



**Special Review**

# Korean Cultural Artifacts in Japan

Volume 27 Number 1

June 2024

The Review of Korean Studies



doi: 10.25024/review.2024.27.1.226

## Editor's Note

LEE Kang Hahn

Last year, for the June 2023 issue, the *Review of Korean Studies (RKS)* invited foreign experts on U.S.-based Museums and Museums of Arts where Korean artifacts and cultural legacy have been in custody and preserved. We hosted five reviews from several U.S. experts, not only to get more information of items we did not know but also to become an audience to their knowledge, specialty, and evaluation on Korean cultural artifacts which have been exhibited at important U.S. institutes. It was never an easy task to contact them and ask for their willingness to contribute a review. But we were able to solicit the most kind devotion of total of six reviewers (in the form of four reviews) who graciously offered their take on Korean cultural legacy in the U.S.

And at the time, preparations for a follow-up Special Review were in fact already under way. We wanted to explore Korean relics and cultural legacy that are unfortunately not with us today, but in fairly close range. In other words, we embarked upon the task of asking experts, either Korean or Japan, working at Japan-based Museums and Museums of Arts to contribute reviews of all things Korean in their respective institute's custody. The project has actually been on my mind ever since I had the distinct honor and opportunity to visit the Museum of Oriental Ceramics at Osaka myself. The spectacular nature of the items exhibited there instantly got my attention, and I was quite moved by the sincere devotion the people there had been investing in preserving such Korean beauty.

Ever since, I wanted to host a series of reviews that would feature various kinds of Korean cultural legacy and artifacts discovered in Japan or in custody of Japanese institutes for preservation. In that regard, one may say that this project was envisioned even before the U.S. Museums of Arts project mentioned above was ever commissioned. I'm just happy that a dream became a reality at this very moment.

For the Special Review, total of five experts agreed to contribute a review.

Each contributor delivered a review on the Korean collection at their respectively affiliated institutes, either present or former.

Jung Eunjin 鄭銀珍 of the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka 大阪市立東洋陶磁美術館 provided us with a review on the Korean Ceramics Collection of the museum. As the reviewer emphasized, the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka has one of the most complete collections of Goryeo celadon, *buncheong* ware, and Joseon white porcelain in Japan. What would greet the visitors are magnificent Korean ceramics collections such as the Ataka Collection and the Rhee Byung-Chang Collection. The reviewer's elaboration on the history of the museum's collection, as well as the history of collection of Korean ceramics in Japan in general, will be most informative to readers who would like to visit the museum themselves in the future. According to the reviewer, the museum should be regarded as a place where the love of Korean ceramics and the collection of them by the Japanese since the 16<sup>th</sup> century really do converge with each other.

Lee Sue 李須惠 offered us a review entitled "Jeong Jo-moon and the Koryo Museum of Art in Kyoto 高麗美術館." Her review concentrates upon highlighting the life and endeavors of an individual named Jeong Jo-moon 鄭詔文. He was a Korean who lived in Japan for 65 years, wishing to return to his country once it was "reunited." He did not have that chance, but what he did was nothing short of extraordinary, as he published a quarterly magazine dealing with Korean culture in Japan through a publishing company he himself founded, and eventually established a museum in Japan dedicated to Korean cultural artifacts. The Jeong Jo-moon Collection here contains more than 1,700 diverse and wonderful items, many of which were collected by Jeong himself who devoted his entire life to the task. According to the reviewer, the institution has undertaken the role to bridge Japan and Korea. That may be Jeong Jo-moon's most shining legacy.

Inokuma Kaneki 猪熊兼樹 of the Tokyo National Museum offered us a review that would introduce us to the Korean culture at the Tokyo National Museum. The Tokyo National Museum (TNM) is of course the oldest museum in Japan, recently celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022. According to the reviewer, the Japanese people have enjoyed and appreciated Korean and Chinese art and crafts including paintings, calligraphy, metalwork, ceramics, lacquerware, and fabrics. Here in the review, Inokuma takes us to various sections in the museum that contain and exhibit Korean art, such as the Asian Gallery, the

Ogura collection, and the Collection of Hōryūji Treasures. In addition, the reviewer highlights materials related to the Joseon Envoys, who visited Japan in the past, and clothes related to the Crown Princess Yeong (Yi Bangja). The reviewer also informs us of the exhibitions and scholarly exchanges the museum has hosted over the years.

Sugiyama Takashi 杉山享司 offered us a review entitled “The Korean Crafts Collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum 日本民藝館 and its Founder, Yanagi Muneyoshi.” In the review, Sugiyama introduces us to a Japanese modern thinker Yanagi Muneyoshi 柳宗悦, who was the founder of the folk crafts movement in Japan. Yanagi was a person fascinated with Korean art and culture and praised its beauty in numerous occasions. His love of Korea led to the foundation of the museum which has roughly 1,600 pieces of Korean art. The museum’s Korean crafts collection was an outcome of Yanagi’s determination and efforts throughout the years, and his devotion to introducing and preserving the unique culture of the Korean people was also recognized by the government of the Republic of Korea. The reviewer lets us know all the exhibitions held by the museum, designed to let the world be aware of and appreciate the true value of Korean crafts.

Shimomura Nahoko 下村奈穂子 offered us a review entitled “The Korean Art Collection of the Nezu Museum 根津美術館: The Kōrai Tea Bowls Collected by the Founder, Nezu Kaichirō, Sr.” Kaichirō was a businessman who collected all sorts of Asian antique works and founded a museum of arts where they could be exhibited and preserved. Among more than 7,000 items in custody, which range from Northeast to Southeast Asian origins and cover a variety of craftsmanship, there are 230 Korean works of art, of which 170 items were collected by Kaichirō. According to the reviewer, Kaichirō spent more money in purchasing Kōrai tea bowls than others, including Japanese ones, and used them in dignified tea gatherings. In fact, amongst many exhibitions of the museum, the most frequently exhibited items were the Kōrai tea bowls. Shimomura contemplates the significant status of Kōrai tea bowls in modern Japan, compared to their Chinese and Japanese counterparts.

The goal of this Special Review is first and foremost to raise awareness of spectacular Korean cultural artifacts that remain in Japan, to let people all over the globe know how they have been appreciated in the eyes of the Japanese people in past and present and how these artifacts are preserved and nurtured in Japan today. In the process we wanted to encourage fellow Koreans to learn

more of Korean culture that is currently not with us but within our reach, if we know enough, and stay devoted enough to care for them.

All the reviewers who graciously contributed their expert reviews are people living in a neighbor country who are deeply devoted to preserving, learning, and spreading Korean art in Japan to the world. For that, truly, we are forever in their debt. *RKS* expresses our profound gratitude for the five reviewers who spent precious time and effort to inform us of and teach us what kind of Korean cultural legacy we could find and enjoy in Japan. They shared their love and admiration of Korean art with us, and one may hope we could do the same, never forgetting our traditions and culture, spread all around the world. Special thanks and sincere admiration to Jung of the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka, as without her help this project would have never come to fruition. She was more than instrumental in bringing this project to life, helping us find and contact the brightest and talented minds for this occasion.