The British Museum

Room 67

한국실
The Korea Foundation Gallery

Korea

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Please return this guide for other visitors to use
Section 1 07
Gallery entrance and Contemporary Korea

Section 2 13
Loans from the National Museum of Korea

Section 3 22
Dynastic periods

Section 4 69
Buddhism

Section 5 84
Changing exhibits: Collecting Korea

Section 6 110
Coins

Section 7 118
Architecture and interiors
The Korean peninsula is about as large as the UK. Since 1948 it has been divided into the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the north. This gallery explores the rich material and visual culture that tells the peninsula’s long and enduring history.

The Trustees of the British Museum acknowledge with gratitude:

The Korea Foundation for a significant donation to create this Gallery in 2000

The National Museum of Korea for grants to refurbish this Gallery in 2014

Dr Hahn Kwang-ho CBE (1923-2014) for his gift to establish a purchase fund for Korean works of art
Samramansang Moon Jar #1
Kang Ik-joong (b. 1960)
USA, 2010–13
Mixed media on wood

The squares are covered with an image of a moon jar, one of the most iconic types of Korean porcelain vessel, and a layer of white flowers mixed with images of fighter jets and attack helicopters. In the background 225 squares each contain an image of a seated Buddha.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
Asia 2014,3046.1
Jar based on a ritual vessel
Kim Yik-yung (b. 1935)
Republic of Korea, 1990–99
Glazed porcelain

Kim’s work is based on the forms of traditional Confucian ritual vessels of the Joseon period (1392–1910). They were originally made in bronze but also in ceramics. This vessel is modelled on a rice measure made from pure white porcelain clay, slab-built, carved and covered in with a clear glaze.

Donated by Lee Doowon
Asia 2000, 1214.1
Nam June Paik

The Korean-American artist Paik is internationally recognised as the ‘Father of Video Art’. He was also a musician and installation artist, but he is best known for his sculptures made from television sets. Born in Seoul, he left Korea during the Korean War (1950–53) and lived in Hong Kong, Japan and Germany before settling in the United States.

Revolution in art

Nam June Paik (1932–2006)

*Evolution, Revolution, Resolution*, 1989

Colour lithographs on paper

These prints are from a series called *Evolution, Revolution, Resolution*, made on the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. The television-robots represent eight of the revolution’s leading figures. Each figure is addressed individually, in notations on the screens that form the robot.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was a philosopher, writer and composer. The leaders of the French Revolution were inspired by Rousseau’s ideas. He wrote that humans had been corrupted by society and civilisation.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund Asia 2001,0315,0.4

Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793) was a politician in the French Revolution, and a radical journalist. He was fiercely critical of the revolution’s later figures and institutions.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund Asia 2001,0315,0.6
Danton, Oratory of Eloquence
Nam June Paik (1932–2006)
USA, 1989
Colour lithograph on paper

Georges-Jacques Danton (1759–1794) was a French revolutionary leader and orator.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
Asia 2001,0315,0.3
Buddhism in Korea

Buddhism spread to Korea from the AD 300s. Buddhist images and scriptures were commissioned by devotees from a wide cross section of the society. For individuals, commissioning and offering was thought to help secure a favourable rebirth. For groups they could bring comfort in times of crisis.

The Buddha
Goryeo period, AD 900–1000
Iron

Iron Buddhist statues were produced during the transition from the Unified Silla (AD 676–935) to the Goryeo (AD 918–1392) periods. They were often coated in lacquer and gilded.

Lent by the National Museum of Korea
Domestic celadon trade (1100–1300)

The Goryeo (AD 918–1392) capital was in the north, but the major celadon (green-glazed ceramics) kilns were far south. Celadon was supplied through maritime links.

**Ewer**
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

**Bowl**
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

**Bottle**
Goryeo period, 1100–1300
Found in Kaesong
Celadon-glazed stoneware with inlay decoration
Lent by the National Museum of Korea
**Cup with lid**
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Bian Island, Gunsan
Celadon-glazed stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

**Bottle, *maebyeong***
Goryeo period, 1200–1300
Found in Kaesong
Celadon-glazed stoneware with inlay decoration
Lent by the National Museum of Korea
32 bowls found on the ocean floor
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Bian Island, Gunsan
Celadon-glazed stoneware

These bowls were probably cargo on a ship that sank on its way to Kaesong. During transportation 30 to 40 bowls were usually stacked, bound in a wooden frame, and cushioned with straw for protection. Over 3000 celadon vessels have been recovered from shipwrecks off the southern and western coast of Korea.

Lent by Jeonju National Museum, Korea
Three bowls
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Bian Island, Gunsan
Celadon-glazed stoneware

Many of the ceramics in this section come from the sea near Bian Island, one kilometre from the coast of Gunsan City in South Korea. They were excavated by the Korean National Research Institute of Maritime Cultural Heritage in 2002–03.

Lent by Jeonju National Museum, Korea
Ceramic exports to Japan (1400–1600)

Ceramics made in the Joseon period, especially *buncheong* stoneware, were highly regarded in Japan. They appealed to a Japanese aesthetic that was centred on the appreciation of tea.

**Tea bowl**
Edo period, early 1600s
Fukuoka, Japan
Glazed stoneware

Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia Franks.1843.a

Japanese kilns producing Korean-influenced stoneware were created during the 1500s. From 1639 to 1717 a kiln operated in the Korean port city of Busan, producing ceramics for the Japanese market.

**Bowl**
Joseon period, 1500–1600
*Buncheong* stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea
Bowl
Joseon period, 1400–1500
*Buncheong* stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

Covered bowl
Joseon period, 1400–1500
*Buncheong* stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

Bowl
Joseon period, 1400–1500
*Buncheong* stoneware
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

Two bowls and one dish
Joseon period, 1500–1600
Glazed porcelain
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

These three white porcelain vessels were for use by the court, high officials and wealthy elites. They were produced at the official kilns called *Bunwon*, near Seoul.
Bowls
Joseon period, 1500–1600
Glazed porcelain
Lent by the National Museum of Korea

These bowls were made in Korea for everyday use. These products of regional kilns inspired Japanese kilns to make similar stoneware.
Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods
(about AD 300–668 and AD 676–935)

Pottery in the Three Kingdoms period

Silla pottery was often raised on a stem and had a ritual function. During the Three Kingdoms period wheels and closed kilns were used for making pottery. Surfaces were coated with a natural glaze made from the ashes in the kiln. Silla and Gaya, neighbouring powers, left behind large quantities of stoneware. Their pottery is more heavily decorated than Goguryeo and Baekje pottery from the period.
**Vessel in the shape of a duck**  
Three Kingdoms period  
(Gaya confederacy), AD 400–450  
Stoneware

Duck-shaped vessels are only found in Gaya tombs. They are containers for alcohol or water and were used in funerary rituals, probably to guide the soul of the deceased to the afterlife. After these ceremonies the vessels were buried with the deceased.

Ex-Gowland collection.  
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks  
Asia OA+.583

Image: Three Kingdoms period powers, about AD 450.
Stand

Three Kingdoms period
(Gaya confederacy), AD 300–400
Stoneware

This type of stand was used to support a round-bottomed jar. The ceramics technology used in Gaya enabled the development of Sueki pottery in Japan. Pottery from Gaya is similar to early Silla pottery. However, Gaya pottery features curved shapes and vertical cut-outs.

