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## Reading the humor in Korean traditional space - dreaming the restoration of old sentiment -

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**READING THE HUMOR IN KOREAN TRADITIONAL SPACE  
- DREAMING THE RESTORATION OF OLD SENTIMENT -**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the degree of  
Master of Landscape Architecture

In

The School of Landscape Architecture

By

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M.S., Catholic University of Daegu, Korea 1996

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May 2004

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is about humor and its application in Korean traditional space, which merges culture, design, and preservation. The purpose of the research is to seek humor as a significant design concept in Korean traditional space, and establish it through the examples. The examples focused on are found in temples and palaces since those are relatively well preserved Korean traditional spaces. Each humor in the examples is interpreted based on culture and the mentality of the age, such as religion, ideology, and customs. Also, forms and functions of humor are examined. Through the design analyses of case studies, unique characteristics of Korean traditional humor were found, and the importance was also discussed. Unlike that of Western countries, humor in Korean traditional space is soft, metaphoric, and human. Moreover, the humor creates intimacy and a unique sense of place so that it attracts viewers. Namely, humor is one of the significant design elements which has potential to be applied and developed for the future. Ultimately, this study will become an essential design guideline for both Korea and the western world.

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

This is a study about humor and its application to designs in Korean traditional space. In a broad sense, this is about culture since culture becomes the background of art, and explains every artistic activity.

As Aristotle classified beauty as sublimity, pathos, elegance, and humor, humor traces back to remote antiquity. It means that it is comparatively easy to find humor in any era, any country, and any genre of the arts. In other words, humor can be a distinguishable element only when it is salient among other aesthetic elements. Korea is a strong example of a nation with a sense of humor. In fact, one of the most distinctive Korean traditional sentiments is humor. This important factor is well represented through the literature, art, and landscape works. This thesis seeks detailed examples, which represent humor in Korean traditional landscape works and will interpret their meaning and significance.

Humor is formed based on a nation's unique experience. This means that it is impossible to understand the nation's humor without some understanding of its culture. What factors of Korean culture made people pursue humor? What are the characteristics of Korean humor and how were those built up? We have to seek those factors first before discussing humor in the design of Korean traditional space.

A Japanese folklorist and literary figure, Muneyoshi Yanagi claimed the characteristic of Korean beauty as a "Beauty of sorrow"<sup>1</sup>. He insisted on Koreans as people who do not know a laugh but have too much sadness. Korean history was a history of grief in his eyes. However, this is one of the representative errors in misunderstanding Korean culture. Firstly, Korean people are

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<sup>1</sup> Yanagi, Muneyoshi(1989~1961). 1954. Chosun and Art

optimistic by nature. Some scholars, such as Young-ok Shim and Rae-kyung Park, explain this instancing the characteristics of Korean geographical conditions. Korea is a peninsula which is covered with mountains, and has four distinct seasons. Generally the gentle lines of ancient mountains, which are ubiquitous landscape in Korea, might have made Korean people relaxed and optimistic. Also, they might enjoy nature according to four different seasons and expect coming hopes as the changing cycle of seasons.

Secondly, the challenges through out Korean history made the Korean people instinctively seek humor. Korea has suffered from the invasions of foreign countries. China was going to control Korea, and Japanese pirate raiders pillaged incessantly. In this situation, Korean people always had to be ready for the war, and frequent wars gave rise to sadness. However, Korean people did not linger in sadness. A tough spirit that overcomes the sorrow was in their humor, they used humor as a means of survival from the deep despair. Like these, the spirit of Korean humor is not nihilistic but stands optimistic against the tough life.

Thirdly, their religious background has affected the nature of Korean people. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism are the three main religions that have affected the Korean mentality. Buddhism is a philosophy that emphasizes the harmony of the mundane world and soul, and freedom from an attachment to worldly affairs. Also, it promotes optimism with the concept of a future life, which consoles the pain of this life.<sup>2</sup> Under Taoism, Koreans attained an optimistic mentality, adapting to and leaning from nature in a way that is different from westerners, who regard nature as an object of challenge and analysis. In other words, it is an intrinsic part of Korean culture to search for harmony with nature and the universe. They sought compromise with the world, not collision. In fact, this harmony between humans and nature is one of the most

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<sup>2</sup> January 6<sup>th</sup> 2003, Buddhist Newspaper



prominent characteristics of the Korean traditional landscape. Notably, Korean landscape design is distinguishable from the Chinese style, which emphasizes exaggeration, and Japanese, which is generally manicured and simplified. Koreans wanted to enjoy nature itself through a mediated artificial beauty that could harmonize men and nature. Therefore, the Korean landscape is neither overwhelming nor luxurious. Instead, it is human scaled, friendly, and natural. They adapted themselves to nature, and humor might be produced from those inner resources.

Such harmony and animation, lively beauty and humor are well reflected in almost every field of art, literature, and everyday life. Folk paintings in particular are famous for their brightness and merriness, frankness and humor. In this thesis, I focus on the detailed design of landscape works such as sculptures, structures and facilities in Korean traditional space. First of all, I research the characteristics and background of Korean humor based on the special features of history, geography, and culture. Then I review previous research that deals with humor in Korean literature and arts as a second step. In chapter six, I present particular case studies and interpret their meanings based on literary records in relation to traditional philosophy, aesthetics, and history of Korea.

The purposes of this thesis is to document and reveal the humor which has not been previously recognized as an important concept of Korean traditional landscape design and to demonstrate its special quality. Through the process of westernization, many Asian countries have lost traditional properties, and Korea is one of these. Designers scramble for following modern and western style, which do not speak Korean culture. Contrarily, Asian ideas and traditions such as Zen, Feng shui, and Yoga set a trend in western countries. At this point in time, it is time that Korean traditional design concepts should be exhumed and adopted in today's design world, retaining them for the future.

This study also offers important data for understanding a Korean design concept useful for the western world. For Koreans, it will give the chance to reflect upon their cultural inheritance, motivate them to preserve such elements, and be inspired by them in modern landscape design. Ultimately, it could be significant for generating design guidelines for both.

## CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by five processes. Firstly, a review of records and data was conducted to understand the characteristics and background of Korean traditional humor based on Korean history, geography, and culture, and to review the literature on Korean humor.

Secondly, I conducted case studies. The research sites selected were limited to outdoor spaces where Korean traditional form is preserved. Korean garden styles can be classified into five main types: palace, temple, hermitage, lecture house, and commoner's house. In seeking examples of humor in Korean traditional space, all five types of sites were considered. From this pool, the research sites were narrowed to include the main palaces and temples in South Korea. Compared to commoner's houses, palaces and temples are well preserved and clearly exhibit characteristics of Korean traditional landscape design. In addition, one royal tomb and another tomb site were selected as subjects for analysis. Also, Jang Seong, a site exhibiting statuary having human features made from stone or wood, was added to represent the folk arts of commoners.

As the third step, the examples, which were regarded as having humor in their design, were photographically recorded by Ahn.<sup>3</sup> Then, the pictures were selected under consultation with Ahn. Professor Ahn participated in this step because he is a specialist in Korean traditional landscape architecture who could forward the data with advice from Korea to the United States.

The next step was case studies, which were the main part of the study. I interpreted

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<sup>3</sup> Ahn, Gye-Bog. Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Catholic University of Daegu, Korea

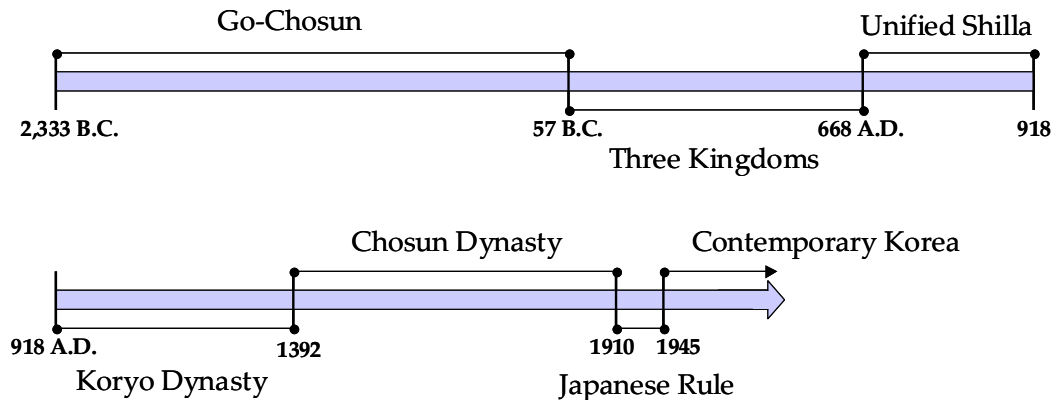
and examined each case study site. I focused on why they are humorous and what meanings they contain. Korean traditional design characteristics, religion, historical records, and folk beliefs were good guides for the analysis. Also, I added several images to the parts where explanation was needed to help readers understand the case study site, even if these were not related to humor. The images from internet sites with stated copyright, were used with permission obtained from their authors, and identified in footnotes.

Lastly, the forms and functions of humor were analyzed, critiqued, and categorized. In addition, the importance of this study for developing design guidelines and its special meaning is discussed.

## CHAPTER III. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW OF KOREA

### 1. History

#### (1) The prehistoric age



Korea has a long history of more than five thousand years. The first ancestors of modern day Korea, a Tungusic branch of the Ural Altaic family, moved from northwest Asia to Manchuria and the Korean peninsula.<sup>4</sup>

According to legend, the leader Tangun established the kingdom of Go-Chosun, merging the dispersed tribes in 2333 B.C. There is also a theory that the Kija dynasty, established by a Chinese man and lasting 99 years, succeeded the Go-Chosun dynasty, but this theory is not approved and today's historians do not accept it. Later, three prehistoric states, Mahan, Chinhan, Pyonhan were founded in the southern portion of the Peninsula.

In 109 B.C., the Chinese Han dynasty invaded the peninsula and established four colonies: Nakrang, Chefan, Imdun, and Hyondo. However, during the Three Kingdoms-period,

<sup>4</sup> The following historical synopsis is based on several sources, including the following:  
<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr>,  
<http://www.koreaa2z.com/silok5/>  
<http://user.chollian.net/~makcbg/wang26.htm>

Koguryo (one of the three kingdoms) repulsed Nakrang, which was the strongest colony, and finally expelled the power of the Han dynasty from Korea.

## (2) Three Kingdoms Period (57 B. C. ~ 668 A. D.)

After the Go-Chosun period, three Kingdoms, Koguryo, Baekje, and Shilla, were established. Koguryo took possession of the northern part of the Korean peninsula and Manchuria as well. In the meantime, Baekje occupied the southwestern part of Korea, and Shilla the southeastern part.

Of the kingdoms, Koguryo was the strongest. Koguryo received Buddhism and Confucianism from China, and these were conveyed to Japan by way of the three kingdoms. However, Koguryo was conquered by the allied forces of Shilla and Tang (China). Shilla also achieved victory over Baekje. Finally, the three kingdoms were reunified by Shilla in 668 A.D.

