



THE TEN SYMBOLS OF LONGEVITY SCREEN

A Resource for Educators

Dear Teacher,

Welcome to explore the *Ten Symbols of Longevity Screen*, Korean Art Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art! This resource is intended to provide you and your students with an opportunity to learn about Korean art with history, and culture. In particular, it emphasis on the late-Joseon Ten Symbols of Longevity through the JSMA's very own *Ten Symbols of Longevity screen*.

Artworks are made up of visual symbols. Whether utilizing figurative forms like people, plants, and landscape, or nonfigurative shapes and abstraction, all art carries a symbolic meaning which can vary widely depending on the particular technique and method used in its production. The use of symbols in art is not only due to the formative characteristics of conveying a lot of content on a single screen, but also the fundamental principle of art that express various human lives by implication.

Because the Ten Symbols of Longevity are comprised of symbols carrying complex philosophical and cultural connotations, there is thus more than meets the eye to these paintings, and an understanding of the historical, social and cultural context of these symbols is therefore necessary to understand the deep significance of these paintings. And it is the reason why I made this resource for you.

Unfortunately, as of 2023, this piece is not on display in the gallery of the JSMA, but I sincerely hope that one day this piece will be displayed in a gallery so that you can see the amazingly beautiful *Ten Symbols of Longevity Screen* with your students.

Thank you,

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KOREA

Introduction to Korea

The Korean peninsula is located in northeastern Asia, abutting China and Russia in the north and surrounded by the Yellow Sea on the west and the Sea of Japan or *Donghae** on the east. The 38th parallel marks the dividing line between the countries of North and South Korea. An estimated 25 million people live in North Korea. Although the total area of North Korea is slightly larger than South Korea, South Korea's population of 52 million people is twice of North Korea.

Roughly 70% of the Korean landmass is mountainous. As a result, the Korean population is densely concentrated in lowland areas. Seoul, the South Korean capital in the northwest corner of the country, is the most highly populated area of South Korea with 9.8 million people. South Korea enjoys a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. The late summer months are marked by typhoon season which brings torrential rains.

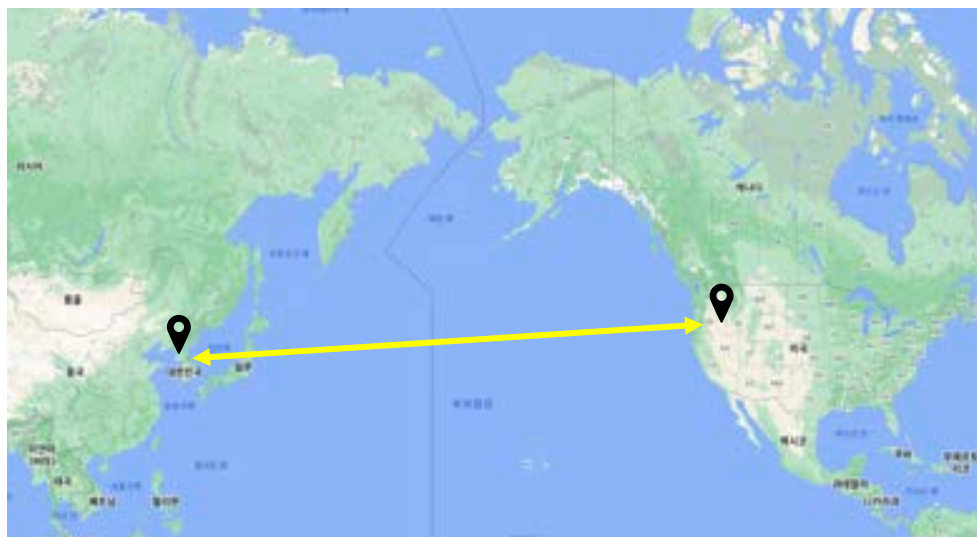
Geography has played a significant role in Koreans historical and cultural development. Korea's close proximity to its neighbors of China in the west and Japan in the east facilitated dynamic cross-cultural exchange of art, language, culture, and religion. However, this proximity also made Korea vulnerable to invasions over the centuries. Today, South Korea is highly industrialized boasts a thriving high-tech economy and culture as well.

