has Bitna's note hidden until the reader taps on little Bitna to reveal the note. To add a little fun to the action, little Bitna also changes her pose when tapped giving the illusion of animation. The final step for the print book and the e-book was to export them to the appropriate files.



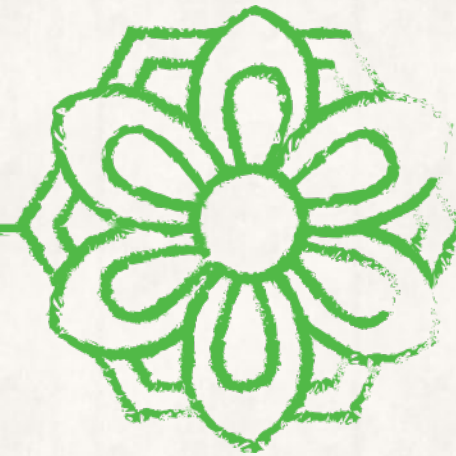
Animation frames for the interactive touch point







# Chapter Four



Final Solution





The final visual solution for this project was an educational children's book and e-book about the Joseon period in Korean history titled *Adventure in Joseon*. The book's content was based on both the literature review and visual research conducted for this project. The following pages present each book spread and explain how the research helped guide the content and design decisions.



View the interactive e-book at [deannabohae.art/thesis](http://deannabohae.art/thesis)





The first two spreads set the stage for the story. In spread one, Bitna and the reader learn some basic historical facts about Joseon. This information helps to place Joseon in the context of world history. Because American students are often only familiar with modern Korean history, presenting how long Joseon existed and the extent of its land reach would help introduce them to Korea's historical past and emphasize that Korea's history began long before the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War.



The second spread is a fun transition into the next part of the story. Here, Bitna falls asleep while studying and is transported to Joseon. Her notes flying around the page tease the content that will be covered in the rest of the story.





In the third spread, Bitna finds herself in a traditional marketplace. The scene in this spread presents several people wearing different types of hanbok.

The idea for this scene came from the artist's observations during the visual research stage. The portrayal of a crowd of people in a marketplace was a commonly occurring scene both in dramas and in animations. People of different social classes were depicted going about daily tasks. Thus, a marketplace scene seemed a logical way to present multiple types of hanbok in one place.

The buildings in the marketplace illustration are made of wood, stones, and tiles based on the information gathered in research about

traditional Korean architecture. The visual research helped to clarify what colors and textures to use on the buildings. For example, a large-grained wood texture was applied to all the wood in the building to reflect the roughness of the wood observed in images of traditional Korean buildings.

The scene presents five different people (in addition to Bitna) wearing hanboks. The upper class (Yangban) man in the left corner is wearing a do-po robe and dap-ho overcoat over the basic baji and jeogori ensemble. He wears a gat on his head and taesahye shoes. The boy next to him wears a similar costume but with a sleeveless kweja overcoat and a bokgun hat. The Yangban woman in the center wears a richly-colored chima and

jeogori in contrast to the two commoner (Sangmin) women who both wear more subdued colors.

Each of their ensembles was designed after looking at the visual research. Historical artifacts of each clothing piece provided important details about the shape and texture while the visual media presentations provided details about how the clothing was worn. After drawing the initial sketch and finishing the final artwork, the illustrations were compared to the visual research.

This process helped the artist to catch mistakes and strive toward authentic expression. For example, the man's do-po was originally drawn with a wide sleeve opening based on the observation of the historical artifact. However, after studying how the do-po was worn in the historical dramas, the artist realized that the sleeve should actually have a narrow opening.