## (3) Unified Shilla Period (668~918 A.D.)

Shilla forced out the remaining armies of the Chinese Tang dynasty after the unification of the three kingdoms, and started commerce with many foreign countries. During the period, Buddhism became the main religion of the country and influenced people's cultural and spiritual life exceedingly. However, unified Shilla lasted only 250 years. In 918 A.D., she collapsed to Wang Gun who became the first king of the Koryo dynasty.

## (4) Koryo Dynasty (918~1392)

In 918, Wang Gun established the Koryo dynasty. During this period, the Koryo dynasty had a large trade with many foreign countries. As a result, Koryo was introduced to the world,

and received the present English name of Korea.

Koryo suffered from the invasion of the Mongols in particular. Much loss of lives and properties occurred. Ironically, throughout the invasion of the Mongols, cultural exchange between the two countries was also active. In addition, Korea received imports from western countries at this time. Meanwhile, Koryo reformed its social system, selecting persons for higher positions through examination. In addition, bronze coins were first made and circulated, and art bloomed during this period. Koryo Chungja, a world famous porcelain, is a representative work of art from the Koryo dynasty. Buddhism was still at the center of the cultural and spiritual life of Koryo. Indeed, monks played a part in politics. Due to their power, monks and the king were closely connected and, as a result, Buddhism was corrupted. Monks exerted deep effect upon politics, and accumulated wealth in temples. In this situation, general Song-gye Yi turned his army back on the way to attack Manchuria, and usurped the throne of the Koryo dynasty. Finally, he became the first king of the Chosun Dynasty.

#### (5) Chosun Dynasty (1392~1910)

King Taejo (Song-gye Yi) established Chosun in 1392 A.D. He started reforms, and the first target was Buddhism. His policy was to venerate Confucianism and oppress Buddhism. Monks and temples were removed to the mountains, and Confucianism became the moral criterion of the nation.

Among the many kings of the Chosun dynasty, the fourth king Sejong is called the “great king” due to his many achievements and efforts for scholarship and science with an enlightened viewpoint. His patronage inspired scholars to invent such scientific instruments as sundials, water clocks, and orreries of the solar system. The most important invention was

Hangul, the Korean alphabet. It consisted of 10 vowels and 14 consonants, and is famous for its scientific accuracy and ease to learn. More over, the first movable printing type in the world, 50 years ahead of Gutenberg, was invented in his period.

Japanese pillaging was a great distress to Chosun. In 1592, the Japanese army, under the command of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, invaded Chosun. The main reason for the outbreak of war was the stability of the political situation of Japan. It only took three weeks to occupy the capital of Chosun. Their unexpected attack threw the nation into chaos. However, admiral Sun-shin Lee invented the first ironclad ship in the world (the turtle ship), and repulsed the Japanese with his exquisite tactics. The seven-year war ended with the victory of Chosun.

Before a complete recovery from the Japanese invasion, the Chinese Ching dynasty whose stronghold was Manchuria made an attack on Chosun in 1627. The war ended in a treaty between the two countries, and the army of Ching left. Even though the damage of the war was not serious, the Chosun court and people were exhausted by the series of invasions.

Incessant foreign invasions made Korea shut her door to other countries, and Korean became known to western countries as a “hermit kingdom”. Even though western countries wanted to be trading partners, Korea did not change her policy until the twentieth century. The prince regent Taewon is a representative ruler who insisted closed-door policy (1863~1873). He strongly banned Christianity and Roman Catholicism, regarding them as evil, which would mislead the Korean people culturally, and spiritually. In 1866, the armies of General Sung-Keon Han and Hun-Soo Yang repulsed the French fleet, which was sent to revenge of Prince Taewon’s persecution of French missionaries. Subsequently, Korea also succeeded in driving American ships away in 1870.

However, this blockade policy did not last long. Japan realized that power had moved to



from Prince Taewon to Queen Min, and they assassinated the Queen in 1895. After Queen Min's assassination, Japan succeeded in making Korea open her door to trade. In succession, other western countries demanded that Korea open and that treaties be signed. On May 22, 1882, a Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation was signed with the United States.

In the rapidly changing world situation, Korea was suddenly besieged by China, Japan, and Russia without preparation. These nations competed against each other for Korea. Eventually, Korea was unwillingly pushed to the wall and consented to the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910.

#### (6) Japanese Rule (1910~1945)

After the Japanese annexation of Korea, the Korean people had to face enormous change. The political and economic system had changed, and Korean people lost their land and properties. To avoid suppression, millions of Koreans emigrated to Russia and China.

Resistance to Japanese rule was raised continuously both inside and outside the country. The March First Independence Movement was representative of the resistance efforts. It was a pan-national, peaceful resistance movement that occurred on March 1, 1919. Thirty-three notables representing various social circles read a declaration of independence, receiving the crowds' hurrahs for independence following.

However, the Japanese quelled the movement cruelly, mobilizing the military and the police. They killed more than 6,000 demonstrators, and arrested about 50,000 leaders and participants of the movement. After the March First Independence movement, the Korean movement for regaining sovereignty did not stop, even though Japanese suppression was severe. The Japanese killed, tortured, and arrested anyone who was involved in any kind of

independence movement. In addition, under the new governor Minami Jiro's policy (assimilation of Koreans into Japanese culture), Koreans were forced to change their names into Japanese, and to speak only Japanese. This policy of obliteration of Korean culture deepened as World War II progressed unfavorably for the Japanese.

Meanwhile, the independence movement by Koreans overseas made steady progress. A Korean Provisional Government was established in Shanghai with Gu Kim as the central figure, on April 17, 1919. At the sametime, Syngman Rhee, another leader of the independence movement, played an active part in the United States. However, the Japanese plunder of Korea had reached extremes. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans were sent to Japan and other South Asian countries, and were mobilized to compulsory labor. Young girls were sent to be prostitutes for Japanese soldiers. Japanese even took Korean metal tableware, such as spoons, chopsticks, and bowls, to make their weapons. Such plunder and exploitation continued until August 1945, when World War II ended.

#### (7) Contemporary Korea (since 1945)

Korea regained her sovereignty on August 15, 1945. However, the Korean peninsula was divided in two and went under trusteeship. The United States controlled the southern part of Korea, and the Soviet Union the northern part. On June 25, 1950, North Korea initiated war. After a three-year war, North and South Korea concluded a ceasefire agreement, and eventually Korea was divided in two between the borderline of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. As a result, about ten million dispersed family members have suffered from lifelong separation until the present day.

#### (8) South Korea (Republic of Korea)

The republic of Korea was established in the southern half of the country in 1945, after World War II. At that time, South Korea was one of the poorest countries, but she has grown into one of the biggest trading nations in the world today. With highly educated manpower, south Korea is now one of the world's strongest producers of information technology. As a result of rapid economic growth, GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita is comparable to the lesser economies of the European Union, and sixteen times that of North Korea.<sup>5</sup>

Tragically, South and North Korea still have hostile relations. However, the Korean government is making every effort to mitigate tension on the Korean peninsula since Dae-Jung Kim administration. South Korea supports North Korea economically, and the reunification of dispersed family members has partially begun. Today, South Korea is on a wave of change, especially in the reform of her obsolete politics. Young generations support the new Korean government in particular, and Korea is now marching towards democratization and an advanced country status.

The 5000 year-history of Korea has been rough and dramatic. Due to her geopolitical features, Korea has had 998 foreign invasions through history yet still stands in a quite important situation for the peace of the world. In spite of the rough and difficult history, the Korean people have kept and developed their original culture and the spirit of Korea. "In general, and throughout most of their history, Koreans have led productive lives while enjoying the attractiveness and serenity of their peninsular homeland, which they still refer to as 'The Land of the Morning Calm,' even if the roar of Korea's 'tiger economy' is now heard around the world."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr>

<sup>6</sup> From <http://www.askasia.org/Korea/geo1.html>

## 2. Geography

### (1) Location<sup>7</sup>

Korea is a peninsula, located between 124 degrees and 131 degrees East Longitude and between 33 degrees and 43 degrees North Latitude. The peninsula is included in the northern temperate zone of the Eastern Hemisphere. In brief, Korea lies between China and Japan (fig 1). The Yalu and Tumen Rivers draw the boundary with Manchuria and Siberia, respectively. This mountainous peninsula surrounded by the East Sea (to the east) and the West Sea (to the west), and has 3,201 islands. The total area of South Korea is about 99,173 square kilometers, with 221,000 square kilometers in total area for Korean peninsula. The size of South Korea is similar to the state of Indiana.

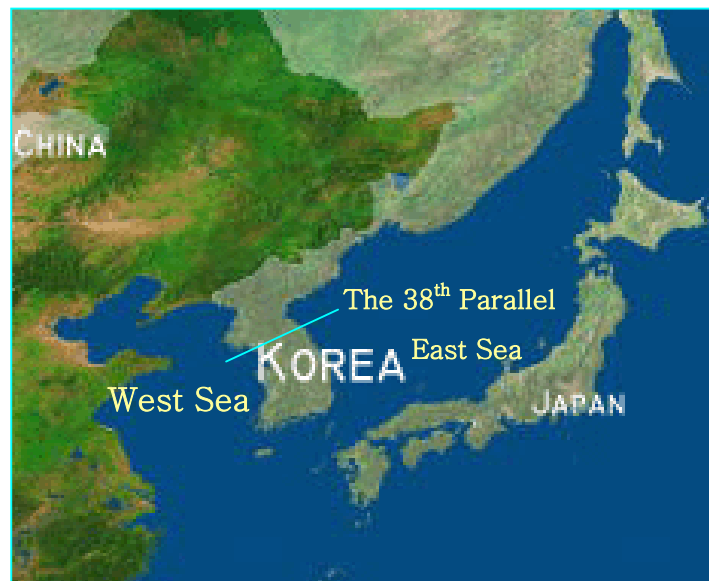


Fig1. Location of Korea<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the information from <http://607ws.yongsan.af.mil>

<sup>8</sup> Source from [http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr\\_env.htm](http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr_env.htm), and edited by author

## (2) Topography<sup>9</sup>

75% of the Korean land mass is covered with mountains and hills. Particularly, the northeastern area consists of relatively high mountains (about 7000 feet high) and a narrow coastal plain. The Northwestern region has small mountains and hills but the elevation is mostly below 5000 feet. Mountains lie adjacent to China and the western part is lowland. The east coast region has a simple shoreline and mountain ranges below 4,000 feet. The southwest area consists of hills and plains. The terrain is rugged, although most hills and mountains are below 5,000 feet elevation.

The remaining 25% of lowlands are scattered mainly in the western coastal area along the rivers. More lowlands and plains are in South Korea, but most of the land of South Korea is covered with mountains and hills, as well. The Taebak mountain range lies parallel to the east coast and forms the backbone of South Korea, its branches extend throughout the south.