A note about names: proper names mentioned in this resource are written in traditional East Asian word order (i.e., family name first, followed by surname). ¹

¹ Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, *ArtsAsia: A Cross-Curricular Unit about Korea a Resource for Educators*, 2018.

*Please note: these are contested names for the same body of water. What is known in Japan and on many western maps as the Sea of Japan is called the *Donghae* (“East Sea”) in South Korean and the *Joseon Donghae* (“Korean East Sea”) in North Korea

The Map of Korea



National Symbols of the Republic of Korea (South Korea)

<The National Flag of Korea, "*Taegeukgi*">²



© Ministry of the Interior and Safety.

Origin

Following the trend for modern states to adopt national flags, the decision to create a national flag for Korea emerged with the ratification of the Korea-United States Treaty of 1882. No accurate records remain of the Korean flag chosen for use at the signing ceremony; however, according to *Navy Department's Bureau of Navigation and found in 2004*, some argue that the flag was similar to the ensign flag featured in the *Flags of Maritime Nations* issued by the U.S.

In his capacity as Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary under King Gojong, Park Yeong-hyo kept a record of his diplomatic mission to Japan in 1882. According to his journal, known as *Sahwagiryak*, in September of that year while aboard the ship to Japan, Park created a four-trigram flag with a *taegeuk* circle (instead of the flag with eight black bars that had been

² *Ministry of the Interior and Safety*. <https://www.mois.go.kr/eng/sub/a03/nationalSymbol/screen.do>.

used prior to 1800). The flag was used from September 25, 1882, according to Park's report to the government on October 3 of that year.

By royal order on March 6, 1883, King Gojong promulgated that Park's flag with a *taegeuk* circle in the center and four trigrams around it (the flag named *Taegeukgi*) be the national flag. However, due to a lack of specific guidelines, the flag design took different forms. On June 29, 1942, the Provisional Government issued a national flag style guide to ensure that subsequent flags would be created in a consistent manner. Despite these efforts, however, ordinary people were unaware of these guidelines.

After the establishment of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948, the government felt an increasing need to standardize flag construction. Thus, in January 1949, it formed the National Flag Correction Committee, which announced the National Flag Construction Guidelines on October 15 of that year.

Later, several regulations were implemented, providing for the systematic management of the flag: the Act on the Flag of the Republic of Korea, enacted in January 2007; the Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Flag of the Republic of Korea, in July 2007; and the Regulations on the Hoisting, Management, and Promotion of the National Flag in September 2009 (by instructions from the Prime Minister)

Symbolism of the Flag

The *Taegeukgi* consists of a white background, a red and blue *taegeuk* circle in the center, and four black trigrams (collectively called *geon-gon-gam-ri*), one in each corner of the flag.

The white background represents brightness, purity, and peace, qualities that are highly valued by the people. The *taegeuk*, which has long been a commonly used motif, denotes the harmony between the negative cosmic forces (*yin* : blue portion) and the positive cosmic forces (*yang* : red portion), depicting the truth of nature that all things are created and evolve through the interaction of yin and yang.

The four black trigrams are specific representations of the movement and harmony of these forces. In detail, the *geon* symbolizes the sky, the *gon* the earth, the *gam* water, and the *ri* fire. Together, they create harmony around the *taegeuk* mark.

In short, the *Taegeukgi* flag embodies the vision of the Korean people who, like the universe, seek continuous creation and enrichment. By upholding the spirit and significance of the *Taegeukgi*, the people seek to realize unity and unification and contribute to the happiness and peace of humanity.

<The National Flower “*Mugunghwa*”>³

Origin

The *Mugunghwa*, or the rose of Sharon, is an object of deep affection. Meaning “eternal blossom that never fades,” it has been an important symbol of Korean culture for centuries.

According to ancient records, the *mugunghwa* was treasured as a “blossom from heaven even before the Gojoseon era (ancient Korean kingdom). As further testimony of its cultural

³ Ministry of the Interior and Safety. https://www.mois.go.kr/eng/sub/a03/nationalSymbol_3/screen.do.

value, the Silla Kingdom (57 BC – AD 935) called itself *Geunhwahyang*, meaning Country of the *Mugunghwa*. The ancient Chinese, too, referred to Korea as the “land of wise men where the *Mugunghwa* blooms.”