*A do-po artifact from the Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture. Because the artifact was photographed flat, the narrow opening of the sleeves is not fully clear.*



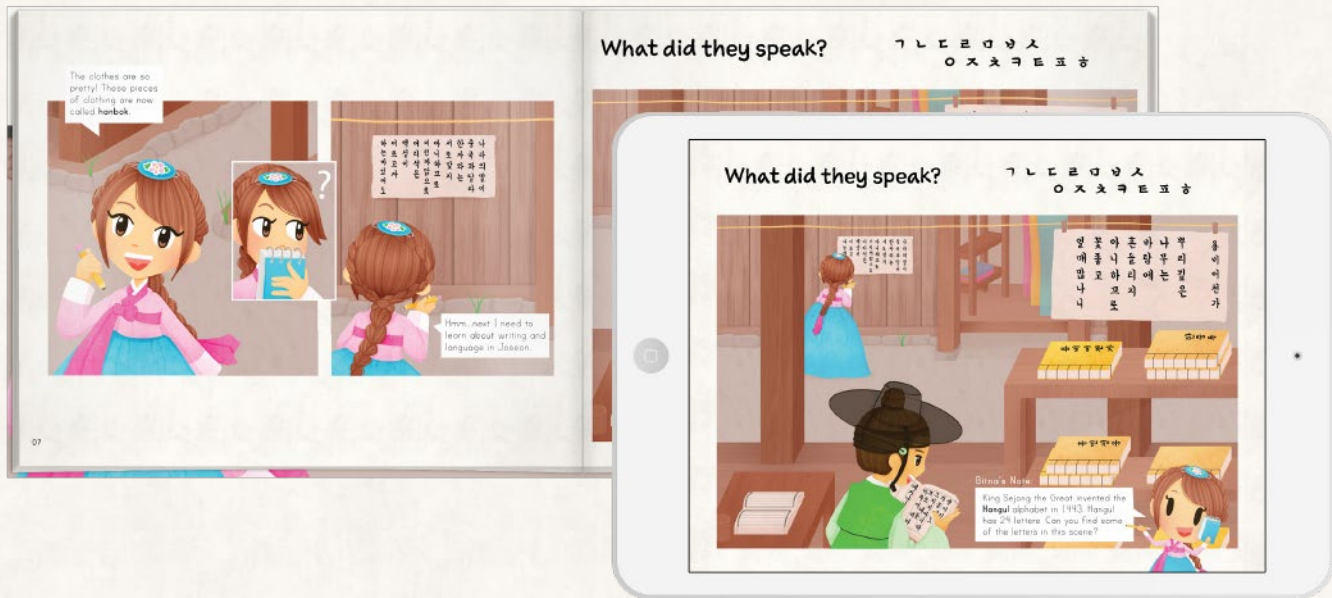
*Original illustration with wide sleeve opening*

*Updated illustration with narrow sleeve opening*



*Actor Seo Kang-joon in episode 11 of MBC's historical drama Splendid Politics (화정) wearing a do-po. Here the narrow opening of the sleeves can be clearly seen.*





In the fourth spread, Bitna discovers a government notice. This scene shows the notice board and a bookstore. The focus of this spread is the Hangul alphabet.

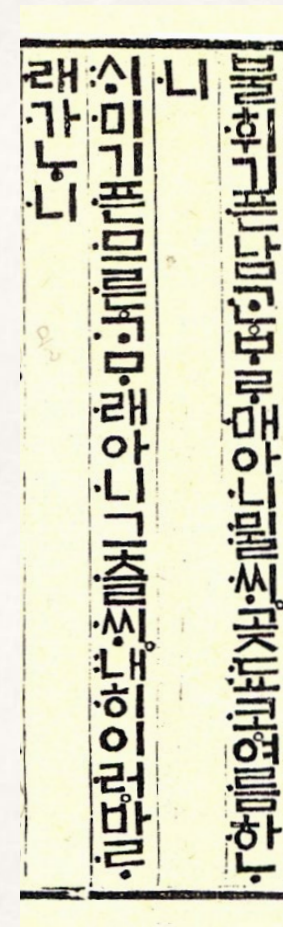
Finding the right scene to present Hangul was difficult, but the visual research again helped the artist to find direction. The inspiration for the government notice came from SBS's historical drama *The Tree with Deep Roots* that tells a narrative around King Sejong's creation of Hangul. In the drama, King Sejong's motivation to create a simple alphabet for his people stemmed from his realization that the people could not read the government warnings about a plague because the majority of the commoners were illiterate. King Sejong, desiring to help his people, began working on a new alphabet that would provide a means

of communication for the common people. From this scene, the artist was inspired to include a government notice in Hangul using the words from *Hunminjeongeum* (훈민정음), King Sejong's proclamation introducing the new alphabet.