Asia 1994,0521.15
Jar and stand
Three Kingdoms period
(Gaya confederacy), AD 350–500
Stoneware

Round-bottomed jars on supporting stands were commonly used in Baekje, Silla and Gaya. After about AD 400, jars on stands became an important grave good in large tombs, and the shape of the stands grew impractically tall and cylindrical. The diversity of stand shapes allows scholars to identify different powers within the Gaya confederacy.

Asia 1993,0816.2.a-b
Lidded stem-cup
Three Kingdoms period (Silla kingdom), AD 450–500
Stoneware

Large quantities of stoneware including stem-cups were excavated from Silla and Gaya tombs. They were probably used to hold food in funerary rites. Grave goods reflect the religious belief that the deceased were to be buried with provisions for their existence in the afterlife.

Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia OA+.582

Jar
Three Kingdoms period (Silla kingdom), AD 400–450
Stoneware

Silla pottery was more similar to Gaya’s pottery than any other state’s in the Three Kingdoms period. Silla and Gaya pottery was harder and less absorbent than the stoneware made in Baekje and Goguryeo. Early Silla pottery had similar shapes to Gaya examples, but later it developed linear forms and thin vessel walls.

Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia OA+.603
Cup with a handle
Three Kingdoms period (Silla kingdom), AD 400–450
Stoneware

The year AD 400 marks a turning point in the history of the Gaya confederacy. Silla and Goguryeo combined forces to fight the Gaya-Japan forces. In AD 400 Silla-Goguryeo had a sweeping victory. Busan, where this cup was made, fell from Gaya’s rule to the dominion of Silla.

Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia OA+.597
Bowl with stamped decoration
Unified Silla period, AD 700–800
Stoneware

Vessels became more uniform across the peninsula after Silla annexed Goguryeo and Baekje and ruled considerable parts of the territory. In the Three Kingdoms period incised circular or triangular patterns were popular. This type of decoration was superseded by stamping from the late AD 500s through to the early AD 800s.
Asia 1994,0521.6
Tombs and treasures

The Silla kingdom (traditionally 57 BC–AD 676) is famous for its colossal elite tombs. The people of Silla buried large quantities of exceptional treasures, including gold jewellery, to ensure the continued prosperity of the deceased during the afterlife. The construction method of the tombs made them almost impossible to rob. After the introduction of Buddhist burial customs and the unification of the peninsula under Silla, these lavish burials came to an end.
Earrings
Three Kingdoms period (Silla kingdom), AD 400–600
Gold

These earrings were worn by noblemen and women. Gold crowns and ornaments, including rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces, were excavated from tombs of the Silla nobility. The gold was mined in Korea, but the design and decoration method of the jewellery shows connections with Central Asia and Siberia.

Asia 1938,0524.238, 243-245.a-b

Image: Mounded tombs at Gyeongju, Silla’s capital.
© Seyoon Oh
Funerary urn
Unified Silla period, AD 700–900
Stoneware with natural ash glaze

Urns were nested in a stoneware or granite outer case and buried at the foot of a mountain. Shapes of urns often matched vessels made for daily use, but had more decoration. Sometimes pieces of house-shaped pottery and three-coloured (sancai) ware from Tang China (AD 618–906) were used as urns.

Asia 1936,1012.289.a-b

Funerary urn
Unified Silla period, AD 800–900
Stoneware

Buddhism introduced cremation burials to Korea, and these did not require large numbers of grave goods. The days of Silla’s golden burials were gone. This and the vessel nearby are urns for holding the cremated ashes of the deceased. Cremation reached its peak during the Unified Silla period.

Donated by Dr A. G. Poulsen-Hansen
Asia 1992,0615.37

32
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)

Ornaments
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)
Gilded and openwork bronze

Many Goryeo tombs were looted, so few ornaments have come from secure archaeological contexts. Their use is difficult to determine. Remnants of thread on ornaments in the National Museum of Korea suggest that they were sewn onto fabric for decoration. String could have been passed through the loop at the bottom of each ornament.

Asia 1945,1017.225; 1938,0524.354, 356, 360-363
Section 3 – Case 6

**Button**
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

The crane was a favoured motif in Goryeo celadon. Buttons like this would have created a sumptuous impression when several were sewn in a row. Together with the pillow and cupstand in this case, the button attests to the opulent lifestyle the upper class could enjoy.

Donated by Kim Young-kwon
Asia 2000,1130.2
Spoons and chopsticks
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)
Bronze

In the Unified Silla period (AD 676–935) a round spoon and an oval spoon made a set. From the Goryeo period chopsticks are found with spoons. Even then, spoons found in tombs outnumber chopsticks. The prominence of spoons shows that soups and stews were an important part of the diet. In today’s Korean table settings a spoon and chopsticks make a set.

Asia 1926,0407.13; 1938,0524.484, 539
Bottle, *maebyeong*
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed stoneware

The body is completely covered with lotus buds, full-bloom flowers and leaves. Incising alone created this decorative effect as the pooling glaze in the depressions left by the incisions looks darker. Incising was more actively used when appreciation of the glaze colour was more significant than the decoration.

Donated by Brenda Zara Seligman
Asia 1940,1214.313
Incense burner stand
Goryeo period, 1358
Silver-inlaid bronze

This stand shows beautiful inlay work featuring a flying dragon. According to the inscription around the base, it was a pious offering for the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha at Sojaesa Temple on Biseul Mountain, Daegu, north Gyeongsang province. The two major contributors, monk Myohae and Dalhae wished for the long life of King Gongmin (r. 1351–74) and the royal family.

Donated by Lady Invernairn
Asia 1945, 1110.1
Tea drinking in the Goryeo period

The tea bowl is one of the most common shapes found in Goryeo celadon. The number of surviving tea bowls attests to the popularity of tea drinking among Goryeo’s elites. Cone-shaped bowls with considerable capacity were suitable for the type of tea consumed at the time. Tea leaves were finely ground and whipped in a bowl to make foamed tea.

Tea bowl
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed stoneware with underglaze copper red decoration

This celadon bowl is one of the very few examples in which copper-red was used solely and extensively for its decoration. Copper pigment is extremely volatile. Developing red colour from it involved full control of the pigment, glaze and firing.

Asia 1938,0524.763
Image: The underside of the bowl.
Tea bowl
Goryeo period, early 1100s
Celadon-glazed stoneware

Celadon was produced in Korea from the mid-AD 800s and reached its peak during the Goryeo period (AD 918–1392). Phoenixes are incised on the inside of this bowl. Incised celadon vessels appear in the 1100s, slightly earlier than inlaid decoration.

Seligman Bequest
Asia 1973,0726.393

Image: Detail of a phoenix incised into the inner wall of the bowl.
Tea bowl with a sexagenary cycle year
Goryeo period, probably 1329
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

Some Goryeo-period vessels refer to a year in the Chinese sexagenary (60 year) cycle. Dated vessels from 1329–47 attest to the fact that the production of inlaid celadon continued until the first half of the 1300s despite the Mongol invasions of Korea (1231–70) and the subsequent disruptions.