Over time, the public affection grew stronger when a phrase extolling the flower’s beauty was included in the national anthem in the late 19th century. Those words are “*Mugunghwa samcheonli hwaryeogangsan* (Three thousand *ri** (equivalent to 1,200 kilometers, the length of the Korean Peninsula) of splendid rivers and mountains covered with *Mugunghwa* blossoms)”. Even during the dark days of Japanese colonial rule, the people’s devotion to the flower never faded.

Hence, it was only natural for the government to adopt it as the national flower after Korea regained its independence from Japan.

Varieties

Koreans cherish the national flower because it honors the country’s noble spirit and symbolizes the many successes as well as tribulations that the nation has experienced. *Mugunghwa* varieties are grouped based on the colors of their blossoms. The groups are dansim, baedal, and asadal.

- **Dansim** : White, red, purple, or blue flower with intense red or purple center
- **Baedal** : Pure white flower
- **Asadal** : White flower with intense red center that fades to pale pink at the petal edges



White dansim (left) and Red dansim (right)

© Ministry of the Interior and Safety.

TEN SYMBOLS OF LONGEVITY

SCREEN OF THE JSMA

The JSMA Ten Symbols of Longevity Screen

Ten Symbols of Longevity screen, which arrived in Eugene in late 1924 by museum founder Gertrude Bass Warner (1863-1951) and was conserved in 2010 through a generous grant from the Korean National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (KNRICH).

“This exquisite composition of auspicious landscape, floral, and animal motifs reflects a Korean court painting tradition laden with symbolism intended to confer happiness, longevity, and prosperity on both the ruler and the nation. The first eight panels depict the Ten Symbols of Longevity (*sipjangsaeng*), specifically, the sun, clouds, mountains, water, pine trees, bamboo, mushrooms of immortality, deer, cranes, and turtles. The last two panels bear a long inscription naming the fourteen court officials who commissioned this painting in 1879 to celebrate the recovery from smallpox of Korean Crown Prince Yi Cheok (later known as Sunjong, 1874-1926), the final ruler of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910).⁴”

⁴ Kitagawa, Anne Rose, and Gina Kim. *From past to present: Masterworks of Korean art from the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon*. Eugene, OR: Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, 2016.



© Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art.

Ten Symbols of Longevity Screen (十長生圖, 십장생도, Sipjangsaengdo)

Korean; Joseon dynasty, 1879-80

Ten-panel folding screen; ink, color and gold on silk, 79 x 203 1/8 inches

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon; Murray Warner Collection; MWK68:3

SALES FORM	
W. W. TAYLOR & CO. IMPORTERS & EXPORTERS	
No. 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000	

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Invoice for the Ten Symbols of Longevity Screen; JSMA Archives

***TEN SYMBOLS OF LONGEVITY AND
LATE JOSEON KOREAN CULTURE***

What are the *Sipjangsaengdo*?

<Meaning and Kind>

In Korean, *Sip* (십 十) refers to the number “ten”, *Jang* (장 長), “long”, *Saeng* (생 生), “birth/life” and *Do* (도 圖), “painting”. Therefore, *Sipjangsaengdo* literally refers to a painting decorated with the ten objects associated with long life. More specifically, the term *Jangsaeng* means *Bullojangsaeng* (불로장생 不老長生) or *Bullobulsa* (불로불사 不老不死). This means aging slowly (or not aging at all) and living a long time (or never dying). So, *Sipjangsaengdo* are paintings depicting Ten types of natural elements symbolizing eternal youth and long life.

Typically, these ten symbols are the sun, clouds, mountains, water, pine trees, rocks, deer, cranes, turtles, and mushrooms of immortality called *Yeongji*. However, there are more symbols of longevity as well, the moon, peaches, and bamboo. Depending on the theme, the painter was able to effectively bring together and harmonize around ten different symbols.