The bookstore concept was chosen because the bookstore connected seamlessly with the idea of language and also because it provided the perfect backdrop for naturally introducing three books that were written in Hangul. The first being the above mentioned *Hunminjeongeum*. The other two are *Yongbiocheonga* (용비어천가), the first book written in Hangul, and *Hanjoongrok* (한중록), the memoirs of Lady Hyegyeong. The poster hanging in the bookstore and the man's book include text from *Yongbiocheonga*.

Key concerns for this spread was presenting Hangul authentically and accurately for the historical time period. The visual research was important for determining the arrangement and appropriate typeface for the writing. Modern Hangul is written horizontally from left to right; however, the historical artifacts studied showed that Hangul was originally written in a vertical orientation and read from right to left. The Hangul text in this spread is presented in the historical orientation.

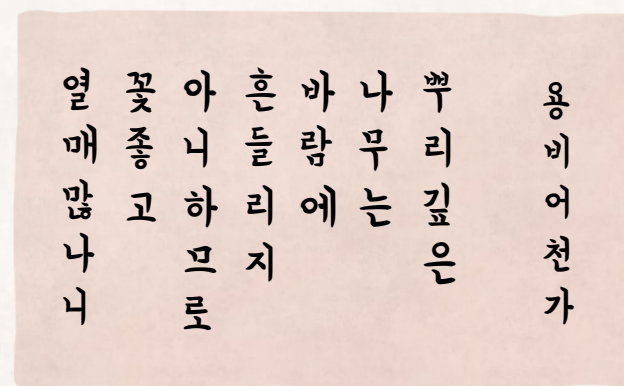
The original design of the Hangul text was rigid, but over time, people developed a calligraphic style of writing. The visual presentations observed used the more calligraphic style more often when showing Hangul writing. The rigid style was typically only used when the content referred specifically to King Sejong's creation of the alphabet. Because the calligraphic style was more common, a typeface that mimics the calligraphic style was chosen for this spread.



An excerpt from *Yongbiocheonga*. As an early publication in Hangul, *Yongbiocheonga* uses the rigid style of Hangul.



A notice written in Hangul in episode 12 of MBC's animation *Jang Geum's Dream* (장금이의 꿈). The text is written vertically from right to left in a calligraphic style.



BM YEONSUNG OTF is the typeface used in the spread. As can be seen in the image above, this typeface mimics the brushstroke style of calligraphic Hangul.



A note written in Hangul in episode 5 of tvN's historical drama *100 Days My Prince* (백일의 낭군님). The text is written vertically from right to left in a calligraphic style.





In the fifth spread, Bitna explores the royal palace and learns about the royal family. This spread showcases both traditional Korean architecture and several royal hanboks.

The first decision for this spread was choosing which of Joseon's five grand palace to portray. The research into traditional Korean architecture revealed that Changdeokgung (창덕궁) was the primary residence of the royal family after the Imjin War. Thus, to maintain consistency with the late Joseon period, Changdeokgung was selected.

In this illustration, the king's hall Injeongjeon (인정전) is depicted along with its gateway Injeongmun (인정문). Injeonjeon was chosen as the representative building in the illustration because the king's hall is the main building portrayed in the visual media.

The second decision was determining how best to illustrate this one part of Changdeokgung. Traditional Korean palaces were extensive complexes filled with many buildings, so only illustrating one building could misrepresent the palace as a single large building. To avoid this misrepresentation, the artist created a composition that shows both Injeongjeon and Injeongmun as well as the surrounding wall. For further clarification, a short note labeling Injeongjeon as the king's hall is included in the final page.