Except for several mountains, most of the mountains and hills in the Korean peninsula are of advanced age, which creates dull and curved lines.

## (3) Climate<sup>10</sup>

The Korean climate shows the typical characteristics of the temperate zone, which has four distinct seasons. Since it is in between a continental and a marine climate, spring and winter show extreme weather. During the winter (from December until February), temperatures drop to minus 4 degree Fahrenheit with dry and cold northwest winds. However, summer is very hot and humid. Sometimes the temperatures go up to 100 degree Fahrenheit with over 80% humidity. Also, monsoon rains give half of the annual precipitation during the summer.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the source from <http://607ws.yongsan.af.mil>

<sup>10</sup> Based on the source from [http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr\\_env.htm](http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr_env.htm)

Spring (from the end of March until May) comes with sandy dust phenomena, which is a yellow dust cloud from China. During the spring, the weather is mild and sunny, but the season is short compared to winter and summer. The Korean autumn (from the end of September until November) is famous for its clear sky and dry, pleasant weather.

#### (4) Population and Language<sup>11</sup>

The population of South Korea was 45,985,289 in 2002. The country has one of the highest population densities in the world with 479.5 inhabitants per square kilometer. Well-educated manpower, due to a high enthusiasm for education, is an important resource of Korea, which has poor natural resources. Culturally and ethnically, Koreans are very homogeneous, having ancestors who migrated from Central Asia to Korea.

Korea has her own language, Korean, which belongs to the Ural-Altaic group. Also, she has her original alphabet, Hangul, which was invented by the Great King Sejong and the scholars of the day in 1443. Hangul consists of 10 vowels and 14 consonants.

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<sup>11</sup> Referred from [http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr\\_env.htm](http://neoexpo.hihome.com/kr_env.htm)

## CHAPTER IV. CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND OF KOREAN TRADITIONAL HUMOR

Humor does not bring the same laugh to every people. It is perceived as having different color, weight, and quality according to the race, history, custom, and way of thinking. Doubtlessly, humor is a part of every culture, and should be dealt with on a cultural level. Following are some cues to Korean humor found in Korean traditional art and space.

Stone guardians, creatures who defend waterways surrounding palaces from bad auras, prostrate themselves with such a lazy attitude (Fig 2). A mythical unicorn-lion guards a palace against fire is wearing a big bell more like a kitten than a solemn figure (Fig 3)<sup>12</sup>. Meanwhile, a fourteen-face-die, on which fourteen punishments are written, such as “making a ridiculous face,” “hitting others’ noses,” “dancing silently,” “imitating a hunchback,” “swallowing three cups of liquor at a gulp” provides recreation for a funny king and his ministers (Fig 4). These all are certainly different contrivances which create a philosophical base of humor different from that found in European baroque style-gardens and even from Chinese and Japanese styles.

This chapter focuses the background and characteristics of Korean humor tracing particular Korean history and culture, and some examples of art and literature that represent humor. These are kernels to understand how has humor been formed, evolved, and applied as a design concept in old Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Only Hae-Tae (mythical unicorn-lion) in front of the gate of Kyung-Bok palace has no horn, unlike others inside of the palace



Fig 2. Seo-su



Fig 3. HaeTae in front of Palace





Fig 4. Fourteen-face-die

## 1. Humor as a Nature of the Korean Temperament – Optimism

Just as Helmuth Plessner described laughing and crying as the “theory of human nature,” which is not controlled by matters of aesthetics or psychology<sup>13</sup>, we can see the characteristics of Korean humor in the Korean people’s nature.

In fact environment, including geographical features and climate, is one of the essential factors influencing human nature. Korea is a mountainous peninsula, beset by the extremes of four different seasons. Clearly changing nature was reflected on rounded mountains. Those mountains have such a ripe old age, that the shapes are dull and curved. Such a soft topography might influence the Korean people’s mentality to be less sharp, merry, and optimistic. Also, they might learn that pain would be gone and hope will come as the seasons change. This theory, which is based on Korean geographical characteristics including climate, is strongly insisted by Young-ok Shim and Yohan Cho.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, 1970, S. Fisher Verlag, S.19-24.

<sup>14</sup> Shim, Young-ok. *A Study on beauty of humor in Korean Traditional Art*

Religious background also affects people's temperaments. Three main religions, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, have influenced the spirit of the Korean people. Buddhism emphasizes the mysterious harmony of the mundane and spiritual worlds, the concept of indifference, and freedom from material and emotional attachment. It plants optimism in the Korean mentality with the concept of a future life that consoles the harshness of this world.<sup>15</sup> Taoism promotes an optimistic farming race, the Koreans, that adapts to and leans on nature unlike western notions of nature, which becomes an object for analysis and challenge. That is to say, Taoists take in and enjoy nature itself, not confronting it. Generally, the Korean people regard harmony, moderation, and equilibrium of nature as the most important virtue which they trained themselves through their religions.

This harmony with the whole and being full of life are well expressed in Korean literature, music, architecture, sculpture, craftworks, and ceramics. In the case of folk painting, works are particularly bright and frank, and do not depict dark shadows. Although life was arduous and destitute, the Korean people always tried to promote delight, and an optimistic way of thinking.<sup>16</sup> Based on optimism for life even in the fate of challenging circumstances, Korean humor rests upon optimism, not pessimism.

## 2. Humor as Will to Overcome Sadness

Historically, Korea has suffered from frequent invasions by foreign countries. Because of the geopolitical characteristics, Korea was threatened by China, and Japanese pirate raiders pillaged incessantly. Given this situation, the Korean people have almost always had to be ready

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<sup>15</sup> Korean Buddhist Newspaper, 1/6/2003

<sup>16</sup> Park, Rae-kyung (President of Korean Cultural Exchange Society), 1998. Modern Application of Korean Humor. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co.

for war until modern times, and sadness naturally followed due to the wounds of wars.<sup>17</sup>

For this reason, Muneyoshi Yanagi (1889~1961), a Japanese folklorist and folk-art critic, describes Korean beauty as a “beauty of sadness.” As the first foreign writer to address Korean art in earnest, Yanagi has published works about Korean ceramic wares and industrial art. With keen insight and an elegant literary style, he describes Korean beauty as follows:

Unavoidably, this land has a fate, which lacks strength and pleasure. The nation's peace could not be kept in the face of incessant foreign invasions. People were forced to be obedient to foreign power, quite a different situation from the Japanese who have rarely known foreign invaders. Pain and loneliness are in the Koreans' bone. They must anchor their hope in Nirvana since they lack hope in this world. They must always dream, and hide agony inside of them. They live in a world of unsettledness, uneasiness, and sadness. In their world, even nature looks lonely. The mountaintops are slender, trees are gaunt, and flowers are discolored. Land is dry, grains are not rich, rooms are dark, and there are few people.... When they lean on art, to what can they appeal? There is no mirth in the rhythm, no light in the color; only a sorrowful mind that is full of tears. Therefore, Korean beauty is also sadness. Only sadness can comfort sadness. Sad beauty is their friend. Art is the object that can open their hearts. This race tried to improve their fate through beauty, and to link it to the infinite world. Where can we find such beauty in the

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<sup>17</sup> Ko, Yu-seop, 1963. Korean Art History, p.340

world that our hearts are choked with emotion? Chinese art is an art of strong will, and Japanese is an art of charm. However, Korean art bears a heavy burden of sadness.<sup>18</sup>

Today, we can only partially endorse Yanagi's opinion about the characteristics of Korean art partially because the "beauty of sadness" is one of the representative errors promoted by misunderstandings of Korean art. Yanagi only reads the sadness of the Koryo Chungja (Celadon green)<sup>19</sup> ceramic ware and focuses totally on the lamentation originating from frequent foreign invasion and its pain. But even in the patterns of Koryo Chungja (Fig 5), there exist clean clouds spotting a clear sky, freely flying cranes and wild chamomiles, which express not sadness but animation.<sup>20</sup>

Yanagi overlooked the peace and cheerful beauty in it. In fact, the patterns frequently used on Koryo Chungja include mischievous boy-monks dangling on vines and scenery of peaceful stream banks in

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<sup>18</sup> Writer's translation. Yanagi, Muneyoshu. 1922 Chosun and Art, pp27-29, Bum Woo Sa Co. Seoul

<sup>19</sup> "Celadon of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) is said to be among the most elegant in the world. In contrast to the blue Chinese pieces, Koryo celadon has a clear, bright jade color. Taiping Laoren, a Chinese scholar, praised the secret color of Koryo celadon as "the first under heaven." A Japanese scholar wrote, "Koryo celadon is a religion to me. Whenever I hold a piece in my hand, my ugly heart becomes pure."

The beauty of Koryo celadon can also be found in its graceful shapes and flowing lines. Chinese art is decorative, while Korean art is simple but dignified. This is indeed the basic characteristic of Korean art. Korean art has long reflected the Koreans' love of nature. The favorite subjects of Koryo celadon are from nature: clouds, chrysanthemums, willows, cranes, ducks and so on" ([www.Koreanfolk.co.kr](http://www.Koreanfolk.co.kr)).

<sup>20</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Datum of 2000 traditional culture school, Mok Ah Museum([www.moka.or.kr](http://www.moka.or.kr))

harmony with willows and water birds. These factors do not correspond with Yanagi's "beauty of sadness". Rather, it is sad to see the whole of Korean art wrongly interpreted as expressing only sadness.<sup>21</sup>



Fig 5. Koryo Chungja<sup>22</sup>

It is a fact that Koreans have been harassed by wars. Yet they have not lingered in sadness. Remarkably, they have used humor as a means of surviving the deep sadness. Contrary to Yanagi's theory, there are many traces of joyfulness and humor in Korean traditional music and literature, as well. For an example of Korean traditional music, Pansori (a lengthy opera) contains not only social protest and beautiful love, but also comic stories.<sup>23</sup> For a literary example,

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, Writer's translation

<sup>22</sup> Source from <http://hodangyo.hihome.com/hodangyo-1-5.html>, under the permission

<sup>23</sup> "Pansori literally means songs at a place of entertainment as "*pan*" signifies the place of performance while "*sori*" means the sound. *Pansori* is usually performed by two people, one person plays the drum while the other chants a

Shijo, brief lyric verses, and folk songs represent the mentality of humor in Koreans' lives as well. The sad history of Korea made the Koreans strong, and humor became their energy in difficult situations.

### 3. Humor as Resistance

Korean humor also represents resistance against a social system. There is opposition and satire in the gloomy smile of the alienated class. It is common that satirical artistic activity becomes prevalent in such societies. Black humor prevails in the autocratic state, because, there exists an "ethos" under the humor.<sup>24</sup> For example, Daumier (Honore Daumier, 1808-1879), a French satirist painter of the nineteenth century, satirized the bureaucracy and absurdity of his society.<sup>25</sup>

Like France, Korea was a country which had social strata dividing the nobility and the common people. Moreover, man and woman, old and young generations were completely classified under the rules of Confucianism.<sup>26</sup> In Korean humor, there is always an object of

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song in a folk style. The song resembles more of an epic or a narrative that is quite lengthy at times, sung in a rhythmic fashion much like a folk song" (The Information from [www.parandeul.co.kr/pansorisong](http://www.parandeul.co.kr/pansorisong))

<sup>24</sup> Cho, Yohan, 1998. The Korean's Beauty of Humor, pp. 82-98. Modern Application of Korean Humor. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co.