Asia 1936,1012.131
The path to inlaid decoration

After the development of a monochrome celadon glaze, potters sought to satisfy the growing desire to decorate the surface with colours. It was extremely difficult to achieve, as celadon was fired at over 1250°C, a temperature at which most colours are volatile. A technique inspired by inlaid metalwork was successful. Ceramics were inlaid with different coloured clays (sanggam). Inlaid celadon continued to gain in popularity during the Goryeo period.

Kundika
Goryeo period, late 1100s
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

The kundika is a bottle used to store water for Buddhist rituals or daily use. The same shape was made in both bronze and celadon. The peony motif was first carved into the body, then filled with white clay before glazing. This was a unique technique, as no other cultures inlaid their celadon stoneware.

Asia 1936,1012.198.a-b
Section 3 – Case 6

**Bottle, maebyeong**
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Celadon-glazed stoneware with underglaze iron brown decoration

Intense and lively floral patterns were painted with a brush using iron pigments. Vessels of this type are usually referred to as *maebyeong*, or ‘plum-blossom bottles’. They might have had several functions. Some examples excavated from shipwrecks have labels that say they are containers for honey. Others were used to hold alcohol.

Donated by Jean and Rachel Alexander
Asia 1931,0618.1
Cupstand
Goryeo period, 1200–1400
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

A small but elaborate cup for wine would have sat on this stand. The stand was first moulded and incised to copy the surface of a flower. Each foot was inlaid with floral decoration in black and white. Celadon was widely used by the upper classes. Excavations revealed that even chairs and roof tiles could be made of celadon.

Asia 1911,0607.15

Image: An example of a cup and cupstand of the Goryeo period. Donated by H. Fajon. Asia 1965,1015.2
Pillow
Goryeo period, 1100–1300
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

More comfortable than they might seem, ceramic pillows were popular in Korea and China for many centuries. They first appeared in China’s Tang dynasty (AD 618–906) and were used in middle and upper class bedrooms. Maybe they encouraged certain sleeping positions. Perhaps people believed they improved health, or influenced dreams. They were used in burials, too, supporting the head in death.

Asia 1936,1012.287
Lacquerware of the Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)

Only about twenty lacquer objects from the Goryeo period are known today. These are admired for their beauty and the sophisticated techniques used to make them. Many layers of tree sap were painted onto a wooden core and each was left to harden (cure) before the next was applied. Next, decorations were added, like the delicate flowers on these boxes. The lacquer surface was inlaid with mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell or wire.
Box for Buddhist scriptures
(sutras)
Goryeo period, 1200–1300
Lacquered wood inlaid with
mother-of-pearl and silver wire

On this box silver wires form the
branches and stems of chrysanthemums
which were inlaid in mother-of-pearl.
The pattern here resembles the inlay on
celadon stonewares. The box was used
to hold sutras that were folded
in a concertina format.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
Asia 1966,1221.1

Image: Detail of the inlay decoration of
this sutra box.
Box
Goryeo period, 1100–1200
Lacquered wood, originally inlaid with mother-of-pearl

The chrysanthemum decoration was probably made of mother-of-pearl. The petals may have been highlighted by tortoiseshell pieces covered in vermilion pigment. The box might have belonged to a set of mother-and-child boxes, a small round box surrounded by four crescent-shaped boxes such as this.

Asia 1937,0416.217

Image: Vermilion pigment paste, once probably covered by very thin shell inlay.
Cosmetic box
Goryeo period, 1100–1300
Celadon-glazed and inlaid stoneware

This box was probably used alongside a cosmetic box, like the crescent-shaped lacquer box. Most cosmetics were made from natural ingredients, like cucumber (lotion), safflower (rouge) and grains and seeds (face powder).

Asia 1936,1012.127
Early Joseon period (1392–about 1600)

Changing times, changing tastes

With its dark green glaze and stylised inlay decoration, this bottle stands at the transition from the Goryeo celadon wares to *buncheong* wares (1400s to mid-1500s). Building on the Goryeo celadon technologies, potters developed new techniques for decoration. They focussed their creativity on surface embellishment rather than the glaze.
Bottle, *maebyeong* or prunus vase
Joseon period, early 1400s
*Buncheong* ware with inlaid decoration

Although reminiscent of Goryeo celadon, the colour of this vessel is more greyish green as indicated by the modern term *buncheong* (powdered green). *Buncheong* wares were widely used from the royal court to ordinary homes, but were replaced by white porcelain from about 1550, as taste changed.

*Asia 1936,1012.129*

Image: Detail of fish decoration, a new fashion in the early 1400s.
Painted bottle
Joseon period, about 1500
Buncheong ware; stoneware painted with iron-oxide over white slip

Painted buncheong wares are characterised by bold motifs, with rapid and lively brushwork that often crosses the boundaries between bands of decoration. They were made at the kilns on Mount Gyeryong in Chungcheongnam-do province, central Korea. This bottle was probably used to hold alcohol.

Donated by Stanley Smith
Asia 1946,0721.1
Jar with mixed decoration
Joseon period, 1400–1500
Buncheong ware, stoneware with incised and stamped decoration

A number of decorative techniques are combined on this jar. The sweeping strokes became a distinctive design element. They were not created by a brush, but by incising the lines into the vessel and colouring them with slip.

Asia 1994,0521.1

Dish with stamped decoration
Joseon period, 1400–1500
Buncheong ware, stoneware with stamped decoration in white slip

After making the vessel on the potter’s wheel, stamps with various motifs were impressed into the body. Then the piece was dipped in white slip (a mixture of clay and water), which was wiped off the surface to leave the stamped parts only.

Asia 1993,1025.2
Patterned bowl
Joseon period, 1400–1500
*Buncheong* ware, stoneware with stamped decoration in white slip

The earliest *buncheong* ware had stamped decoration and was regarded as a type of luxury good, mostly used in courts and government offices. Later, its status changed as efficient manufacturing reduced costs and led to the widespread distribution of *buncheong*.

Donated by George Eumorfopoulos
Asia 1911,0607.22
Painted jar
Joseon period, about 1500
Buncheong ware, stoneware painted with iron-oxide over white slip

Bold application of white slip provided greater freedom for the application of painted decoration. These painted wares from the kilns on Mount Gyeryong in Chungcheongnam-do province were among the last buncheong wares produced there. At about 1500 the kilns turned to making porcelain.

Asia 1992,0313.1
Stoneware imitating porcelain
Joseon period, early 1500s
*Buncheong* ware, stoneware dipped in white slip

The dipping of ceramics in white slip marks the last phase of *buncheong* decoration. The decoration is reduced to the white slip itself. The technique became popular from the early 1500s. Such *buncheong* wares were widely made in Jeollanam-do province, in the southwest of the Korean peninsula.

