



Special Review

Korean Collections
in U.S. Museums of Art

Volume 26 Number 1

June 2023

The Review of Korean Studies



doi: 10.25024/review.2023.26.1.236

Editor's Note

LEE Kang Hahn

Over the years, the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) tried to employ various formats in conceiving Special Reviews, as traditional Book Reviews were deemed simply not enough to cover all kinds of dedicated efforts going on in the academic community. Such attempt resulted in a number of projects, from reviews of Korean studies in various foreign countries—e.g., Japan China, and Southeast Asia—to review of studies and exhibitions of specific areas of Korean Art, or reviews of cultural legacies located in South and North Korea.

Something, however, was still missing, so for this issue of *RKS* we tried something a little bit different. In an effort to expand our search of Korean culture abroad and to explore remnants of Korean legacy in places that may have been beyond the eyesight of general Korean and foreign readers, we decided to directly contact museums and art museums outside Korea and ask scholars and researchers affiliated with those institutes to provide us with detailed reviews of the Korean collections they respectively have.

Of course, the search for Korean heritage around the world has been conducted for several decades, by several Korean institutes such as the Cultural Heritage Administration, National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, and many others. Major museums in various countries have already been covered through their efforts, and their Korean collections are also most elegantly displayed in gorgeous publications.

Through them, cultural communities around the globe were made aware of the splendor of Korean culture that are found outside Korea. But at the same time, beyond such efforts there are still so much more to be found and enjoyed. In the U.S., in Europe, in China, and in Japan, there are so many cultural and academic institutes that host impressive collections of Korean cultural heritage that we do not necessarily know that well or even have been completely unaware of.

To let the readers know of such fascinating foreign collections, the contents of those collections would have to be examined and evaluated, but for Korean scholars based in Korea, it would be a near-impossible task to produce adequate reviews. Hence our decision to contact foreign institutes first, and politely ask for a firsthand review of their proud collections so that both Korean and non-Korean readers could appreciate the extent of the collection's own value, and not to mention what meaning they could have in expanding global interest in everything Korean.

And here are the results in the form of four outstanding reviews of Korean cultural heritage in the U.S. Art Museums, hosted under the title of "Korean Collections in U.S. Museums of Art."

Director Jason Steuber (Appleton Museum of Art, College of Central Florida) provided us with a review on the Korean collection at the Samuel P. Harn Museum. The museum opened in 1990, and in 2008 major efforts began to highlight the Korean Art Collection. In his review, he provides us with details regarding the Harn Museum's permanent exhibitions of Korean and Asian art, as well as the Museum's vision for the future. The review also contains a comprehensive overview of the museum's evolution and more than three decades of history, and not to mention the contribution the museum made to Korean art promotion in the U.S.

Dr. Hou-mei Sung (Cincinnati Art Museum) provided a review on the Korean cultural artifacts at the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM). The museum has approximately 120 works of Korean art, and the review, co-authored by Cynthia Amnéus and Kristin L. Spangenberg at the same institute, portrays three branches: collections at the East Asian Department, the Fashion Arts and Textiles Department, and the Prints and Drawings Department. For the East Asian Dept. Dr. Sung highlights the importance of several recent acquisitions, and while the Fashion Arts and Textiles Dept. has several *hanbok*, shoes, and fans, the Prints and Drawings Dept. shows us the interaction between Korean printmakers and CAM.

Dr. Kris Imants Ercums (Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas) provided us with a review on Korean artifacts at the Spencer Museum of Art (SMA). According to the review, Korean art has been an integral part of SMA since its founding in 1917. The review's first part elaborates on the history of the Thayer Collection of Korean Art that originally contained 71 Korean art works, of which many was from the premodern period. Dr. Ercums presents it as the

very beginning of SMA's Korean collection. Then the second part of the review examines the museum's new direction to embrace more recent Korean art and culture, which includes Korean folk art, Colonial-period artwork, Korean contemporary art, etc.

Dr. Suzie Kim (University of Mary Washington) provided us with a review on the architecture photographs from the Moffett Collection on Korean Church History and Asian Christianity, which is at the Princeton Theological Seminary's Theodore Sedgwick Wright Library. The review's title is "Early American Missionaries in Korea: Photographs of Vanished Modern Architecture in the Moffett Korea Collection." She highlights this important collection, which includes 230 boxes of "Manuscript Collection" that contains materials related to Samuel Austin Moffett—one of the earliest American missionaries—and shows us the early modern history of Korea, while also examining Moffett's settlement in Pyeongyang in the 1890s and images of early modern Christian buildings in the area.

With these four reviews I think we achieved what we intended at the very beginning. It was such a privilege to have the opportunity to arrange some of the finest U.S. museums to give us insights and introductions to their Korean collections. We at *RKS* cannot fully thank all the scholars and researchers who agreed to provide us with detailed reviews on the Korean artifacts and collections in custody of their respective institutes. Such task would have undoubtedly cost them time and efforts, and it could not have been easy for them to sacrifice their already busy schedule. It was truly an honor to be able to host all the reviews, filled with expertise in Korean culture and affection for Korean artistic accomplishments.

I would also convey special thanks to Professor Kim Sunglim at the Dartmouth College. Our heartfelt gratitude is for the guidance and assistance she so graciously offered, which ultimately enabled the fruition of this Special Review. This new format of a Special Review is surely an endeavor that *RKS* would want to continue in the future. We promise to return with another Special Review next year no less, possibly on the Korean cultural heritage currently prevails in neighboring Northeast Asian countries.