Over time, as the ten symbols of longevity gradually gained popularity, new types of paintings were created emphasizing particular elements, each with their own names. For example, *Ilwolbandodo* (일월반도도 日月蟠桃圖) depicted the sun moon and peaches, *Haehakbandodo* (해학반도도 海鶴蟠桃圖) featured cranes and peaches with a seascape background, *Gunhakdo* (군학도 群鶴圖) featured flocks of cranes, *Gunrokdo* (군록도 群鹿圖) depicted deer and pine trees. Despite the different names, however, all these paintings can be collectively referred to as *Jangsaengdo* “longevity paintings.”

<Content and Form>

Sipjansaengdo usually depict mountains, rocks, pine trees, clouds, and the sea as a fantastical, idyllic landscape, while deer or cranes appear in the center and turtles in the left side of the painting. Also, *Sipjansaengdo* emphasize the imaginary heavenly world by making the most of the beauty of elaborate details and vivid coloring. And it is characterized by the use of a blue-green landscape style, especially when describing mountains and rocks.

Symbol (Korean)	Meaning
Pine tree (<i>sonamu</i>)	Endurance/resilience in the face of adversity, as the pine can survive hard winters. Pine trees were often depicted with Daoist immortals. Painters showed gnarled pines to represent the virtue of old age and wisdom.
Sun (<i>hae</i>)	Sun and moon make <i>yin/yang</i> pair of complementary opposites. Sun is pure <i>yang</i> ; it represents generative power and longevity.
Crane (<i>hak</i>)	In folk tradition, cranes were thought to live for more than 500 years and symbolized long life. The crane was a symbol of transcendence in Taoism and was considered a messenger that could communicate with the sky/heaven.
Water (<i>mul</i>)	Symbols of life, fertility, abundance, and longevity. Another example of <i>yin/yang</i> , water and mountains are harmonious opposites in the landscape.
Mountains (<i>san</i>)	Mountains and Rocks are thought to contain the <i>gi</i> (breath) that gives life to the universe. Mountains are considered the home of immortal beings in Daoist tradition.
Clouds (<i>gureum</i>)	Related to mountains, clouds are thought to be highly concentrated areas of <i>gi</i> (breath) that congregate around mountain peaks where immortals live. To attain immortality, it was thought that one could ascend to heaven by rising into the air and disappearing into the clouds.

Deer (<i>saseum</i>)	<i>Shoulao</i> , the Daoist God of Longevity, is often seen with a deer because deer are thought to have the ability to sniff and find the mushroom of immortality, <i>yeongji</i> .
Turtles (<i>geobuk</i>)	Like cranes, turtles are associated with longevity for their long lifespans. The turtle is thought to be the messenger of water, just as the tiger is the messenger of the mountain.
Mushrooms of immortality (<i>yeongji</i>)	Mushrooms of fungi (known as the plant of never growing old) were considered a source of immortality in the Daoist tradition.
Bamboo (<i>daenamu</i>)	Widely used in East Asia culture, bamboo has a variety of associations. In Daoism, bamboo symbolizes the concept of Dao (“the way”), which bends without breaking like bamboo. In Confucianism, bamboo is also symbolic of humility, upright character, flexibility, and grace.
Rock (<i>dol/bawi</i>)	Rocks represent mountains. Rocks and mountains are thought to contain the <i>gi</i> (breath) that gives life to the universe.
Moon (<i>dal</i>)	The moon contains the meaning of longevity like the sun. Moon is pure <i>yin</i> ; it means that it is perpetuated by circulation.
Peach (<i>cheondo/ boksunga</i>)	Peaches are deeply related to the idea of immortality and immortality that Taoism ultimately pursued. This seems to have originated from the legend of " <i>Seowangmo</i> and <i>Cheondo</i> " in China. In the palace garden of <i>Seowangmo</i> (Queen Mother of the West) there is a peach tree of the gods. It blooms once every 3,000 years, and <i>Cheondo</i> , the fruit of eternal life, is said to not open until another 3,000 years later. <i>Cheondo</i> is known as an immortality that keeps the gods alive.