Donated by Dr A.G. Poulsen-Hansen
Asia 1992,0615.44
Material shifts: metal and ceramics

Metal was often in short supply in Korea, due to demand for tributes to China, military use, coinage and printing type. High government demand for bronze also created a shortage of metal for tableware and ritual vessels. These bowls are rare examples of early Joseon metalwork (1400–1600). Vessels that would have been made of metal were increasingly replaced by ceramics with similar forms and decorations.
Iron bowls
Joseon period, 1400–1600
Iron inlaid with silver and gold

The Chinese inscription around the rims of the bowls reads ‘longevity’. These bowls may have been used to present offerings to ancestors. This was an important duty in Korean society, which was influenced by the moral framework of Confucianism.

Asia 1978,0626.1-2

Image: Detail of the inlaid inscription.
Late Joseon period (about 1600–1910)

The rise of porcelain

During the Joseon period (1392–1910) society was restructured in line with Confucian ideas. Confucian scholars in Korea used the dragon to symbolise political order and good government. Importing Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in the early 1400s stimulated production and a preference for porcelain in Korea. The blue pigment was extremely expensive, so only kings used blue-and-white porcelain.
A family heirloom
Joseon period, 1700–1800
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue and iron brown decoration

This jar is inscribed: ‘To be handed down to the sons and grandsons of the Kim family’. Jars with dragon designs were used in court rituals until the 1800s. Because of their exclusivity and scarcity, the family must have been proud to own one, as the inscription suggests.

Donated by W. M. Tapp
Asia 1913,1007.1
Banqueting vessels
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Glazed porcelain

White porcelain was highly sought after but was not easily attainable in the early Joseon period. By the late Joseon period porcelain was mass produced for everyday use among the wider population. Many paintings from this period depict these white porcelain pieces on banquet tables.

Asia 1946,0720.2
Donated by Dr W. G. K. Barnes
Asia 1899,0612.1

Faceted jar
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Glazed porcelain

In the early 1800s a variety of new stationery was invented. This multi-faceted vessel could have served on a scholar’s desk. Plum-blossom patterns are moulded on the surface.

Asia 1946,0720.5
Blue for all
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration

Blue-and-white porcelain became more accessible in the late Joseon period. One of the reasons was the cheap blue pigment imported from Beijing, China. It was used to create blue designs. Towards the end of the Joseon period it became fashionable to cover entire vessels in blue.

Asia 1991,0813.1
Jar painted with orchids
Joseon period, 1600–1700
Porcelain with underglaze iron brown decoration

In the 1600s the economy collapsed amid armed conflicts with Japan and China. Instead of expensive cobalt blue mostly sourced through China, iron was widely used as a substitute for decorating porcelain. This vessel shape, commonly known as a ‘moon jar’, was also a new invention of this period.

DONATED BY K. R. MALCOLM
ASIA 1957,0514.1
Placenta jar
Joseon period, 1600–1900
Glazed porcelain

In the late Joseon period (about 1600–1910) it was traditional for aristocrats and the royal family to bury the umbilical cord and placenta of newborns. They believed that this would ensure the well-being of the child. This inner jar would have been bound tightly with string. At least two outer jars would have surrounded it.

Seligman Bequest
Asia 1973,0726.403
Royal ritual dish
Joseon period, mid-1800s
Glazed porcelain

Porcelain vessels with stippled inscriptions in Korean hangeul script appeared from the late 1830s to the 1880s, as hangeul became widespread. The inscription usually appears inside or alongside the foot ring. This inscription reveals that the dish is one of a set of 700 pieces commissioned for ritual use by the royal palace.

Donated by Dr W. G. K. Barnes
Asia 1899,0612.6

The inscription on the base reads (top to bottom, right to left):
큰덮고간 To be used in the royal palace
대동쇼 [made in] large, medium and small sizes
칠십육 [one of] 700 pieces
Dragon jar
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration

Owing to the economic growth of the 1800s, porcelain was in demand by the wider population. Despite tight regulations the government-controlled kilns began covertly catering to the growing demand. The dragon jars of the 1800s feature longer necks and more humorous depictions of dragons.

Asia 1969,0618.1
Moon jar
Joseon period, 1650–1750
Glazed porcelain

The milky-white glaze and shape of these vessels led to them being known as ‘full moon jars’. Very few examples of this quality have survived. They are seen as embodiments of austerity, frugality and purity, principles favoured by Confucianism, the dominant ideology of the Joseon period (1392–1910).

Hahn Kwang-ho Purchase Fund
Asia 1999,0302.1
The moon jar, Bernard Leach and British studio pottery

Moon jars influenced the style of British pottery. Bernard Leach (1887–1979) is regarded as the father of British studio pottery. He was inspired by East Asian ceramic traditions and acquired this jar on a trip to Korea. East Asian ceramics reflected the traditional artisan pottery that the British studio potters strove to rediscover. Leach left this jar to the potter Lucie Rie (1902–1995) who kept it until her death.

Image: Lucie Rie with the moon jar at Albion Mews, London, about 1990. © Zoë Dominic
Buddha

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha (about 500–400 BC), known as Buddha Sakyamuni. His teachings, physical remains and images became the focus of worship. As Buddhist doctrine developed, the idea of innumerable Buddhas and bodhisattvas (Buddhas-to-be) emerged to emphasise the universal accessibility of awakening. In East Asia Amitabha and Ksitigarbha enjoyed great popularity due to the comfort they give upon one’s death.

Ksitigarbha and the Ten Kings of Hell
Joseon period, dated 1868
Mineral colours on hemp

A dead soul must pass trials in ten hells in front of the Ten Kings of Hell (depicted as Chinese magistrates) before its fate is determined. Families commissioned paintings like this in the hope that Ksitigarbha (depicted as a shaven-headed monk) would defend their relatives on trial.

Asia 1959,1010,0.2
Guardians of Buddhist realm

The four Heavenly Kings were popular in worship and representation in Korean Buddhist art. As defenders of the law of Buddha, they are found as paintings and sculptures at the entrances to temples. Fierce with bulging eyes, often trampling down a demon, they guard the Three Jewels: Buddha (the Awakened), dharma (the Teaching) and sangha (the Buddhist community).

Heavenly King of the North
Joseon period, dated 1796–1820
Mineral colours on hemp

The four Heavenly Kings are often associated with the four cardinal directions. These two huge paintings guarded south and north. The direction is identified through symbols: the lute (north), the dragon with a wish-fulfilling jewel (south). The size of these paintings, the dynamic depiction and the green and red mineral colours are typical of Joseon-period Buddhist paintings.

Asia 1920,0317,0.2
70
Heavenly King of the South
Joseon period, dated 1796–1820
Mineral colours on hemp

The King’s name and the direction that he guards are written in the upper right corner of this painting. This and the nearby painting bear inscriptions of later devotees. Nearly twenty people wrote their names, where they came from and the date they travelled. Most of them were from Daegu, where these paintings may have come from.

Asia 1920,0317,0.3

Image: Two of the four Heavenly Kings in the entrance hall of Jikjisa Temple, Gimcheon, Republic of Korea.
Buddhist teaching (*dharma*)

After Buddha Sakyamuni’s death, his teachings were compiled into three groups of scriptures (*sutras*): sermons, instructions for monastic life, and commentaries. As Buddhism was transmitted to East Asia from India, *sutras* originally written in Sanskrit were translated into Chinese and then distributed through copying and printing. Even after the invention of printing, many sutras were deliberately hand-copied, reflecting religious devotion.
Woodblock for printing
Buddhist texts
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Wood

The growth of Buddhism spread the practice of copying and transmitting the sacred texts. Before modern typesetting developed, Korea produced books using woodblocks, movable type and by hand.