<sup>25</sup> Ik Young Yun, 1998. Korean modern art and humor p. 53

<sup>26</sup> "Confucianism was the affirmation of accepted values and norms of behavior in primary social institutions and basic human relationships. All human relationships involved a set of defined roles and mutual obligations; each participant should understand and conform to his/her proper role. Starting from individual and family, people acting rightly could reform and perfect the society. The blueprint of this process was described in "The Great Learning, " a section of the *Classic of Rituals*:

Only when things are investigated is knowledge extended; only when knowledge is extended are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds rectified; only when minds are rectified are the characters of persons cultivated; only when character is cultivated are our families regulated; only when families are regulated are states well governed; only when states are well governed is there peace in the world"

opposition, such as the common class against the nobility, vulgarity against nobleness, comedy against tragedy, and discord against harmony. Despite its strength and centrality to the Korean people, sometimes the rule of Confucianism smothered the spirit of society and suppressed the mentality of the people. Further, aristocratic culture provoked feuds between the nobility and the people of lower classes while extended family compelled women to sacrifice for men and family. Under these situations, humor might give “catharsis,” resistance against these entrenched social structures. The “Hahoe mask (fig 6) dance drama” is a representative example that has satirized the feud between the nobility and the common people as an art form, since AD 1200.<sup>27</sup>

The drama shows the peak of the governmental class’s absurdity. Since the actors all wear smiling masks, and do not designate specific characters, people can laugh with ease. To the common people who eked out a scanty livelihood and endured mistreatment, the masquerade helped rid them of their stress through humor.

On the other hand, Yun-Bok Shin (1758 - ?),<sup>28</sup> one of the most famous Korean folk painters of the eighteenth century, jeered not only at the Confucian views on sex but also at Confucianism’s moral system, displaying anti-establishment humor, and resisting authority and falsehood to the best of his ability.

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(Judith A. Berling, Confucianism – Focus on Asian Studies, Vol. II, No. 1: Asian Religions, pp. 5-7, Fall 1982 AskAsia (Asia Society), 1996)

<sup>27</sup> “*Hahoe Pyolshin-gut Tal-Nori* (mask dance drama) is one of Korea's most traditional folk plays... Hahoe Pyolshin-gut Tal-Nori features various allegorical characters, such as Yangban (an arrogant aristocrat), Sonbi (a pedantic scholar), Chung (a depraved Buddhist monk), Imae (a foolish servant), Paekchong (a coarse butcher) and so on. Each of these characters represents a social class. Conflicts among different classes and individuals were satirized to relieve social tensions among the families in the village... In addition, though the story is satirical and humorous, it does not culminate in the traditional ritual of burning the masks”. (<http://anu.andong.ac.kr/~hyun/andong/norital.html>)

<sup>28</sup> “Yun-Bok Shin (1758 - ?) With his daring use of women as subject matter, *Shin* vividly depicts the passions and romantic tastes of his era. *Shin* also excelled at landscapes in the literati (intellectual class) style, depictions of birds and animals, and calligraphy. The figures in his paintings have oblong faces and sensual expressions. His “Rendezvous Under the Moon,” for instance, depicts a love scene with an inscription that suggests only the two lovers can read each other's mind. Shin depicted the romantic interplay between profligate yangban (the nobility) and the singing and dancing girls known as Kiseng courtesans”. (From [www.koreainfogate.com](http://www.koreainfogate.com))



Fig 6. Hahoe Mask

After all, the Korean people could laugh even under an oppressive system of social and religious ideology. It was the wisdom of breaking through stifling reality. As Ik-Young Yun said, Korean humor's root is resistance, its branch is acumen, and its flowers are laughter and reconciliation.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Humor as Metaphor – Softness, Warmth, and Humanity

Yohan Cho<sup>31</sup> said that even if humor joins the rank of ethics, it does not arm like satire

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<sup>29</sup> Source from [http://midistar.co.kr/hmask\\_index.htm](http://midistar.co.kr/hmask_index.htm), under the permission

<sup>30</sup> Ik Young Yun, Korean modern art and humor (1998) pp. 51

<sup>31</sup> Korean Art Philosopher (1926~).



or sarcasm. Humor has therefore, flexibility and open-minded grace compared to satire and sarcasm.<sup>32</sup> Instead of attacking or analyzing, humor embraces its target warmly and generously. Korean humor especially is not direct and tough.

Richard Rutt, an American reporter who worked during the 1970s in Korea, is famous for his articles on Sa-Gat Kim,<sup>33</sup> and the folksong, Arirang.<sup>34</sup> According to him, humor exists as a strong undercurrent of Korean culture. He says the poems of Sa-Gat Kim and the love song Arirang describe humor deeply and especially points out that Korean humor is not represented directly but in a roundabout way. Actually, the Korean people have high regard for the beauty of metaphor. They have followed the circuitous way as an ideal in every form of expression, and the concept is well represented in their lifestyle and art.

Hee-Kyun Ahn<sup>35</sup> said Korean art is not too grand or splendid as to overwhelm the viewers. He described that it is moderated but not rigid. Also, he said there is solemnity and order in it, but it does not neglect details around. He emphasized that Korean beauty in art is hard to be attracted to at first sight. According to him, it needs time for gazing at, and then we can realize that the beauty is seen dimly.

Changing the genre of art, let us compare Korean sculptures with that of the European

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<sup>32</sup> Ryu, Byung Hak, 1998. A play of laughing.

<sup>33</sup> Kim, Sa-Gat (1807-1863) A Korean wanderer poet. His satirical poems are very famous and important in Korean literary world.

<sup>34</sup> A beautiful ancient love song (? - ).

“The text of this song is the story of a disappointed maiden who hopes that her departing sweetheart will have sore feet before he has gone ten li (about two and a half miles) and have to return to

her.”(<http://members.aol.com/panmunjom/arirang.htm>)

Text;

“Walking over the peak at Arirang  
you left me behind.  
You will be tired before you reach one mile.  
Walking over the peak at Arirang  
the sorrows in my heart  
are as many as the stars in the sky.” (From [mervino.com/window/arirang.html](http://mervino.com/window/arirang.html))

<sup>35</sup> Curator of Royal Museum

late Renaissance. The fountains of the Villa d' Este (Fig 7) and “Manneken Pis”(Fig 8) show the direct style of western humor that makes us laugh loudly. Those are exaggerated descriptions of a part of the human body or ridiculous gesture that induce laughing instantly. Then, let us look at the sculpture of Korean HaeTae<sup>36</sup> in front of the Kyung-Bok palace. She is carrying her baby (Fig 9). There is warmth of maternal love even in the solemnity of guarding the palace. Since over protectiveness of children or playing the child is avoided under Confucianism, the scene makes us smile. Also, it is different from the dreadful Chinese stone lion that stands in front of the palace (Fig 10).



Fig 7. Villa d' Este

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<sup>36</sup> Hae-tae is an imaginary animal who judges true and false, and guards palace. It is put outside the palace in order to let the government officers steady their minds. This example will be discussed in chapter IV in detail.



Fig 8. Manneken Pis (Early Seventeenth Century)



Fig 9. Hae-Tae carrying baby

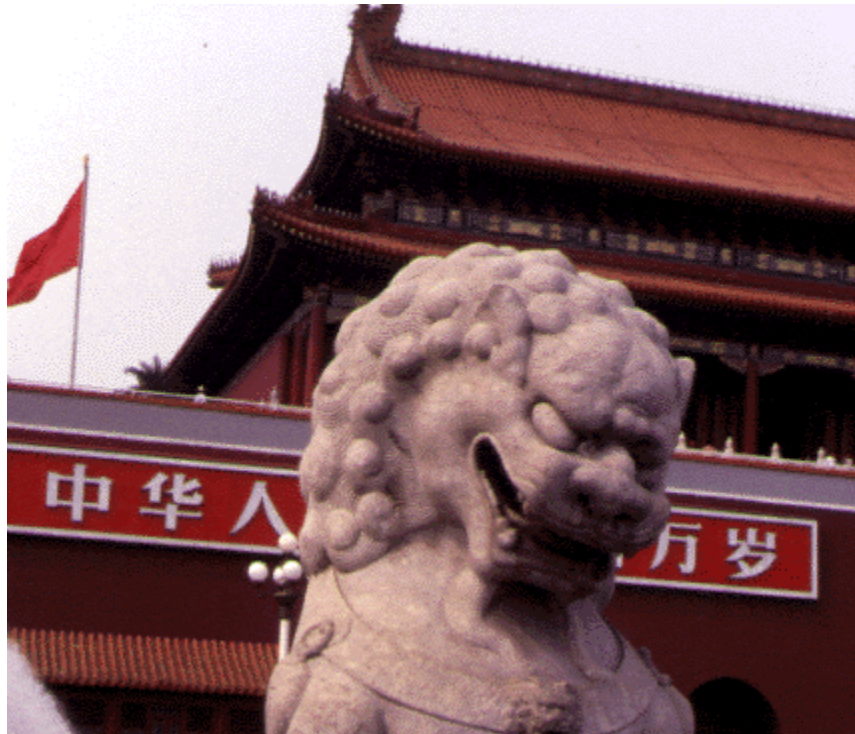


Fig 10. Chinese Stone Lion

There is another example in folk paintings. The humor does not convey direct merriment or jocularity in a compulsory way. It is based on the commoner's day-to-day life, which is simple and natural, not very dramatic. Yun-Bok Shin tried to express human nature in humorous ways. However, Shin did not depict as direct expression. In his painting, we can feel indirect and dim humor that adds to the charm of his works (Fig 11).

Under Confucian society, free love was tacitly abstained especially in the noble class, but two lovers meet in secret at night. The crescent moon and two lovers all look so shy that they make us smile.