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<Concept and Thought>

Ten symbols of longevity were made by embracing Chinese Daoist ideology which is emphasized on the way of the universe with nature based on Koreans' worship of native natural objects and shamanistic ideas. In other words, it is considered to have been formed by combining

shamanistic beliefs such as 'God of Heaven', 'God of the Sun and the Moon', and 'God of Mountain', and the idea of immortality represented by cranes, immortal plants, peaches called a *Cheondo*, and bamboos.

<Origin and Development>

While the exact origins of the Ten Symbols of Longevity remain uncertain, it is believed that the Chinese have been combining several symbols of longevity into a single icon since ancient times. Considering this, we can trace the origins of the Ten Symbols of Longevity to China. However, this particular grouping of ten symbols in *Sipjangsaengdo* is not present in other parts of East Asia and appears to be uniquely Korean.

Because court artist rarely dated or signed their works, it is difficult to date many *Sipjangsaengdo*, which was a court decorative painting. However, given that the earliest mention of *Sipjangsaengdo* comes from a poem by Yi Saek (1328-1396)—a scholar and literary man of the Goryeo dynasty—we can assume that these paintings were already being created in the Goryeo period.

In this poem, the ten symbols of longevity and the ten symbols of longevity paintings were mentioned first.

*“It is now October but the new year’s painting
Of the Ten Longevity Symbols in my room still looks fresh.
When one is ill, his only wish is for a long life.
I wrote a short comment on each symbol (...)”*⁵

⁵ Kim, Kumja Paik. *The art of Korea: highlights from the collection of San Francisco's Asian Art Museum. Asian Art Museum of San, 2006.*

In conclusion, even though Goryeo-period Sipjangsaengdo have yet to be discovered, this poem confirms that the Ten Symbols of Longevity were in use by at least the late Goryeo period.

Why were the *Sipjangsaengdo* popular in the Joseon period?

The ten symbols are important in revealing a unique Korean cultural tradition. Particularly, the ten symbols of longevity represent a ubiquitous theme in the Joseon-period (1392-1910) visual culture of Korea, judging from surviving artifacts such as textiles, jewelry, furniture, ceramics, etc.

Then, why were the sipjangsaengdo especially popular during the Joseon period? It is closely related to the cultural and social background of the Joseon period.

<Joseon period and Neo-Confucianism>

The last Korean dynasty—the Joseon period (1392-1910)—was founded by Yi Seong-gye (1335-1408) and lasted for over 500 years.

<Timeline of Korean History>

- Paleolithic and Neolithic period, ca 7000-ca. 10th century B.C.
- Bronze Age, ca. 10th century-ca. 3rd century B.C.
- Iron Age, ca. 300 B.C.
- Three Kingdoms period, 57 B.C.-668 A.D.
- Unified Silla dynasty, 668-935
- Goryeo dynasty, 918-1392
- **Joseon dynasty, 1392-1910**

The advent of the Joseon dynasty in the late fourteenth century brought in its wake major social and cultural changes. In their efforts to augment the power of the royal government and

reconstruct the country which during the preceding Goryeo period had suffered almost a century of Mongol domination, the Joseon rulers withdrew royal patronage of the Buddhist establishment, then seen as corrupt, and embraced Neo-Confucianism. As the official state ideology, Neo-Confucianism flourished among the Joseon court and elites, and influenced many works of art in the Joseon period.

Neo-Confucianism was established by Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a Chinese scholar of the Song dynasty of China, and is a branch of Confucianism that emphasized the relationship between the order of the universe and the human mind. It is not a religion, but an ethical doctrine that emerged from a mixture of traditional Confucian teachings and other philosophies, including Buddhism and Daoism.⁶ Zhu Xi highlighted the idea that prolonged peace and prosperity were only achievable if strict moral codes were maintained at each level of society.

Although Neo-Confucianism entered Korea in the late Goryeo dynasty, it has come a long way during the Joseon dynasty. The new aristocrats, who played a central role in establishing Joseon society, worked hard to promote Neo-Confucianism, and the Joseon government made Neo-Confucianism the basis for governing the country. Neo-Confucianism focused on the individual and their status in society and emphasized the politics of royal principle which values peace and order based on the cultivation of harmonious interpersonal relationships and proper conduct. Therefore, Neo-Confucianism was considered necessary to improve the chaotic and corrupt situation at the time.