On two occasions when Goryeo (AD 918–1392) was threatened with Mongol invasions, the entire corpus of Buddhist texts was produced on over 80,000 woodblocks as an act of devotion to solicit the Buddha’s protection.

Donated by Mrs Keum Ja Kang
Asia 1997,0227.2

Image: Rendering of a printed page made from this woodblock.
Surangama sutra (Neung-eom-gyeong)
Calligraphy by Yun Baek-ha (1680–1741) with a colophon by Sin Wi (1769–1845)
Joseon period, early 1700s
Ink on gold-flecked paper

This sutra stresses the power of concentrated meditation to combat delusions during practice. It was important to the Seon (Chan) School, with their emphasis on continual self-discipline. Part of the sutra has been selected here by a Confucian scholar and calligrapher Yun Baek-ha.

Asia 1997,0720,0.1

‘When a wise man points his finger to the moon, a fool regards the finger as the moon… He will not be able to tell brightness and darkness, because one who thinks the finger is the bright nature of the moon will not ever learn the two binary natures of the brightness and the darkness.’

A well-known passage from the sutra.
The Buddhist monastic community (sangha)

The Buddhist monastic community also included nuns and laypeople. It began as the group of disciples who renounced the worldly life to follow and practise the Buddha’s teachings. In Korea, the *sangha* (Buddhist monastic community) was never independent from the state. During the Goryeo period (AD 918–1392), the government conducted exams to select priest-officials and the *sangha* supplied master-advisors to the kings. A bureaucratic system was developed to control the *sangha*.
Portrait of a Buddhist monk
Joseon period, about 1750
Ink and mineral colours on silk

Commemorative portraits of Buddhist masters were commissioned by their disciples. These portraits helped to legitimise their monastery’s authority. Some monks specialised in painting. Although the poses are formulaic, the faces show individuality. This is a portrait of Taeamdang, a monk of the Seon School of Buddhism in Korea.

Asia 1936,1009,0.121
The Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*)

**Razors**  
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)  
Bronze

Shaving one’s head is a symbolic act when joining the Buddhist priesthood. The *sangha* regards hair as ‘ignorant grass’ associated with earthly desires. Shaving the hair is seen as a demonstration of the will to break with attachment to self, temptation and deviations that obstruct practice.

Asia 1938,0524.494-497
**Kundika**
Goryeo period, 1000–1200
Bronze

In India, where Buddhism originated, the *kundika* was one of the few personal belongings monks and nuns were allowed. It was used for drinking water. Later it began to be used as a ritual object. The ritual was conducted by sprinkling purified water on the altar. This act was believed to clear all anguish.

Asia 1974,1031.1

Image: Portrait of a monk and his possessions. Ink on paper. Stein Collection. Dunhuang, China, AD 851–950
**Alms bowl**
Joseon period, 1800s–early 1900s
Wood

In the Seon School, Buddhist teachings were passed down directly from a master to disciples. An alms bowl, primarily used to collect donations from lay devotees, was given to the most prominent disciple. It became a sign of approval from the master to his disciple.

Asia As1905,1115.58
Ceremonial robe
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Cotton with streamers of coloured silk thread

Robes worn by monks and nuns (kasaya) were made from a patchwork of discarded fabric. Although intended to reflect frugality and nonattachment to worldly things, these ceremonial robes were sometimes elaborately decorated. Some had silk streamers and colourful panels with patterns wishing well-being for the wearer.

Asia As1905,1115.63

Cap
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Hemp

Buddhist monks and nuns dressed according to monastic rules. However, they had caps similar to those worn by lay people. Conical caps were worn when not officiating. Such caps were also worn by low-ranking officials in the Joseon period. Conical caps are still sometimes worn, for example during festivals and ceremonies.

Ex-Gowland Collection
Asia 1895,1108.1
The Abbot of Yu-chom-sa Temple
Angus Hamilton (1874–1913)
Korea, 1904

As seen from the hierarchical arrangement in the photo, conical caps were considered appropriate for assistant monks. The author Angus Hamilton went to Korea as a representative of the Pall Mall Gazette around 1900. The book covers topical issues on Korea including manners and customs, trades, industries, resources, and existing crises between foreign powers.

Anthropology Library and Research Centre, British Museum
Forming the collection

Thomas Watters, diplomat


Image: The British legation in Seoul, early 1900s. © From Homer B. Hulbert (1863-1949), The Passing of Korea, 1906
Objects from Watters’ collection

**Tobacco pouch**
Late 1800s
Pressed paper
Donated by Thomas Watters
Asia As,+.4033

**Blind**
Late 1800s
Bamboo and silk
Donated by Thomas Watters
Asia As,+.4326

**Two fans**
Late 1800s
Paper, bamboo and lacquer
Donated by Thomas Watters
Asia As,+.4037; As,+.4038
William Gowland, amateur archaeologist

William Gowland (1842–1922) was a British metallurgist who worked for the Japanese mint in Osaka. He was interested in the relationship between the ceramics of Korea and Japan. Gowland visited Korea in 1884, travelling between Seoul and Busan. He collected an impressive assortment of Three Kingdoms pottery, now held by the British Museum. Finds from his excavations in Japan are on view in the Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries, Rooms 92-94.

Image: William Gowland in the burial chamber of Tsukahara Kofun, Japan, about 1880.
© Trustees of the British Museum
Jar stand
Busan, Korea
Three Kingdoms period
(Gaya confederacy), AD 400–500
Stoneware
Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia OA+.606

‘In form, inscribed designs, marks of matting, and the material of which they are made, many [Korean vessels] are allied to the sepulchral vessels of the dolmens of Japan, but they are not identical.’ – William Gowland

Image: Korean (left) and Japanese (right) pottery collected by William Gowland, about 1890.
© Trustees of the British Museum
Objects from Gowland’s collection

Tazza with stand
Shiratori Misasagi, Japan
Late Kofun period, about AD 550–600
*Sueki* ware, stoneware with natural ash glaze

Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia Franks.2250

Pedestal jar
Rokuya dolmen, Kansai, Japan
Late Kofun period, about AD 530–560
*Sueki* ware, stoneware with natural ash glaze

Ex-Gowland collection.
Donated by Sir A. W. Franks
Asia Franks.2226.a
George Eumorfopoulos, art collector

The British-born son of a wealthy Greek merchant, Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939) was one of the most significant European collectors of East Asian art. He amassed a large collection, including many Korean objects. Financial considerations forced him to sell his collection to the nation. It was divided between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Image: Korean and Chinese objects displayed in Eumorfopoulos’ home, 7 Chelsea Embankment, 1934.

Censer
Goryeo period, 1300–1400
Bronze inlaid with silver and gold

Such pieces were made for use in Buddhist temples and the Goryeo royal court. At court burning incense marked the beginning of a ritual. In temples it marked the beginning of a sermon. Incense burners were decorated with one, four, or six siddham (seed) characters, which formed a verse or a chant.