Fig 11. “Two lovers under the moon” by Yun-Bok Shin<sup>37</sup>

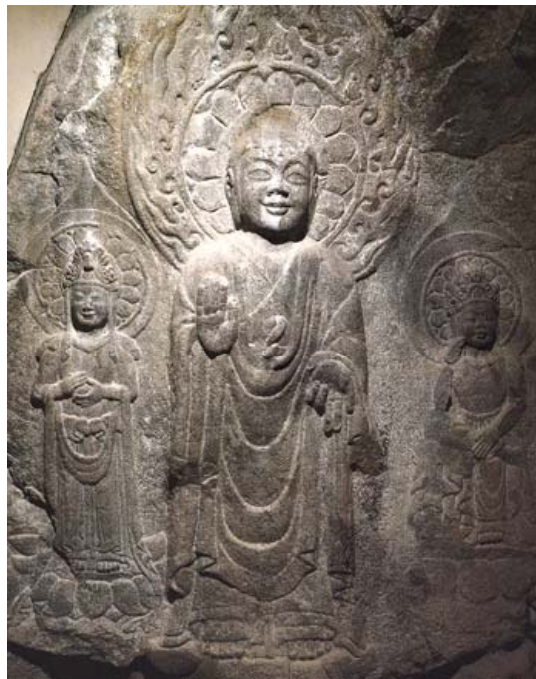


Fig 12. Rock-Cut Buddha Triad<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Source from [http://www.koreandb.net/OldPaint/op\\_pungsok03\\_1.htm](http://www.koreandb.net/OldPaint/op_pungsok03_1.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Source from <http://na4you.hihome.com/155.htm>.

Moreover, Korean humor is human. Let us take a look at the Rock-Cut Buddha Triad from the Baekje<sup>39</sup> period(Fig 12). What makes the image of the Buddha truly unique is the smile that graces its round pleasant face. That expression, often labeled the "smile of Baekje" is one-of-a-kind. Dressed in the simple robes of commoners, the Buddha's face itself recalls those of the common people, his smile the same one of a child. This kind of smile is called the "Archaic Smile"<sup>40</sup>, which is not difficult to identify on sculptures of ancient Greece, India, China, and Japan. Yet, Korean ones have no fixed form. Rather, each image of Buddha is different. There are some smiling Chinese Buddhist statues, but the shape of the Buddha's eyes seems too sharp. Meanwhile, the image of the Japanese Buddha from the same period is overly serious. Not only the face of the Korean Buddha but also the space where the Buddha statue is set is human. Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddha statues are set apart in sacred space for the gods, like idols of a deity in Europe. Korean ones, however, are placed for ease of approach, so they seem more familiar. Sometimes they hold lost men's hands on a path up a mountain.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes they smile on the corner of a path through the forest. Korean Buddha statues smile on Koreans' everyday lives and breathe in their mentality. They are more human than a god that we cannot approach.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the metaphor in Korean humor, one of the techniques of Korean art and literature, is that it makes us think once again. Let us look at the "flower wall" of JaKyung-Jeon, a palace of the queen mother. The king wished the queen mother's longevity and the patterns of the wall show it. The patterns depict ten longevity

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<sup>39</sup> B.C. 18 to A.D. 660.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.kculture.co.kr/content03-6-005.htm>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.kculture.co.kr/content03-6-005.htm>

<sup>42</sup> [www.kocca.or.kr](http://www.kocca.or.kr) (Korea culture contents)

symbols<sup>43</sup> such as the crane, turtle, deer, pine tree, clouds, sun, which symbolize long life. For all that, there are a couple of butterflies (Fig 13). Butterflies symbolize the love of man and woman. What was the King's intent? The butterfly makes us curious, think again, and finally smile instead of just passing by.<sup>44</sup> Scruton pointed out that pleasure of beauty is not perceived instantly like pleasure through sensory organ, but refers to the process of thought and is influenced by it.<sup>45</sup> The philosophy of Korean humor also would be included the theory.



Fig 13. Butterflies on “flower wall” of JaKyung-Jeon.

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<sup>43</sup> Ten Longevity Symbols: Sun, clouds, mountains, water, rocks, pine trees, cranes, deer, turtles and the elixir of immortality. The ten longevity symbols, envisioning the universal wish of man to lead a long and happy life, were widely applied to Korean folk arts and handicrafts.

<sup>44</sup> This example will be discussed in chapter IV in detail.

<sup>45</sup> Scruton, Roger. 1980 *The aesthetics of Architecture*, Princeton University Press.

All of these examples tell us that there is naive, unvarnished, roundabout, and human art in Korean humor. It is warm and soft enough. It approaches us tenderly and makes us smile silently.

Based on this understanding, in the following chapter I will show more examples in Korean traditional space and explain why they are funny, and develop the meanings of the humor.



## CHAPTER V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Through all ages and countries, humor has been a significant subject in various fields of art and literature. It has been born and developed of particular cultures in our lives. However, it is not easy to find records that governed how humor has been applied and interpreted in various fields of art. Moreover, since the understanding and interpretation of humor are very subjective and diverse based on culture, race, and country, it is exceedingly difficult to define and explain the theory behind. In this chapter, I review significant concepts about Korean traditional humor found especially in Korean literature and art.

The term humor has not been defined clearly and still is a thorny subject in the academic world. Even though England is known as a country with a well developed notion of humor, Louis Kazamian, an English scholar who spent his whole life in the study of humor, wrote a book on the subject of why humor cannot be defined, and gave up defining humor.<sup>46</sup> There are more than a hundred theories, including Plato and Aristotle's understanding of humor as "unexpected harmless disharmony."<sup>47</sup> The definition of humor has been asserted differently according to psychological, philosophical, and literary points of view. Aristotle classified the aesthetic category of beauty into the sublime, tragic, grace, and the comic, which was subdivided into humor and satire. Meanwhile, Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Dessoir and Johnnes Volkelt prescribed humor as a category of aesthetics, but Theoder Lipps and Benedetto Croce raised an objection to this classification.<sup>48</sup>

In Korea, studies have examined what humor is and how humor has been used as a

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<sup>46</sup> Kang, Taekun. A study of the concept of humor, p. 264

<sup>47</sup> Moyer, Tony. 1970, Humor in literature east and west, p. 55. International P.E.N Congress

<sup>48</sup> Kang, Taekun. A study of the concept of humor, p. 266

subject of art or literature. Most of them have dealt with the “difference between humor and satire”. Taekun Kang classifies humor in the field of literature as humor, satire, irony, and wit. He describes that humor is not a laughter which refutes the other party but derives positive-ness based on concern for warm-heartedness and understanding of others.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, satire is defined as strong denial of the other party. He says that since satire makes an exception of the speakers themselves from their target of criticism, the property of satire is very scathing.<sup>50</sup> According to Pollard, satire inspires readers’ emotions such as laughter, ridicule, disdain, anger, and hatred using wit, ridicule, sarcasm, cynicism, and the sardonic. And through this process, the writer attains his or her goal, which is to correct social phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> (Arthur Pollard, *Satire*, Seoul National University Press, 1980). These concepts of humor and satire mentioned above have become the mainstream in scholarly writing.

Humor has been especially examined in much of Korean classical literature. Sangtae Oh<sup>52</sup> stresses the characteristic of humor in *Baebijang-Jeon*,<sup>53</sup> one of Korean’s comic classics. He points out that humor expressed in *Baebijang-Jeon* is different from satire. That is, comedy evokes laughter as an end in the work itself, while satire “derides”; namely, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself.<sup>54</sup> Jinwon Kim observes that humor is

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Kang, p. 271

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, Kang, P. 273

<sup>51</sup> Pollard Arthur, 1980. *Satire*. Seoul National University Press

<sup>52</sup> Oh, Sangtae. 1980. A study of *Baebijang-Jeon* – Focused on humor - pp.55~72

<sup>53</sup> *Baebijang-Jeon* (A story of Baebijang)  
Plot;

“*Baebijang-Jeon* is a very fun Korean classical literature. The story is about Baebijang, the new Jeju city major. When he left home he promised his wife that he would never look at other women and that he would keep them away from him. To keep his promise he had to try very hard not to be around his friends who always drank and seduced women. His friends, who found this to be silly and quite ridiculous, decided to play a trick on him. They called Kisaeng (female entertainer) Aerang to seduce him. Eventually, Aerang succeeded in and he made a fool of himself”. (www.koreatips.net)

<sup>54</sup> Abrams, M., A. A glossary of literary terms

a part of human life and it grows and develops with culture.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, Kim finds that the characteristics of the Korean ancient novel are more similar to the western concept of satire, while poems and songs represent typical oriental humor.<sup>56</sup> His analysis says that the ancient novel often deals with the story of lower class people who have difficulties and resignations under the upper class' molestation, and tries to resolve the feud using satire. He defines the ancient novel as an "argument form" of literature that challenges society with criticism, not just a simple story that has humor.<sup>57</sup> According to him, the spirit of Korean humor was induced from the desire to be free from extreme situations, such as war and the suffering of poverty.

Jongkon Kim also explores the characteristics of Korean humor in Korean classical literature. He describes Korean humor as having its peculiar characteristics based on natural features, climate, racial traits, history, and convention.<sup>58</sup> He cited Jongwhi Park's thought.

Since Korea is a peninsula, she has suffered between continent (China) and island (Japan). However, for the same reason, Korea has the potential of tolerating China and Japan. (Jongwhi Park, Korean Ideology)<sup>59</sup>

Kim asserts that the more the Korean people overcame difficulties, the deeper the ideologies they could have. In addition, under these difficulties, the spirit of humor was ripened by a contemplative view of life.<sup>60</sup> Kim also points out that Korean humor neutralizes sadness to

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<sup>55</sup> Kim, Jinwon. A beauty of humor in the Korean ancient novel, p. 125

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, Kim, P. 127

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, Kim, P. 135

<sup>58</sup> Kim, Jongkon. Humor viewed from traditional interconnection, p. 42-43

<sup>59</sup> Writer's translation, ibid, Park, p. 43

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, Kim, p. 43

laughter.<sup>61</sup> Even though most Korean classical literary works are based on the arduousness and sadness of life, there is always laughter and a happy ending. At the same time, he asserts that the primary creators of literary works were commoners. According to him, Korean classic literary works are a democratic literature that uses humor as a means to rid of the pain and sadness of life. During the time when Korea was under the rule of Japanese imperialism, this distinctive feature of the national humor sought resistance and freedom. Yet, the humor still had softness, objectivity, and was natural at that time.<sup>62</sup> Again, generosity was emphasized as a special quality of humor.