Uses of the *Sipjangsaengdo*

<*Sipjangsaengdo* as a Decorative Court painting or *Minhwa* (Folk painting)>

Under these circumstances, the theme of *Sipjangsaengdo* was perfectly suited for expressing wishes for peace for the court and the long and healthy life for the royal family. As a

⁶ Kang, Jae-eun. *The land of scholars: two thousand years of Korean Confucianism*. Homa & Sekey Books, 2006.

result, the Ten Symbols of Longevity were widely produced and displayed as decorative paintings in the royal court in the early Joseon dynasty.

However, paintings of the Ten Symbols of Longevity were not produced solely in the royal court. Wishes for long life and eternal youth were not limited to royalty but universal human desires. The desire for longevity transcends class and era. Therefore, the Ten Symbols of Longevity were initially used in royal court, but later passed on to all walks of life.

Perhaps because of this, the ten symbols of longevity have often been included in the genre of *Minhwa* (민화 民畵), or folk painting. However, this definition of *Minhwa* is controversial. Some scholars believe that *Minhwa* includes court paintings in that it is an "ethnic painting" that depicts the lives and culture of Korean people in a broad sense. Others argue that court paintings and folk paintings need to be distinguished because decorative court paintings literally refer to paintings used to decorate palace spaces that were produced by various court painters (called *Hwawon*) of *Dohwaseo*, which was a government office in charge of paintings of the state and the royal family during the Joseon dynasty, while *Minhwa* refers to "everyday objects made by unknown and untrained artists to be used by ordinary people."⁷ Therefore, although there are many similarities with folk paintings in terms of content, such as auspicious elements and expressions being customarily repeated, there are significant differences in size and quality.

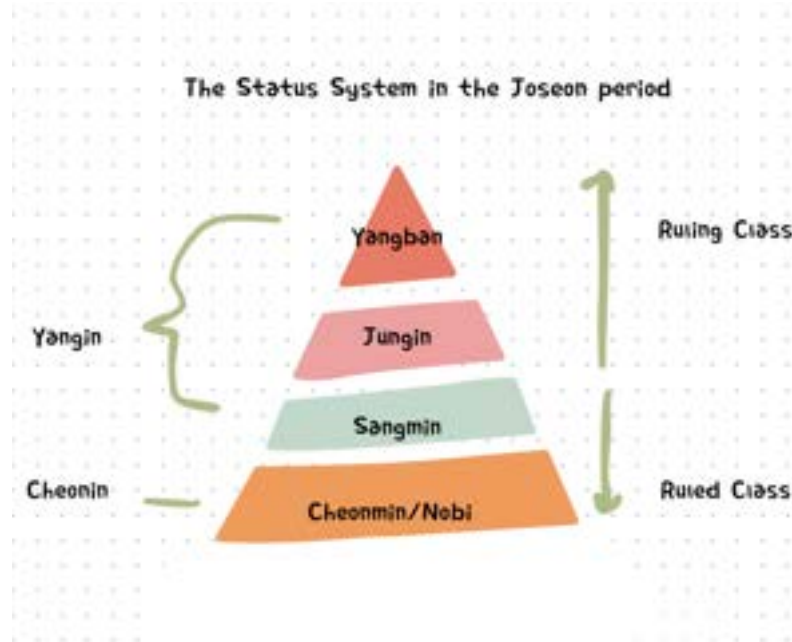
<The hierarchical class system of the Joseon society>

The hierarchical class system in Joseon was formed based on socioeconomic changes and Neo-Confucian status concepts from the late Goryeo Dynasty to the early Joseon Dynasty. During the Joseon period, the official class system was *Yangcheonje*, which was allegedly only

⁷ Lachman, Charles, and Richard Gehrke. *The Ten Symbols of Longevity: Shipjangaengdo : an Important Korean Folding Screen in the Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon*. Eugene, OR: Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, 2006.

divided into *Yangin* and *Cheonmin*. However, in real life, it was divided into the four classes as ranked in descending order - *Yangban*, *Jungin*, *Sangmin*, and *Cheonmin*. The monarch and the royal family were considered the highest and most respectable class in the society.