Asia 1936,1118.196
Section 5 – Case 13

**Pair of scissors**  
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)  
Bronze  
Asia 1938,0524.491

**Needle case**  
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)  
Bronze, silver, gold  
Asia 1938,0524.536

**Seven hairpins**  
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)  
Bronze  
Asia 1938.0524,511, 518, 520, 524, 528; OA+.105, 107

**Mirror**  
Goryeo period, 1000–1200  
Bronze  
Asia 1936,1118.101

**Two sets of belt plaques**  
Goryeo period (AD 918–1392)  
Jade  
Asia 1938,0524.680-682; 1945,1017.245.a-j

90
Collecting contemporary Korean art

**Summer trees**
Song Soo-nam (1938–2013)
Republic of Korea, 1979
Ink on paper

Song Soo-nam, Professor Emeritus of Hongik University in Seoul, was one of Korea’s foremost ink painters. Known for his lush use of black ink, Song saw black ink as reflecting ‘Koreanness’. His approach to ink paintings reflected other assertions of national identity, such as South Korea’s successful 1981 bid for the 1988 Summer Olympics.

Asia 1995,1012,0.8
Plate
Park Young-sook (b. 1947) and Lee Ufan (b. 1936)
Republic of Korea, 1994
Porcelain, underglaze cobalt blue

The plate was thrown by ceramic artist Park Young-sook who is also known for her recreations of moon jars. The plate was signed and decorated by painter Lee Ufan. These two leading artists of their generation collaborated to produce a limited edition of tableware, including this plate.

Donated by Park Young-sook
Asia 1996,0619.4
Grandmother
Oh Yun (1946–1986)
Republic of Korea, 1983
Colour woodcut

Oh was one of the leading figures in the People’s Art (Minjung Misul) movement of the 1980s. The movement protested against the unfair distribution of wealth resulting from the ‘economic miracle’ that began in 1962. He produced images of exhausted factory girls and poor peasants using the traditional woodblock technique.

Asia 1997,1107,0.2
Black luster 0819
Chung Haecho (b. 1945)
Republic of Korea, 2008
Hemp cloth coated in lacquer

Chung Haecho is a lacquer (ottchil) artist and Professor Emeritus of Pai Chai University. Usually wooden cores are used for lacquer pieces, but these organic forms are made by shaping the vessel around a Styrofoam model. He uses multiple layers of coloured lacquer and polishing to finish the pieces.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund; Marjorie Coldwell Fund
Asia 2013,3013.1
Paintings for export
(1800–1900)

Korean export paintings

Western travellers began visiting Korea after its ports were opened by a treaty in 1876. They brought home genre paintings which captured scenes of everyday life. The souvenirs illustrated the little-known country. Kisan, the penname of Kim Jun-geun (active in 1880–1900), was one of the genre painters who responded quickly to this growing demand.
Kisan’s paintings

Kisan painted a wide range of Korean subject matter. As in many other Asian export paintings, his skilfully captured a moment in everyday life and constructed a story from it. He inherited the genre painting tradition of the 1700s–1800s, represented by Yun Duseo (1668–1715), Kim Hongdo (1745–about 1806) and Sin Yunbok (about 1758–after 1813).

Noodle pressers
Making wooden shoes
Funerary ritual
Selling bowls
About 1880–1900
Ink on English notepaper

Donated by General Becher
Asia OA+, 0.432.5, 28, 66, 70
Capturing scenes of Korea

Kisan’s genre paintings should be understood in relation to Asian export paintings of the 1800s. There are parallels in compositions, as well as interest in crafts, trades, and subjects like funerals and executions. To meet the high demand, especially around 1885–95, he collaborated with other painters, using a model book.

Playing Korean chess, baduk
Stewart Culin (1858–1929)
Korean Games, 1895

The image shown is a faithful copy of Kisan’s coloured illustration. Culin was an American ethnographer with a strong interest in games. Korean Games was his first book, followed by writings on games from Native America, Hawaii, the Philippines and Japan.

Anthropology Library and Research Centre, British Museum
Korean Sketches
James Scarth Gale (1863–1937)
Korean Sketches, 1898

Kisan provided 42 illustrations for the first work of Western literature to be printed in the Korean hangeul script, Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan. It was translated by Gale, a Canadian missionary, who travelled widely in Korea and established a mission in Wonsan (in present-day Democratic People’s Republic of Korea).

Anthropology Library and Research Centre, British Museum
Indian paintings in the British period

As with the Korean export paintings, Indian paintings in the British period depicted trades, occupations and customs. These subjects were sketched by local artists for clients from Europe, India and East India Company officers. These so-called ‘Company paintings’ blended local Indian and European techniques, and focused on Indian culture and customs, including dress and jewellery. Examples from southern India usually feature two people bearing the implements of their trade.
Religious couples
Thanjavur, Southern India
About 1830
Watercolour on English paper

This detailed watercolour by a local artist depicts three Hindu couples from various sub-groups of priests and devotional followers in southern India. Some can be seen with prominent veneration marks pasted on their forehead and arms. Their accoutrements and dress distinguish their social and religious identities.

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
Asia 2005,0503,0.1
A silversmith and his assistant
Patna, Eastern India
About 1850
Watercolour on paper

This painting by an artist from a family-run workshop in Patna is from a set depicting various trades. Here, a silversmith hammers an object on an anvil and his assistant works on a forge with a pair of tongs. The two men are surrounded by instruments of their trade.

Bequeathed by P. C. Manuk and G. M. Coles through the Art Fund
Asia 1949,1008,0.28
Jugal Kishore Gosain of Delhi with his attendant Gokuldas and other residents
Delhi, India
About 1820
Watercolour on paper

Made by a Delhi artist, this portrait depicts Hindu religious figures whose names and designations are written in English and Persian, languages commonly used in British-administered India. Delhi pictures rarely followed the typical ‘Company’-style and most were sketched from life.

Asia 1966,1010,0.7
Chinese export paintings

In the 1800s and 1900s artists in Canton and other Chinese ports created paintings for export. Like Korean export paintings, they were often sold as souvenirs to Europeans and later Americans. Depicting trades, pastimes, boats, architecture, costumes and natural history, they are a lens through which we can perceive contemporary life in China.

People from Shandong province
China
1800–1900
Colours on paper

Paintings for export frequently depict people and their costumes from different places in China. This painting shows people from Shandong province on the east coast.

Donated by Sarah Maria Reeves
Asia 1877,0714,0.1254
Making tassels for hats
China
1800–1900
Colours on paper

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) men wore caps or hats with a button and a red silk tassel. The man at the back is combing the silk, the man at the front is trimming the tassel. This painting is similar to paintings by Kisan with their interest in trades.

Donated by Sarah Maria Reeves
Asia 1877,0714,0.844
Korea from the West, about 1900

A Korean shrine
Lilian May Miller (1895–1943)
USA, 1928
Colour woodcut

This building may be part of the group of buildings at a royal tomb. It is probably the hall where sacrifices for the deceased were conducted. Miller visited Korea when her father was posted there. She produced many prints of Korean people and the countryside.