The National Palace Museum of Korea's online tour of Changdeokgung allowed the artist to observe the structure and detailing of the palace's buildings. The detail and complexity of Changdeokgung made it difficult to illustrate at first. However, observing animations and illustrations that



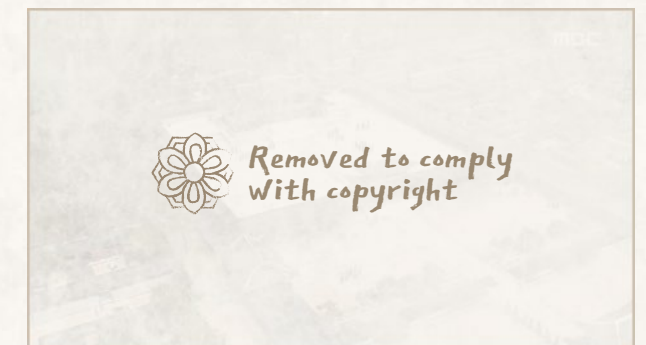
As can be seen in this close-up, the illustration of Gyeongbokgung in *The Story of Joseon's Five Palaces* uses a simple design for the roof tiles and the decorative elements.



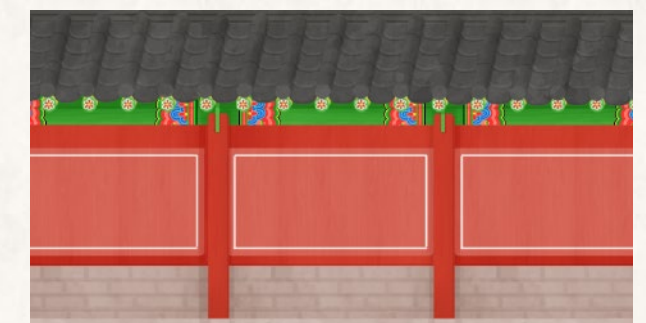
*Injeongjeon* in the animation *Korea's World Heritage Site Series - ChangDeokGung* uses the traditional colors scheme on their replica *Injeongjeon* to mimic the look of the original *Injeongjeon*.

depicted Korean palace architecture helped provide direction on how to simplify the complexity for the illustrative style while still retaining authenticity. For example, the illustrations in *The Story of Joseon's Five Palace* (한 권으로 보는 조선의 다섯 궁궐 이야기) simplify the roof tiles of the palaces into long grey stripes that contrast with the dark roof. The decorative designs on the palace structure are loosely drawn giving the feel of the design without the intricate detail of the original. The key to retaining the feel seems to be the traditional colors and symmetrical patterns.

The final decision was determining who to include in the illustration of those who lived in the palace. To avoid an overly complicated scene, the immediate royal family along with a few palace servants was illustrated for this scene. Their hanboks were drawn using the same method used with the earlier illustrations of traditional clothing.



The establishing shot for the palace in MBC's historical drama *Emperor: Owner of the Mask* (군주-가면의 주인) features the king's hall and courtyard prominently.



The palace illustration used in this spread includes the black tiles, green decorations, red walls, and a grey stone base that are found in the traditional Korean palace design.





In the sixth spread, Bitna observes a traditional Korean wedding at a hanok house. This scene presents both traditional architecture and pottery.

As with the palace architecture, drawing the hanok architecture required a balance between accurate detail and simplified depiction. The observation of both historical hanok houses and their depiction in visual media revealed a variety of houses. However, all of the houses had unifying features including the tiled roof, patterned window and door frames as well as the two facing chambers that opened into a porch-like area. Based on these observations, a simple hanok building was designed for this illustration.

The textures for this illustration became a key point because the natural materials in hanok architecture are a part of its aesthetic appeal. Wood textures were used to create the look of

natural wood while a papery texture was used to give the walls a stucco-like appearance. A rocky texture was used on the roof to make the simple ridges look more like roof tiles.