Duksoon Chang defines the characteristic of humor as goodwill, not to ridicule or insult the other party. Chang has researched Korean farcical stories which show the Korean typical sense of humor, such as stories of husband and wife, a master and a maid servant, a noble man and Kisaeng (a singing and dancing girl), and finally a monk and a widow.<sup>63</sup> She explains that most of the Korean folly tales are constructed based upon human relationships and also anecdotes of the distinguished scholars should have spectators as media to make it a humorous story.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, she describes that most of risk in Korean farcical stories deal with immoral and bold behaviors. As the third characteristic, she points that humor arises according to the needs of the communal society. That is, it relates with manners and customs and ideas of a certain group of society. So it is natural that a noble man cannot understand the commoners' native sense of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, Kim, p. 47

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, Kim, P. 47

<sup>63</sup> "In Korea its native character, *Hangul* has been used for about five hundred years, while Chinese characters have been used for no less than two thousand years. Accordingly even after the invention of *Hangul*, lots of the volumes have been written in Chinese characters by many famous scholars or literary men disregarding their native character. This essay is a study on such kinds of volumes and among them it chiefly deals with some pieces of farcical stories mentioned in about ten books written in Chinese characters which I think are filled with thousands of humorous stories showing Koreans' typical sense of humor" (Chang, Duk-soon. *Sense of Humor in Korean Literature – A study of Farcical Stories Written in Chinese Characters* – p. 41.)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, Chang, p. 41

humor. On the other hand, common people are dull to the jokes of the aristocratic society. Finally, Chang asserts that we can also taste the sense of Korean humor in the way of expression in language.<sup>65</sup>

Each language has its own local tone. So the humor which arises from the different languages are also different one from another. Especially in witty talk, the local tone of each language is the key point to solving the sense of humor. In respect of language there are two kinds of farcical stories in Korea. The first are stories written in Hangul, it becomes a good humorous story but if it is once translated into Chinese characters, it turns out to be a monotonous foul story though the contents of the story are just the same<sup>66</sup>

Chang also argues that Korean tales and ancient novels are so strongly linked with Korean custom, colloquial language, and religion that we can appreciate what Korean humor is all about. She adds that satire and humor should be distinguished. According to her, satire attacks the irrationality of life while humor comprehends virtue, happiness, and love. Ironically, she also insists that Korean humor reads the same to foreigners. Yet, since humor is strongly related in the nation's peculiar culture and language, I disagree with her point of view. After all, she confesses the hardship of defining exact Korean humor.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, Chang, p. 42

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, Chang, p. 43

I scrutinized Korean farcical stories written in Chinese characters...  
However, I realized that I couldn't explain the characteristics of Korean humor exactly like we cannot define humor accurately.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike other scholars, Dongwook Kim sees pessimism in Korean literature.<sup>68</sup> According to Kim, the humor in literature disappeared and acrimonious sarcasm was substituted after the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592. He attributes this phenomenon to the effect of the war. He specially stresses changes, such as the lack of showing emotion, warm heartedness, and contemplation in Pansori, which has changed as full of "fun", "pun", or "parody", instead. He theorized this fact as "class limitation of commoners' literature". He described that the patrons, that are the nobility, interfere and polish those literary works, so the works reveal the limitation of humor as a result. However, he emphasizes delicate shades of sadness and gladness citing the fact that the etymology of the two words is the same in Korean.

Through the traditional funeral rites, we can recognize that the origins of sadness and gladness are connected to each other. There are a shaman's dancing and song in funeral march, which must be in the saddest moment. In there, Koreans' inborn optimism originates. Optimism in this life is underlying the Korean people's consciousness.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, Chang, p. 38

<sup>68</sup> Kim, Dongwook. Humor in Korean literature, pp. 1~5

<sup>69</sup> Writer's translation, ibid, Kim, p.2

Sunhee Hong mentioned the importance of humor in Pansori.<sup>70</sup> She analyzes two representative Pansoris, Choon-Hyang Ga, and Pak Ta-Ryung, and points out that the humor in two Pansori is satirical and focused on characterization, exaggeration, and metaphor. She also says Pansori was warmly welcomed by the masses because of humor, and the humor became the most important part of developing Pansori into a democratic literature.<sup>71</sup>

There are some studies of Korean humor in connection with animal fables. Jungshil Kim researched a change of consciousness of the humble class through the humor and satire in Korean animal fables.<sup>72</sup> She finds that while humor reflects periods of the social stability, satire is salient in times of social unrest. As a literature of a period, animal fables affected the social system or structure of consciousness of the masses, especially when they could not express their discontent and depression directly. She insists that, therefore, we can understand social change through the mutation of humor.<sup>73</sup> For instance, animal fables represent the state and change of consciousness in a specific time. From this point of view, humor becomes a refresher for the Korean people who have undergone all sorts of hardships through history.<sup>74</sup>

Jaehwan Kim published his research work, “Satire, Humor, Irony in Korean Animal Fables”. In his study, he asserts that satirical literature is adhered closely to the period. He said, although satire has the same attribute with irony, which is negative and critical against the reality of life, satire has more aggressiveness than irony.<sup>75</sup> He explains animal fables as a way of satire that is used when injustice and absurdity of human society couldn’t be disclosed directly. As an

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<sup>70</sup> Hong, Sunhee. *Humor in Pansori*. pp. 221~222

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Hong, p. 221

<sup>72</sup> Kim, Jungshil. *Humor and satire in Korean animal fables*. Pp. 149~150

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, Kim, p. 149

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, Kim, p. 150

<sup>75</sup> Kim, Jaewhan. *Satire, Humor, Irony in Korean Animal Fables*. p. 105.

example, he instanced Tokki-Jeon<sup>76</sup> (a rabbit story) as a narration of satirizing the absurd throne of the time. Yet, Kim emphasized that the personification of animals in the story makes us feel humor instead of hostility. Also, he says the importance of the characteristic of animal fable is exposing and criticizing hypocrisy, contradiction, and corruption of the ruling class based on commoner's senses during the time of feudal lord society regulated by Confucianism.<sup>77</sup>

Misook Wi views a masque as a form of festivity which is a product of public culture, in her research "Humor in Korean masque".<sup>78</sup> She points out a special quality of public humor in Korean masques. So far, the discussion of masques has been focused on satire. Yet, she classifies Korean masques, ancient novel, and Pansori as the traditional public culture, and defines humor as common cultural characteristics in those commoners' literature. Generally, masque is understood as a confrontation between orders of existing and new.<sup>79</sup> Also, the humor of the masque reaches satire against feudal privileged class. Again, satire stresses its purpose which corrects and improves absurdity, attacking with laughter. However, Wi emphasizes the difference between "carnival laughter," which means "whole", and satirical laughter that is focused on the "individual". She insists Korean Tal-Nori<sup>80</sup> (a Korean masque play) not only criticizes society but also offers laughter through forgiveness and reconciliation, and humor of masque changes in

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<sup>76</sup> The subject of Tokki-Jeon (Rabbit story) is about the faithfulness against the logic of medieval rule, and satire of its absurdity in Chosun period.

<sup>77</sup> Kim, op cit ,p. 105

<sup>78</sup> Wi, Misook. Humor in Korean masque. pp. 147~170

<sup>79</sup> A history and principle of Tal-Choom (Korean masque dance).

<sup>80</sup> "Korean Mask (Tal in Korean) has two different names in Korean. One is Gamyun (disguised face) because it disguise original face in varied animal or human being masks.

The other is Dutbyogi (meaning double face) because it can express essence of human life that can't be expressed by real human faces.

The origin of Korean Mask can be dated back to ancient times. Ancient Korean Mask had a supernatural deity's face, functioning as religion. The mask was believed to be God's descendant upon the earth. But the mask came to be employed by art and drama, and in Chosun Dynasty it was developed as Talnori (Korean Mask Play) of which the purpose was to criticize the society." (<http://www.sac.or.kr/eng/face/masks.html>)



accordance with regional characteristics and historical growth.<sup>81</sup> Namely, she views the laughter of Tal-nori as a humor, which is carnival laughter, not satire.

In the meantime, Daniel A. Kister tries to examine comic propensities which act on exorcism (short dramatic performance) through his study “Humor in Korean shamanic dramas.”<sup>82</sup> Kister’s analysis is that those comic propensities are on active power of psychologically cathartic emission.<sup>83</sup>

A shaman fabricates the image of Confucian bureaucratism as fabulous nonsense and an obstacle restricting human freedom.... A shaman drives the drama to the direction that social or existent frustration paradoxically rouses up gladness.<sup>84</sup>

Dong-il Cho sought humor in Korean folk songs. He asserts that religious or supernatural factors do not exist in folk songs, and moral standards are not valued in them.<sup>85</sup> Specific character of humor is emphasized again in Korean folk songs.

Folk songs attach greater importance to the expression of the singers themselves rather than focusing on critique against a hostile opponent. Therefore, the comic in Korean folk songs is humor, rather than satire.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Wi, op cit, p. 2

<sup>82</sup> Kister, Daniel A. A theory of Humor and comedy – Humor in Korean shamanic dramas -

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, Kister, p. 174

<sup>84</sup> Writer’s translation, Ibid, Kister, p189

<sup>85</sup> Cho, Dong-il. Humor in Korean folk songs. p. 1

<sup>86</sup> Writer’s translation. Ibid, Cho, p.1

Most of all, a democratic mentality was emphasized as a concrete aspect of humor in Korean folk songs. He describes that humor in Korean folksongs is based on the emotion of the commoners. Especially under strict Confucian moral rules, they might try to be free from restriction through humorous songs.<sup>87</sup> From this point of view, Cho asserts that this attribute of the humor was appeared remarkably during the period when Korea was a colony of Japan.<sup>88</sup> Also, there is an opinion that humor mainly appears more than satire in the old form of Korean verses.<sup>89</sup> And at the same time, the “didacticism” of humor - revealing and sympathizing with human faults was highly valued.<sup>90</sup>

Recently, more scholars are conducting studies about humor in Korean traditional art. Young-ok Shim writes about humor as an important Korean traditional beauty. According to her, humor was well expressed in ceramics, folk paintings, and embroideries in the Chosun period.<sup>91</sup> Among them, she stresses that the beauty of humor on objects of craftwork is especially varied.

Gu-yeol Lee insists that we can create a term “Humor art” as a genre, like “humor literature” or “comedy.”<sup>92</sup> As an example of the humor of Korean art, he says “despite that the tiger was regarded the most dreadful animal, often it became a subject of drawing in humorous and droll way.”<sup>93</sup> He also writes about humor as an important element of the beauty of Korean formative arts, such as sculpture of wood or stone.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, Cho, p. 2

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, Cho, P. 4

<sup>89</sup> Kim, Yeolkyu, 1978. Korean humor, p. 26 Joong-Ang Il Bo Co.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, Kim, p. 26

<sup>91</sup> Shim, Young-ok. A Study on beauty of humor in Korean Traditional Art, p. 20

<sup>92</sup> Lee, Gu-yeol (The head of Korean modern art institute), 1998. Humor in art and its tradition, p. 40. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, Lee, p. 40

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, Lee, P. 41

Moving to Korean modern art, Lae-kyung Park studies the modernized application of Korean humor in Korean modern art.<sup>95</sup> Park says the humor of Korean modern art shows more satirical, critical, and intellectual tendencies compared to the characteristics of traditional humor, which is artless and frank. Consequently, even though the techniques of works are diverse in accordance with artists, the humor in the modern arts is more complicated and metaphorical.<sup>96</sup> Further, introducing “a cow, bird, and a crab” by Jung-Sub Lee, Park describes Lee as the best artist who expressed humor diversely among many painters of the day.<sup>97</sup> This painting depicts a cow whose testicle is bitten by a crab. His face looks pained, the tail is shaking, and a bird is jeering him, sitting on his horn (fig 14). Park explains that this painting is a wonderful piece of workmanship showing the possibility of an unexpected situation between the strong and the weak.<sup>98</sup>