Donated by Lilian May Miller
P&D 1930,0131.1

Image: The stele house of Gangneung, tomb for King Myeongjong (1534–1567) and Queen Insun (1532–1575) in Seoul.
© National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage
Seoul, West gate
Ernest S. Lumsden (1883–1948)
Britain, 1911
Etching

West Gate (Seodaemun) is one of the eight gates protecting Seoul. In 1899 an electric tramway was built through the gate. But the artist decided not to show the electric poles and the track. In 1915 this building was demolished. From 1910 Lumsden traveled around Japan, Korea and China.

Bequeathed by Campbell Dodgson
P&D 1949,0411.417

Image: West Gate including electric poles and track in Seoul, before 1908. From George Trumbull Ladd (1842-1921), In Korea With Marquis Ito, 1908.
**East Gate – Seoul**
Elizabeth Keith (1887–1956)
Britain, about 1924
Colour woodcut

The East Gate (Dongdaemun) is one of the eight gates of the fortifications that protected Seoul. The donkey carrying loads reflects the fact that an important market was there. Keith developed her own printing style based on traditional Japanese woodcut prints. She visited Korea several times between 1919 and 1939.

Donated by the
Contemporary Art Society
P&D 1928,0310.40

Image: The East Gate in Seoul today. © National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage
The Scholar – Korea
Elizabeth Keith (1887–1956)
Britain, about 1921
Colour woodcut

Describing a ‘country scholar’ she sketched, Keith wrote: ‘It is a wonderful experience to come face to face with an aged Korean scholar. He has a look of breeding, self-discipline, and sweet gentleness, and his manner is gravely courteous. He seems to be in touch with some region of peace remote from the world of to-day.’

Donated by the Contemporary Art Society
P&D 1932,0514.37

Old Korea: The Land of Morning Calm
Elizabeth Keith (1887–1956) and Elspet Keith Robertson Scott (about 1872–1956), 1946

Department of Asia library, British Museum
The East Asian coin tradition

The East Asian tradition of cast bronze coinage began between 700 and 600 BC in China. Knife money (pre-Qin China) and round coins with a square hole (Han China) have been found at archaeological sites in Korea. In the East Asian tradition, the cast bronze disc with a square hole is immediately recognisable as a coin. The inscription can be seen as an assertion of authority and identity.

Joseon tongbo coin
Issued during the reign of King Sejong, 1423
Cast bronze

This coin was issued in the early part of the Joseon period (1392–1910) when there was a growing need for a reliable monetary system. The inscription translates as ‘Circulating treasure of Joseon’.

C&M 1884,0511.1211
The first Korean coins

The earliest Korean coins were issued for just over a century (about AD 996–1105) during the Goryeo period (AD 918–1392). Modelled on Chinese Tang dynasty coins, the inscriptions asserted Korean authority using the ancient and conceptual names of Korea: ‘East of the Sea’ (Haedong), ‘Eastern Kingdom’ (Dongguk) and ‘Three Han’ (Samhan). These coins were not widely circulated and are excavated mainly in the vicinity of the Goryeo capital (present-day Kaesong, DPRK).
Influence and identity
開元通寶  *Kaiyuan tongbao,*
*China – first issued AD 621*
和同開珎  *Wadō kaichin,*
*Japan – first issued AD 70*
乾元重寶  *Qianyuan zhongbao,*
*China – first issued AD 758*
太平興寶  *Thai Binh hung bao,*
*Vietnam – first issued AD 970*
東國通寶  *Dongguk tongbo,*
*Korea – first issued AD 997*
三韓通寶  *Samhan tongbo,*
*Korea – first issued 1097*
海東通寶  *Haedong tongbo,*
*Korea – first issued 1102*
C&M 1884,0511.723; 1884,0511.5;
1884,0511.866; 1884,0511.2233;
1884,0511.1210; 1884,0511.1187;
1884,0511.1190
Stabilisation coinage

Most of the coins from the Korean peninsula in the British Museum’s collection are inscribed ‘Circulating treasure of the Stabilisation’ (Sangpyeong tongbo). This coinage was issued from 1678, and lasted for over 200 years. The Stabilisation was achieved by unifying taxes from various goods in kind to only three forms of payment: rice, cotton and coins. This had the effect of reducing corruption, promoting commerce and monetising the economy.
Issuing offices for *Sangpyeong tongbo* coins

*Sangpyeong tongbo* coins were issued by about fifty different agencies in Korea, including over twenty offices in the capital, Seoul. The agencies are named on the reverse of the coins. The *Sangpyeong tongbo* coinage was contemporary with steady coinages in China and Japan.

China, *Qianlong tongbao* coin, 1736–1795
C&M 1979,0227.214; 1974,0515.89

Japan, *Kan’ei tsūhō* coin, 1624–1868
C&M 1884,0511.179; 1884,0511.339

*Sangpyeong tongbo* coins issued in the capital, Seoul.
1-cash C&M 1886,1006.515;
1886,1006.514
2-cash C&M 1884,0511.1295
5-cash C&M 1979,0305.84
100-cash C&M 1888,1006.24
Sangpyeong tongbo coins issued in townships

Ganghwa, 5-cash C&M 1972,0107.5
Kaesong, 1-cash C&M 1883,0701.694
Iwon, 1-cash C&M CH.998
Suwon, 2-cash C&M 1884,0511.1775
Wonju, 1-cash C&M 1884,0511.1781
Haeju, 2-cash C&M 1884,0511.1862
Chuncheon, 2-cash C&M 2005,1111.58

Donated by J. Towle, D. Barbour and F. Barbour
Gwangju, 2-cash C&M1884,0511.1788

A modern silver coinage for Korea

In 1882 a new coinage was created, with the inscription ‘Silver coin of the Great East’ (Daedong eunjeon). The square hole was replaced with a mintmark covered with blue enamel. A sudden change in the price of silver led to their withdrawal the following year. In 1884 the central mint in Seoul began machine-minting. It produced silver and bronze coins with new denominations, leading to the won.
Silver coinages in East Asia in the 1800s

The Mexican silver dollar (8 reales, ‘pieces of eight’) was used across the world between 1800 and 1900. It inspired a range of new machine-struck silver coins in East Asia.

Mexican dollar (under Spain), 1806
C&M 1964,0216.1
Donated by Miss W. Allen

Mexican dollar (Republic), 1889
C&M 1939,0305.2
Donated by Lt Cdr D. Lampen

Japanese yen, 1882
C&M 1920,0907.1254 Bequeathed by F.W. Hasluck

Korean silver coins: 1-jeon, 2-jeon, 3-jeon, 1882
C&M 1883,0902.6, 4, 1, 2 donated by G.J. Morrison

Chinese silver coin, Guangdong, 1890–1900
C&M 1899,0901.2
Donated by Dr G.K.W. Barnes
Women in the inner chamber

Dress symbols and status

Most surviving women’s objects date to the Joseon period (1392–1910). Often colours and decorative patterns were regulated according to status. The dragon and phoenix were reserved for the queen’s dresses. Exceptions were made on special occasions, such as weddings, allowing commoners to enjoy the privilege of wearing costumes with similar designs. Patterns reflecting family values such as fertility, longevity, and marital harmony were widely used on personal items.
Ceremonial jacket for women, *dang-ui*
Choi Bok-hee (1930–2008)
Silk with gold leaf decoration, paper

The *dang-ui* was worn every day by women at court. It could also be worn by the wives of high officials at ceremonial occasions. It is a long jacket worn over other clothing. It would have been worn with a contrasting-coloured skirt.