Traditional pottery was showcased in this spread because the inclusion of expensive pottery would be natural in an upper class home in Joseon. Each of the three representative types of pottery were illustrated: baekja, Goryeo celadon, and buncheong. The design of the pottery was based off historical artifacts and examples seen in the visual media. Both the baekja and Goryeo celadon were illustrated as vases due to the frequency of these types of pottery being vases in both the historical artifact collections and in the visual media. Buncheong pottery was illustrated as a bowl for the same reason. Because the most popular form of baekja in Joseon was pure white, the baekja vase in this scene has

no designs. The Goryeo celadon vase and buncheong bowl have nature inspired designs that are loosely based on designs seen during the visual research. According to the findings in the literature review, the people of Joseon valued pottery that had a spontaneous quality, so their pottery was not perfectly symmetrical. The illustrations of the pottery attempted to reflect this aspect.

In the courtyard, a wedding scene was illustrated to show the home in context of a cultural custom. The folding screen used in the wedding ceremony was decorated with peony flowers based on the research into traditional symbols. Peony flowers were associated with family blessings and wealth, making them an appropriate motif to use at a wedding. In front of the screen stands the bride and the groom.

For traditional weddings, the bride could wear either a green wonsam (원삼) or a red hwalot (활옷). The green wonsam was chosen to help balance the overall color scheme of the scene. Along with the green wonsam, the bride wears a jokduri (족두리) coronet on her head. The bride's clothing took careful attention to draw due to the details on her accessories. A comparison of the historical wonsam and jokduri artifacts with their presentation in visual media helped the artist to determine which details could be simplified without losing the essence of the designs.



In the film War of the Arrows (최종병기 활), actress Moon Chae-won wears a jokduri and green wonsam. The key decorations on her jokduri are the beaded fringe, the side decorations, and the bead stack on the top.

In PinkFong's animation KKokdugaksshi (꼭두각시), the bride's jokduri decorations are simplified.



The bride's jokduri in the spread is decorated with the bead stack and the beaded fringe. The side decorations were removed because the details were difficult to see on the small illustration.



This white porcelain vase from the National Museum of Korea has a slight lopsided appearance rather than being perfectly symmetrical.



The vases illustrated in this spread are not symmetrically balanced.





In the seventh spread, Bitna learns about traditional Korean food. The scene shows both traditional architecture and hanshik (Korean food).

To provide another view of historical Korean architecture, a hanok house with a thatched roof was chosen as the setting for this illustration. The house was designed to show a glimpse of the kitchen where the food was prepared. The plan for this illustration originally included a cross-section under the house that revealed the ondol heating system. However, the cross-section overly complicated the illustration's composition, and the inclusion of the ondol seemed to distract from rather than support the spread's focus on hanshik. The final illustration only includes the ondol's exhaust pipe.

The key elements of hanshik discovered through the literature review include the staple dish of rice, the numerous side dishes called banchan (반찬), and the use of jang (장, traditional Korean sauces) for seasoning. The artist sought to portray these three elements in this illustration.

The rice is shown in the kitchen as well as on the table in a bowl. On the table around the bowl of rice are several banchan dishes. Two of the banchan are namul (나물, vegetable) banchan while the third is jeon (전, a fried dish). The selection of banchan was based on the visual research which found that namul and jeon banchan were commonly showed in scenes with food. Seasoned gosari (고사리, braken), gondre (곤드레, thistle),



Two types of jeon banchan and two types of namul banchan are placed around the grilled fish in episode 25 of MBC's historical drama Goddess of Fire: Jungyi (불의 여신 정이).