Fig 14. A cow, bird, and a crab (Painted by Jung-Sup, Lee)<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Park, Lae-kyung (President of Korean Cultural Exchange Society), 1998. Modern Application of Korean Humor. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, Park, p. 37

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, Park, p. 41

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, Park, p. 41

<sup>99</sup> Source from <http://svr.seogwipo.go.kr/miniBBS/JSLee/09-joongseob.htm>

As another work done by a contemporary artist, Lee points out “come on, snake!”<sup>100</sup> painted by Jae-hew Sung (fig 15).<sup>101</sup> In this painting, a frog hugs a liquor bottle in one hand, and holds a cup in the other hand. In drink, the frog is shouting bravely “come on, snake!” to a snake that usually threatens and afflicts him.<sup>102</sup> Lee concludes that young artists are trying to express a modern aspect of humor in diverse ways, and they are continuously dealing with symbolism, sarcasm, and current issues of humor.<sup>103</sup>

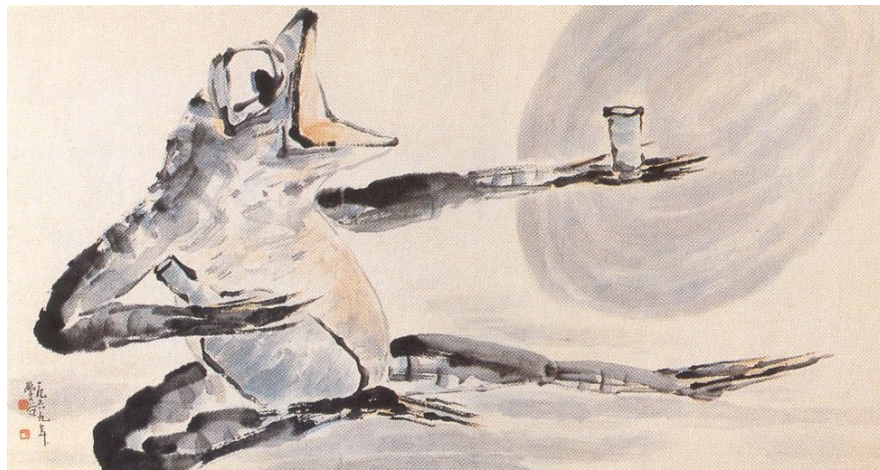


Fig 15. Come on, snake!(painted by Jae -hew Sung)<sup>104</sup>

According to Ik-young Yun, artists of modernism at the end of the twentieth century treat artists themselves as objects of satire. He explains that these cultural phenomena are called post-modernism.<sup>105</sup> He insists that there exists only critique, not satire, in modernism and finally artists regard themselves as the target of humor;

<sup>100</sup> Writer’s translation

<sup>101</sup> Lee, op cit, p. 44

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, Lee, p. 44

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, Lee, p. 48

<sup>104</sup> Source from Humor and Us p. 44

<sup>105</sup> Yun, Ik-young ( An art critic, a professor of Chang Won University, Korea), 1998. Humor and Korean Modern Art, p. 53 – 54. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co.

Namely, the subject and object of the painting are artists themselves.

Finally, they ridicule and sympathize with themselves at the same time.

Through the process, we can find the factors of humor.<sup>106</sup>

Yohan Cho<sup>107</sup> generally studies about Korean traditional humor in his research “The beauty of humor of Koreans”. In the meantime, there is an approach to analyzing humor in music. Myung-Hee Han<sup>108</sup> explains humor in Korean traditional music through the interpretation of the words of songs.<sup>109</sup> Notably, he emphasizes the importance of Pansori. Han indicates Pansori as “a thesaurus and a model of humor.”<sup>110</sup>

Without drollery and humor, Pansori cannot exist. Therefore, Pansori music is a lump of drollery and humor. It is the flower and essence of humor.<sup>111</sup>

Han points out the significance of music as a means of enhancing humor. He said when those humorous words jump on the music, the quality of humor is increased double and becomes true to nature.<sup>112</sup>

So far, I have reviewed significant research and concepts of Korean humor. Even though there are several studies about humor in Korean literature and art, the interpretation of humor as

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<sup>106</sup> Writer’s translation. Ibid, Yun, p54

<sup>107</sup> A professor in Sung Shil University, Korea. His research was dealt in previous chapter.

<sup>108</sup> A president of the national center for Korean traditional performing arts in 1998.

<sup>109</sup> Han, Myung-hee, 1998. Humor in Korean traditional music. Humor and Us, Shi Gong Sa Co

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, Han, p. 100

<sup>111</sup> Writer’s translation. Ibid, Han, p101

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, Han, p. 102

a traditional landscape design concept, which I try to examine in this study, is rare. Therefore, this research focused on the factor of humor in landscape design works in Korean traditional space would be valuable as a basis for the following study in relation to both design and preservation.

## CHAPTER VI. CASE STUDIES - DESIGN ANALYSIS

While Korean people pass through a long history, which is studded by often invasion from foreign country and recent Korean War, lots of cultural assets were disappeared and destroyed. Moreover, structures and landscape design has changed following western style today.

Comparatively, palaces and temples keep their original style which show Korean traditional landscape design well. The reason I focus on them as the research site is for that reason. Most of following case study was done based on the examples in several palaces and temples in South Korea.

### 1. Kyung Bok Palace

In the heart of Seoul, Korea, an old but beautiful palace is standing (fig 16). Since 1395, Kyung Bok palace has stood as the main palace of the Chosun Dynasty.<sup>113</sup> This magnificent palace has acquired glory and shame throughout its history. In particular, Kyung Bok palace was burned down and damaged severely during the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592, but it was restored in 1867. However, the Japanese destroyed and defamed its reputation again after they colonized Korea.<sup>114</sup> After regaining independence,<sup>115</sup> Kyung Bok palace was no longer used as a place for affairs of state, but was set aside by being loved from the people in and out of the country as one of the nation's great cultural inheritance. Currently, the palace is in the midst of restoration, which will be completed in 2009. With a more than 600-year-history, Kyung Bok palace contains a lot of stories with many cultural properties. Of course, there are several

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<sup>113</sup> 1392 - 1910

<sup>114</sup> 1910 ~ 1945

<sup>115</sup> 1945

examples in relation to humor, too.

#### (1) Bell, a Catalyst of Imagination and Humor – HaeTae in Front of Kwang Wha Moon Gate

From ancient times, HaeTae (fig 17), a mythical unicorn lion, has been a symbol of justice in Korea. He is regarded as an auspicious animal discriminating between right and wrong with a faithful and honest nature. If someone had a bad intention and did wrong, the HaeTae would butt the wrong doer with its horn. The statue of this mythological animal is located in front of Kwang Wha Moon (fig 18), the main gate of Kyung Bok palace. Standing there, the HaeTae gazes at people who proceed to the royal palace as a model of patriotism to them.

The HaeTae is also regarded as the guardian of the palace against fire. According to a theory about the configuration of the grounds (Feng Sui), Kyuan Ak San Mountain, which stands opposite Kyung Bok palace, has the aura of fire, a belief seemingly substantiated by frequent fires at the palace. Putting HaeTae in front of the palace is believed to oppress the force of fire. As such, HaeTae has an extremely important mission.

Let us examine the statue of HaeTae carefully. He has big eyes, canine teeth, and a body covered with scales. Even though he reveals sharp canine teeth and gives us a fierce scowl, the figure does not easily frighten us. Rather, his generally rounded shape is intimate and his big, plump paws look cute (fig 19). He is obviously roaring, but the mouth looks to be smiling (fig 20), and the protrudent eyes are waggish. Yet, this particular statue has no horn like other HaeTae statues. Instead, he is wearing a big bell around his neck like a kitten. The figure itself, a solemn statue is wearing a bell, breaks the stern image of the statue. Further, it makes us curious as to why he is wearing the bell. Since the HaeTae was placed to prevent fire, the bell may be related to the role of the HaeTae. If I imagine a fire, I can envision why the bell is hanging around his



neck. HaeTae would jump from the pedestal and run here and there, jingling the bell loudly to let people know there is a fire in the palace. Imagining the scene or thinking about the intention of the sculptor of HaeTae makes us smile.

Jean Baudrillard describes the image as reproducing certain objects, imagination as the power which produces those images, and calls the world which is constituted by images the imaginary society. He emphasizes that the imaginary society loses its existence in the world where the image itself becomes subject or where there is no subject that image can imitate or reproduce.

Namely, the bell allows us to give full play to our imagination, and becomes a motif of humor, which invests a mythical animal statue with vitality. In other words, the humor in this case functions as an accentuation of the design of this statue, which turns “ceremoniousness” into “friendliness”, “legend” into an “everyday affair”.



Fig 16. Kyung Bok Palace



Fig 17. HaeTae



Fig 18. Kwang Wha Moon Gate



Fig 19. HaeTae



Fig 20. HaeTae

## (2) Lazy Guardians - Seosu

There is a bridge called the Young Jae Kyo which crosses the Kum Cheon stream, between two gates, the Hung Rae Mun and the Kun Jeong Mun, in Kyung Bok palace. The main buildings of Korean palaces were designed to have a stream in front, and a bridge that connects two spaces divided by the stream. That is to say, visitors must cross the bridge to enter the main building of the palace. The stream represents a boundary line between ordinary space and space for a king, which is sacred. Naturally, one might worry about bad aura penetrating into the king's space by way of the stream and bridge. Seosu (fig 21) was created for this reason. His task is to prevent intrusion of ominousness into the palace. Seosu is a stone lion, an auspicious mythical animal of ancient Korea. The sculpture's elaborateness, its wiggly mane and scales, shows the distinguished skill of stone art in the late Chosun period. Near the bridge, four Seosus glare down the stream. Although these Seosus have an extremely important mission, they look much too easygoing (fig 22). They should have strained ears, glaring eyes, and stand upright with sharp toenails extended. Yet, they are prostrating leisurely with two paws drooped. Even, the mouth smiles silently. The statues show an absolute ease and graceful attitude. One wonders how they can guard the king's space from evil with such a pose. However, their unique posture perfectly harmonizes with the surroundings. In spite of their humorous features, they possess the dignity of guardians. They do not look frivolous or simply ridiculous.

In this case, humor breaks our fixed idea that the guard must be rigid and dreadful. It also may be interpreted that humor was applied to create flexibility and softness in a very serious space, and connects two spaces of different characteristics. We also find this peculiar design concept expressed in Korean traditional art through the smiling Buddhist statues, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Korean Buddhist statues smile in particular. Indian Buddhist statues are prominent for their realistic description and those of Southern Asian countries, including Thailand, display a strong dignity. Meanwhile, if Chinese Buddhist statues are usually big and grand, features of unceremoniousness and warm-heartedness characterize those of Korea.<sup>116</sup>

Even though the application of a smile to Buddhist statues or stone guards, which softens rigidity, is a characteristic of Korean traditional stone art, a more concrete expression of humor was applied on the Seosu with his posture and rich facial expression. It is humorous without losing the dignity of guard.