Donated by Kang Collection Korean Art, New York
Asia 2014,3047.1
Shoes
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Silk, leather, felt soles, hide and metal nails

Women of noble families wore leather shoes covered with coloured silk. Hobnails helped to keep them clean from mud, extending their lifespan. These leather shoes were replaced by rubber shoes which first appeared in the early 1900s.

Donated by Mrs F. C. Godber
Asia As1945,04.5.a-b

Pendant, *norigae*
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Jade and silk with metallic thread

Donated by Mrs F. C. Godber
Asia As1945,04.10

*Norigae* with a knife case
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Silver, steel, silk and metallic thread

Asia As1905,1115.51
**Mirror box for women’s toiletries**
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Glass mirror and lacquered wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl
Asia 1991,1008.1

**Stoneware oil containers and a cosmetic box**
Goryeo period, 1100–1300
Celadon-glazed stoneware with inlaid decoration
Asia 1911,0607.26; 1991,0813.4; 1973,0726.399.a

**Hair ornaments and hairpin, binyeo**
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Silver with incised enamel and cloisonné decoration
Metal with incised and filigree decoration, enamel
Asia 1991,1220.3-7
Donated by Mrs F. C. Godber
Asia As1945,04.6
Comb
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Wood, ox horn with painted decoration
Asia 1991,1220.2

Wrapping cloth for a wedding letter, *saseong bojagi*
Choi Bok-hee (1930–2008)
Silk, tassel with embroidery decoration

Wedding letters are delivered wrapped in red and blue fabric and threads that symbolise harmony between husband and wife. When a marriage was arranged, a letter containing the four pillars of the bridegroom (birth year, month, day and time) was delivered to his fiancée’s family. They would reply with a selection of auspicious dates for the wedding.

Donated by Kang Collection Korean Art, New York
Asia 2014,3047.2
Wedding wild goose
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Wood with painted decoration

A wooden figure of a wild goose was a central feature of a traditional Korean wedding ceremony. It symbolised fidelity. It was often painted with bright colours, then wrapped in a cloth called a bojagi. The wedding took place at the bride’s home and began with the bridegroom bringing the goose into the house.

Asia 1991,1220.1
Key chain
Joseon period, late 1800s–early 1900s
Bronze, coins, enamel, silk thread

A key chain was a symbol of the privileges that the lady of the house could enjoy. Keys to the stores, safe boxes and chests were tied to each strand. In the upper class, the bride's mother prepared key chains as part of the dowry jewellery.

Donated by Sir Charles Hercules Read
Asia As1920,-.6
Cabinet
Joseon period, about 1900
Wood

Cabinets were usually arranged in pairs under windows. Due to the low ceiling and small size of rooms, cabinets were carefully designed. Their low height prevented the room feeling overcrowded, and did not obstruct a seated person’s view through the window.

Donated by Ogita Etsuzo
Asia As1910,1111.29
A gentleman’s room

Houses in the Joseon period (1392–1910) had different areas reserved for men and women, reflecting Confucian principles. This room, known as a *sarangbang*, and its adjacent floor area were a central part of the outer quarter of a house complex. In this multi-functional space a man studied, greeted guests, dined and slept. The furniture and utensils adorning the room showcase taste, knowledge and wealth.

1. Main gate
2. Outer (*sarang*) quarters for men
3. Inner (*an*) quarters for women
Furnishing the *sarangbang*

Many aspects of everyday life were guided by Confucian principles, including the style of home furnishings. Furniture in the *sarangbang*, a male space, featured simplicity and clarity. Furniture in female spaces was elaborately decorated using metal, lacquer and patterned wood.

1. Stationery chest  
2. Brush pot  
3. Brush hanger  
4. Wall lamp  
5. Paper scroll stand  
6. Shelf  
7. Water dropper  
8. Flower pot  
9. Paper scroll stand
Furnishing the *sarangbang*

Furniture in the *sarangbang*, a male space, featured simplicity and clarity. Furniture in female spaces was elaborately decorated. Korean paper (*hanji*) is applied as a finishing material to a great range of surfaces in such a building: windows, doors, walls, ceilings and floors. The paper was used to improve the lighting of the rooms, provide some privacy and give protection from the elements.

10. Lantern  
11. Dining table  
12. Letter rack  
13. Bookcase  
14. Case for inkstone, inkstick, brush and paper  
15. Desk  
16. Mattress as a sofa and bed  
17. Lamp holder  
18. Tobacco tray  
19. Brazier
The British Museum’s sarangbang

This sarangbang reconstruction was built by the renowned Korean architect Shin Young-hoon and twelve Korean craftsmen in July 2000. This building is in the style of an upper class house of the mid-1800s. Its design is based on the sarangbang of the Yeongyeongdang (House of Flowing Happiness) in the Changdeokgung Palace in Seoul.

The British Museum is grateful to:
Mr Shin Young-hoon (b. 1935),
the architect
Mr Chung Yang-mo (b. 1934),
the display expert
Mr Sohn Duk-kyun (1954–2007),
the furniture carpenter
Hwa-shin Construction, the contractor
Wooil-yo Ltd, the ceramics manufacturer
And other artists who have contributed to the sarangbang construction
Model house
About 1900
Wood, paper and sand

This model shows a cross section of part of a Korean house. It was created for the Japan-British Exhibition in 1910 to demonstrate life and customs in Japanese colonies, such as the recently annexed Korean peninsula.

Donated by Ogita Etsuzo
Asia As1910,1111.3

Warming the home

In the cross section you can see the underfloor heating system, called *ondol* (warmed stones). It became common from the 1600s. Heat from a furnace was channelled underneath the floor to warm the room. To take advantage of the warmth, residents removed their shoes inside the house and sat or lay directly on the floor. Ceilings were lowered for energy efficiency.
Keeping cool

Fans were invaluable accessories for men and women in Korea due to the extremely hot summer weather. They were also useful for stirring up fires, and as a sunshade for hiding the face.

Fans
1800s–early 1900s
Oiled paper, bamboo, brass, lacquer

There are two types of Korean fans: round ones with handles and folding fans. Unlike the portable folding fans, round ones were only used within the house. Additional patterned paper was pasted around the handle to adorn them and to make them more robust.

Donated by Mrs D. A. Bunker.
Asia As1894,1104.6-8
Asia As1905,1115.59
Donated by Ogita Etsuzo.
Asia As1910,1111.7-8
Candlesticks
Joseon period, 1800–1900
Brass

Candles were a precious commodity during the Joseon period. Only the upper class could afford to use them. Candlestick holders, with their varied shapes and ornate decorations, reflected the tastes of the nobility. Tong scissors were used to snuff out the candles.

Asia 1905,1115.3-4