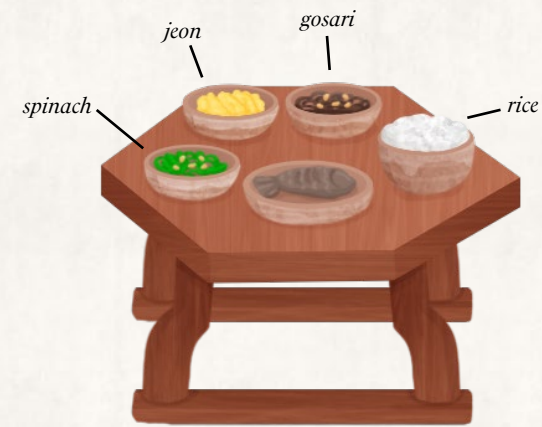
This table setting in episode 9 of tvN's historical drama 100 Day's My Prince (백일의 낭군님) displays rice, soup, and several banchan: jeon, dried seaweed, gosari, and baek kimchi.

and shigeumchi (시금치, spinach) were some namul banchan that were frequently seen while jeon types included hobak (호박, zucchini) jeon and fish jeon. For this spread, the illustrated banchan were seasoned spinach, fish jeon, and seasoned gosari. Jang was portrayed in the illustration using the meju blocks and the jang jars. Meju is the fermented soybean base of traditional Korean sauces. The each sauce is stored in large earthenware jars outside the house.

In addition to the meju, dried fish and corn were drawn hanging in the kitchen. These items were included so show some of the other ingredients used in hanshik and also because the visual media tended to include such items in the kitchen.

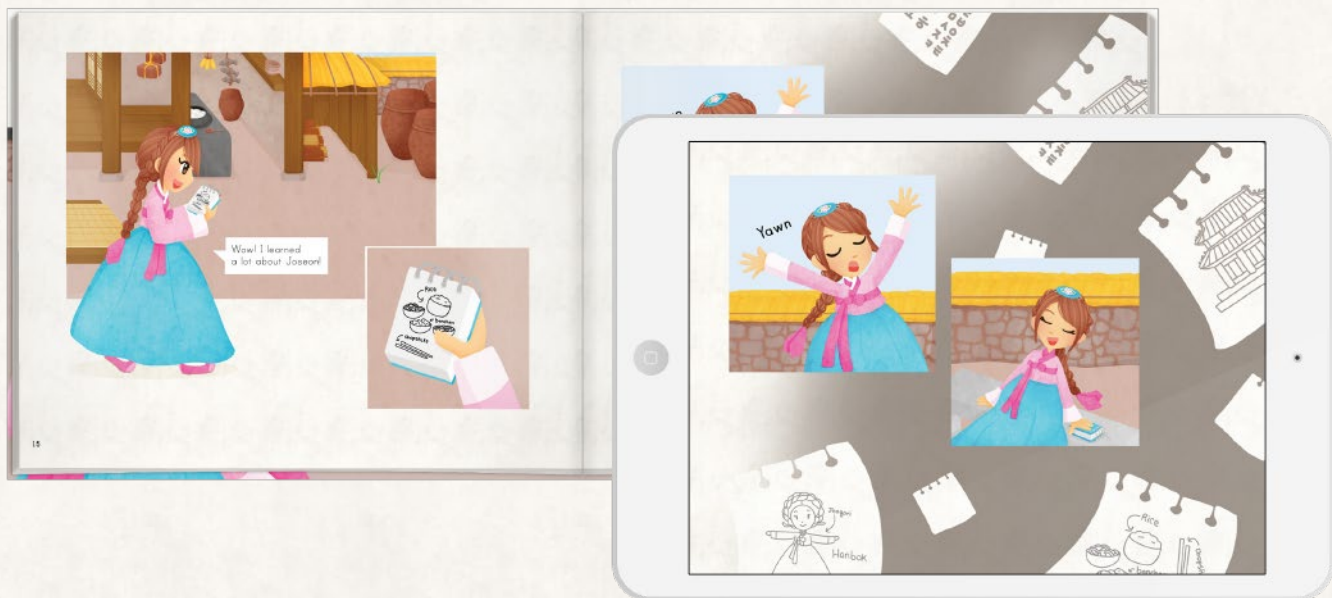


Mini Forest's miniature reenactment of traditional Korean food includes namul banchan made from gosari, zucchini, gondre, and radish greens.