The *yangban* were people who passed the national civil examination (called *Gwageo*). This examination was required to be passed by the two groups within *yangban* class namely, civil officials (called *Munban*) and military officials (called *Muban*). *Yangban* people were considered the highest social class of the Joseon dynasty, although this was only the case for men, because *yangban* women, despite their high status, were not allowed to take the *Gwageo* and therefore could not become civil servants. The *Jungin* were part of the upper-middle-class. They assisted with administrative work under the *Yangban* or engaged in technical and professional jobs, such as doctors, physicians, accountants. Although they also belonged to a quite high class, they had a limitation that they could not get a high-ranking of position. The *Sangmin* were the middle class in the society comprising the working-class commoners such as small merchants, fishermen, craftsmen, and peasants. They accounted for the majority of the people of the Joseon dynasty. Lastly, the *Cheonmin* were the lowest social class of Joseon dynasty such as slaves, butchers, shamans, and female entertainers. If one of the parents was a slave, their children also became a slave, and no matter how talented they may be, they cannot change their class. Since society was purely based on the principle of Neo-Confucianism and privileged statuses were given based on occupations, the works of *Cheonmin* were considered unclean and very immoral.



How is it possible, then, that *Sipjangsaengdo* - royal court paintings - became popular in the common households in a society with such a strict class system? When there was a new year or other commemorative event, there were frequent cases where paintings from the court were bestowed upon or distributed to the *yangban*.

However, the main factors that made *Sipjangsaengdo* became popular among Joseon commoners were the change in the social class system and the development of money as a commodity.

The traditional class system collapsed because of external invasions from China and Japan, such as the *Imjin War* (1592-98), and the *Byeongja Disturbance* (1636-37). As the number of *Yangin* increased and the number of slaves decreased, the system became obsolete, and a new class structure was formed which was divided into two classes, *Yangban* and *Sangmin*. However, the number of commoners pretending to be *Yangban* increased, and by the nineteenth century, most people had become *Yangban*. In *Yangbanjeon*, a satirical novel written by scholar and novelist Park Jiwon, a common story is that rich commoners gave the poor *Yangban* money so that they could elevate their status.

The second main cause was the development of money as a commodity. Merchants' economic transactions developed with the nationwide development of markets and foreign trade

with the Japan and Qing of China. In the process, the *Sangmin* working in agriculture, handicrafts, and commerce were able to accumulate wealth. As a result, their economic and social statuses rose, along with their cultural needs. Moreover, the wages of court painters were not enough at that time, so they were allowed to accept outside orders or sell paintings in the market. Therefore, *Sangmin* paid court painters to produce high-quality paintings such as *sipjangsaengdo*, and the court painters were able to make money by drawing and selling.

Therefore, moving beyond the palace, *Yangban* elites also commissioned Ten Symbols of Longevity paintings. Its popularity continued to trickle down to the next class of *Jungin*, and these two groups grew in wealth and stature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the twentieth century, Ten Symbols of Longevity paintings of varying quality were being produced and consumed throughout every level of society, and most surviving folk art was produced during this period.

Whether created in court, by aristocrats, ordinary families, or in religious places, court decorative art or folk art is a long tradition and an integral part of Korean culture. *Sipjangsaengdo* paintings and objects have been deeply appreciated by not only Korean kings, nobles, scholars, and officials, but also by the general public throughout history.

<Functions of *Sipjangsaengdo*>

Because folding screens were the most common form of royal decoration in the eighteenth century, most *Sipjangsaengdo* have been mounted or painted on screens. Folding screens had practical functions as well as aesthetic functions and were used for many purposes. The multi-panel screen is foldable and easy to move and store and were used in gardens to create outdoor places and as decoration in rooms to prevent wind and cold. However, Ten Symbols of Longevity screens were generally used in a ceremonial capacity for celebrations of the new year, banquets, and significant anniversaries as decorative backdrops.

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