Corn and fish are hung up to dry in these kitchens from MBC's animation Jang Geum's Dream (장금이의 꿈) episode 21 and Jang Geum's Dream 2 episode 15.





The eighth spread wraps up Bitna's adventure in Joseon. She looks over her notes and sits down to rest. The second page of the spread uses the same flying paper transition to mirror Bitna's earlier fall into Joseon.



The final page shows Bitna back in her room surrounded by her notes and drawings. Beside this page is the glossary with the key terms mentioned in the story. The glossary was included to help explain the new terms to the reader as well as to present the romanized term with the original Korean word.





# Chapter Five



Conclusion





## Conclusion

This thesis project considered the problem of misrepresenting traditional Korean culture in American media and explored a possible solution for creating visually authentic presentations of culture.

Television shows, children's books, animations, and even social media posts have often presented traditional Korean culture using generalized stereotypes or elements of other Asian cultures. The origins of this misrepresentation stem from the remnants of Imperial Japanese propaganda and the continued generalization of Asian culture.

Rising above the aftermath of the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War, Koreans have worked hard to preserve their heritage and correct the flawed narrative about their history and culture. In the past, Korean independence leaders preserved cultural artifacts and historical records while Koreans in the present use media to share their cultural heritage. Through Hallyu or the Korean Wave, K-Dramas and K-Pop have helped introduce American audiences to authentic Korean culture, challenging the stereotypes of past representations.

However, despite the progress that has been made in increasing American awareness of Korean traditional culture, the limited prior knowledge of Korean history prevents many fans of Korean entertainment from gaining a clear understanding of Korean culture. The Korean history taught in American schools is often limited to modern history with the focus on the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War. These two low points in Korean history have inadvertently become the basis for understanding Korea's history and

heritage leading to the assumption that Korea was an uncivilized, backwards nation before modernization under Japan—an assumption with roots in Imperial Japanese propaganda.

The problem of misunderstanding a culture is significant because the horrors of events like the Holocaust or the cultural genocide conducted by Japan in Korea are only properly understood when people acknowledge the value of the heritage and people that were brutally destroyed. Thus, this problem is much deeper than just mislabeling Korean cultural artifacts or mixing up East Asian cultures. Rather, the continued misrepresentation of Korea's traditional culture can affect how American audiences interpret the past impact of the Japanese Occupation and the current tensions of Korean-Japanese relations. Misrepresenting culture can minimize the significance of that culture in the eyes of the audience. Thus, cultural representations need to strive toward authenticity and not be based on generalizations or limited research.

When visualizing another culture, artists should not only research cultural objects through museum exhibitions and historical documents but also consider the original context of those objects. Like Wagner's point about culture suggests, artists should not attempt to recreate a cultural world solely based on a few artifacts viewed in a museum. Instead, artists need to explore the world that the objects are from. There is a significant difference between seeing a clothing artifact hanging in a museum and observing someone actually wearing that piece of clothing. Although the opportunity to see objects in context firsthand is not always possible, artists can observe how those of that culture

present their culture in visual media. Through such observations, the artist can learn more about the context of cultural objects and discover ways to present those objects authentically in their work.

This thesis project explored this method of research to create a children's book that presents Korea's traditional culture to American elementary school children. The children's book format was chosen because the problem of misidentifying Korean culture in America stems in part from limited education on Korean culture and history in schools. Educators and parents have sought to improve young students awareness of other cultures using media—books in particular. Illustrated books that showcase other cultures are used in the classroom to introduce students to the visual culture and historical customs of other people groups.

The search-and-find feature in *Adventure in Joseon* was inspired by the concept that cultural elements need to be shown in context. As mentioned before, cultural artifacts alone cannot fully express the culture of a people. Viewing a cultural artifact in isolation has its limitations because the viewer cannot fully grasp how the artifact was used in a culture apart from seeing in context. The search-and-find feature allows the reader to see both the cultural element and its context in the same illustration. The process of searching for the cultural element allows the reader to interact with the context and learn how to identify various elements of Korea's traditional culture.

The method for designing *Adventure in Joseon* illustrations included both a literature review and visual research. The literature review provided the background information about Korean cultural elements while the visual research provided visual inspiration and guidance for the illustrations. The visual research included observations of both historical artifacts and the presentation of the cultural elements in Korean visual media.

Observing the historical artifacts was important for retaining historical accuracy in the illustrations. The images of historical artifacts allowed for a close-up look at details and the accompanying explanations often provided good background information about the materials, historical period, and significance of the artifact.

The visual media studied include film, drama, animation, illustration, and historical reenactments. These media allowed the artist to see the artifacts in the context of Korean culture. Through these observations, the artist discovered how the cultural elements were worn, built, and used during the Joseon era. The visual media also provided insight into how the cultural artifacts could be illustrated while still preserving an authentic look.

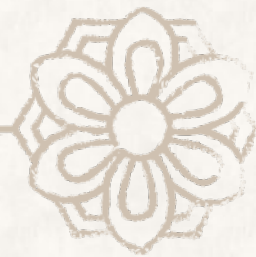
Visualizing a culture is a daunting task, and authentically visualizing it can be almost impossible. However, as Sung and E. Lee explained in their research, combining research with cultural immersion can help artists create work that is more authentic and accurate. Thus, misrepresentations can be avoided when proper research is applied.

By seeking to observe and understand cultural elements in context, the artist strove toward an authentic representation of Korean traditional culture in this project. The final visual solution was an illustrated children's book that could be used to introduce American children to Korea's history and traditional culture. The research into the problem of cultural misrepresentation demonstrates the need for visual media that authentically presents Korea's traditional culture and this project is just one attempt to fill that need. The artist hopes that through this research and the final visual solution more people will experience and recognize the culture that is

uniquely  
**Korea.**



# Appendix



Object Name:

Category (circle one)

Clothing

Food

Architecture

Written Language

Arts

Source:

## Material Analysis

1. What is the artifact made of?
2. What is the texture of the artifact?
3. How large is the artifact?

## Aesthetic Analysis

1. What are the key colors used in the artifact?
2. What style is used? (abstract/realistic/geometric)
3. What patterns or motifs are used to decorate this artifact?
4. What is the overarching mood/feeling of the artifact?
5. Is the composition balanced, asymmetrical, or symmetrical?
6. Does this artifact show simplicity, naturalness, and/or harmony? How?

## Historical Analysis

1. What period is the artifact from?
2. Is the artifact tied to a particular historical event?

## Interactive Analysis

1. What was the artifact used for?
2. Does the artifact have a positive or negative use?
3. Is the artifact functional or decorative?
4. Where is this artifact used?



Object Name:					
Category (circle one)	Clothing	Food	Architecture	Written Language	Arts
Visual Media Name:				Ep/Scene/Pg	
Type (circle one)	Drama	Film	Reenactment	Illustration	Animation
Source:					

**Material Analysis**

1. What is the artifact made of?
2. What is the texture of the artifact?
3. How large is the artifact?

**Aesthetic Analysis**

1. What are the key colors used in the artifact?
2. What style is used? (abstract/realistic/geometric)
3. What patterns or motifs are used to decorate this artifact?
4. What is the overarching mood/feeling of the artifact (in the scene)?
5. What features of the artifact are prominently placed/promoted?
6. Does this artifact show simplicity, naturalness, and/or harmony? How?

**Historical Analysis**

1. What period is the presentation representing?
2. Is the presentation tied to a particular historical event?

**Interactive Analysis**

1. How is the artifact being used?
2. Does the artifact have a positive or negative use?
3. Is the artifact functional or decorative?
4. Where is the artifact located (in the scene?)

**Contextual Analysis**

1. How is the artifact displayed/portrayed in the visual media?
2. How does it relate to/support the message being presented?



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