Fig 21. Seosu

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<sup>116</sup> Writer's translation. The characteristics of Korean culture and laughter.  
[www.encykorea.com/Contents/krean/smile](http://www.encykorea.com/Contents/krean/smile)





Fig 22. Seosu

### (3) A Happy Family - Wol Dae

On the corner of the front of Wol Dae (fig 23, 24),<sup>117</sup> sculptures of a group of HaeTae attract public gaze. It is a HaeTae family. A husband and wife of HaeTaes are sitting back-to-back to each other, turning their heads in opposite directions. Baby HaeTaes are climbing the parents' back and bosom (fig 25, 26). This is not a common posture for a guardian statue. Most of all, the couple carrying their babies present a rare figure, opposed to the strong or sometimes solitary nature of guardians. However, the atmosphere this happy family evokes is warm and humorous.

Let us further examine the background of the humor in this case. Korean traditional culture is under the strong influence of Confucianism, which asserts that every detail of living is ruled according to gender and age. Design characteristics for Korean traditional housing, such as detached buildings called An Che (building for women) and Sarang Che (building for men), or

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<sup>117</sup> Two storied stone platform that is constructed to raise and support the main building.

gardens follow rules that separate space for men and women rigidly. Children also are educated by stern morality to distinctions between the genders,<sup>118</sup> and to respect the elders. Under this condition, children should not behave like spoiled child. However, the Haetae family appears different. The male and female are resting together, and their babies are acting cute. This happy family seems to defy the strict ideology behind the humor. If we interpret the reason for the baby Haetaes to be that even babies will be loyal to the king in succession to their parents, another flavor of humor is added. Even though Shin (1997) sees this Haetae family as an expression of an establishment ideology of the Chosun dynasty, humanism based on the humanitarian ideal,<sup>119</sup> I see more factors of humor as a design element. Compared to Chinese style, the Korean Wol Dae has a smaller scale but is elegant and substantial in design. According to Ahn, big does not mean beautiful or well designed.<sup>120</sup> Especially in Korean Wol Dae, humor was added as a design concept to express instinct more frankly, such as the affection of male and female, and the love between parents and children, rather than just focusing on sobriety or honor. The designer stepped back from the harsh discipline of Confucianism for the moment, and created humor that produces frankness, unsophisticatedness, and warmth from mere pieces of cold stone.

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<sup>118</sup> There is an old Korean proverb that girls and boys cannot sit together from age of seven.

<sup>119</sup> 1997/5/16 The Chosun Ilbo (a name of the Korean newspaper)

<sup>120</sup> Ahn, Gye Bog. The comparison of traditional landscape designs.  
[http://cuth.cataegu.ac.kr/~gbahn/korea/korea\\_04.html](http://cuth.cataegu.ac.kr/~gbahn/korea/korea_04.html)



Fig 23. Wol Dae



Fig 24. Wol Dae





Fig 25. HaeTae Family



Fig 26. HaeTae Family

#### (4) Queen Mother's Romance - Flower Wall of Jakyung Jeon

Passing by KyoTae Jeon (a palace of the Queen), over the Amisan mound, there is an elegant building called the Jakyung Jeon. A splendid wall and beautiful chimney signify that the building is special. It is a building for the Queen Mother (fig 27). A wall decorated by beautiful colors, patterns, and various materials in Korean traditional space is called a “flower wall”. In fact, the flower wall, chimney, flowerbed, lattice, and parapet are principal design elements in the Korean garden. The flower wall has its origin in the Samkuk period.<sup>121</sup> The magnificence of patterns and colors were declined during the Chosun period due to a current of respect for simplicity. Instead, artless decorating materials were used such as soil, small rocks, tiles and broken pieces of tiles.<sup>122</sup> Among these, the flower wall of Jakyung Jeon is known as a masterpiece of the genre.

As mentioned previously, Confucianism ruled everyday life during the Chosun period. It affected the design of inner and outer spaces. Usually, the houses of the nobilities were separately designed for men and women. Spaces for women were placed deep inside away from the main gate of the house so that women could not contact outsiders or men easily. In general, the flower wall may be an expression of concern for women, who spend most of their time in stuffy spaces. Since Jakyung-Jeon was a space designed for a woman, its atmosphere is charming and feminine. On the chimney, patterns of “ten longevity symbols” are engraved (fig 28). They are the Sun, mountain, water, stone, cloud, Pine tree, herbs of eternal youth, turtle, crane, and deer. All these are regarded as having long lives, and expressed frequently in Korean traditional art. These patterns on the chimney express a wish for the Queen Mother. Since the wish for parents' longevity is an obligation and virtue under Confucian ideals, we can easily interpret the meanings

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<sup>121</sup> 57 B.C. ~ 668 A.D.

<sup>122</sup> *Flower wall* by Cho, Jung Hyun 1996, pp 26, 84-85, 87-89

of the patterns. Other patterns such as grape, bamboo, chrysanthemum, lotus, and bat are continuing. Grape symbolizes much posterity and bat means riches and honor.

Let us move back to the flower wall. There are three kinds of patterns displayed: characters, grids, and paintings of flowers and animals. The characters represent well-wishing remarks, such as long and healthy life or peace, and the grid symbolizes a protection from the devil. Lastly, the flowers represent praying good luck.<sup>123</sup> Among them, a butterfly attracts our eyes (fig 29). We could regard this as merely a causal sequence since there are flowers. However, it is not just a simple matter since the butterfly symbolizes love between man and woman.

Jakyung-Jeon was built especially for Queen Mother Jo and was restored in 1888. Yet, when the Queen Mother Jo stayed at Jakyung Jeon, she had already lost her husband. She might be old enough and, of course, she could not remarry by rule. In this situation, the butterfly makes us curious why it is there: Did the king wish for the queen mother's romance? Or, was the butterfly put there as a concern for an old and lonely mother? Regardless of the true meaning, the butterfly offers us a pleasant thought and complacent smile. The humor of the butterfly is metaphorical and elegant. It infuses vitality into a space otherwise senior and grave.

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<sup>123</sup> Kyung Bok Palace, A main palace of Chosun dynasty. [www.hdfamily.com](http://www.hdfamily.com)





Fig 27. JaKyung Jeon



Fig 28. Ten longevity symbols on the chimney of Jakyung Jeon



Fig 29. A butterfly pattern on the flower wall

## 2. Cheerful Lions, and an Alien from the West - Gue Rung

Gue Rung is one of the most gorgeous royal tombs in united Shilla period.<sup>124</sup> It is a six meters-high and twenty-three meters-diameter round peak covered with turf (fig 30). If we turn our faces, we encounter humor in this space. A little apart from the tomb, two pairs of stone lions and the statues of two persons from the West are standing (fig 31). The purpose of placing the statues of the gods to the twelve horary signs and the stone lions is to guard the dead king and to show the authority of an absolute monarch at the same time. However, they have something out of the ordinary. The four stone lions all have different hairstyles and different poses. They are looking four different directions, turning their heads but fixing their bodies. Moreover, they are

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<sup>124</sup> 668-918

happily laughing (fig 32, 33). This overall posture of the stone lions is not only active but also very funny. Stone lions as guards in front of the gates of castles or tombs are numerous around the world, but it is rare to see such pleasant stone lions as at Gue Rung.<sup>125</sup>

Now, let us look at the statue of the person from the West, who wears soft textured clothes (fig 34). He is identified as an Arabian because of the turban and the record of trade with those areas during the Shilla period. With his big eyes, curly whiskers, and robust physique, he is certainly a westerner. Placing westerners around royal tombs is an unusual gesture, but moreover, he has something unusual on his back in spite of his western appearance. He is carrying a small Korean traditional pouch called a Bok-Jumony on his back (fig 35). Typically, Bok-jumony (fig 36) belongs to women and children. They put money or small objects in it and wear inside the waist of one's trousers or skirts. Its cute and typical Korean style-design forms a striking contrast with his exotic and strong external features. Furthermore, it is hanging on his back, not in front, as he seems to hide it. This delicate humor of contrast and unexpectedness twinkles in the space of death.

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<sup>125</sup> [www.kyungju-is.co.kr/culture/tour/bulkuk/bulkuk6.htm](http://www.kyungju-is.co.kr/culture/tour/bulkuk/bulkuk6.htm)





Fig 30. Gue Rung



Fig 31. Gue Rung – Stone lions and a statue of literary man





Fig 32. Gue Rung – Stone lion



Fig 33. Gue Rung – Stone lion





Fig 34. Gue Rung - A westerner



Fig 35. A westerner wearing Bok Jumoney (Source from)<sup>126</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Source from <http://histopia.com/photo/gallery/view.php?num=0000000140&s=> under the permission



Fig 36. Bok Jumoney

### 3. Warm-Hearted Threats - Suk Jang Seong

Even though the Jang Seong is a simple statue having human features made from wood (Mok Jang Seoung, fig 37) or stone (Suk Jang Seoung fig 38, 39, 40), its meanings and functions are much more complex. Unlike statues in palaces or temples, the Jang Seong existed in the more typically artless lives of common people. It was used both practically and spiritually. It stands at the entrance of the village to protect people from evil and to assure happiness. Sometimes, people prayed for a good harvest, heavy catch, or for begetting children by erecting the Jang Seong. For the traveler, it became a landmark. Korean people relied on it and entrusted it with matters with which they could not deal. Therefore, the Jang Seong are as various as people's wishes. The essential feature of the Jang Seong is countenance. Some look hard and stern and others look simple and friendly.

Those of Suk Jang Seong are especially famous for their humor. The exaggerated facial expressions, big, glaring eyes and snob noses with funny hats, are familiar, just like our drunken

fathers or uncles (fig 41). Some have the smile of our witty grandmothers (fig 42). An obtusely outlined shape lets us relax, feel intimacy, and finally, makes us smile. It seems that the Korean people tried to “placate” evil spirits with funny features and soft smiles instead of driving them away using threatening appearance. That is to say, Koreans used humor as an intermediary for calling fortune and repelling devil.



Fig 37. Mok Jang Seong (Wooden Jang Seong)<sup>127</sup>



Fig 38. Suk Jang Seong

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<sup>127</sup> Source from Humor and Us p.128 Photograph by Kim, Dae-Byuck



Fig 39. Suk Jang Seong



Fig 40. Suk Jang Seong





Fig 41. Suk Jang Seong<sup>128</sup>



Fig 42. Suk Jang Seong<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Source from *Humor and Us* p.130 Photograpy by Kim, Dae-Byuck

<sup>129</sup> Source from *Humor and Us* p.129 Photograph by Kim, Dae-Byuck

#### 4. Gods in Full of Life - Nung Ji Tap Pagoda

Nung Ji Tap pagoda is known as the place where great king MunMu's cremation was performed in the Shilla period. It is a mound-shaped, two-stage pagoda. The tops of each story are covered with turf, and stones of stylobate encircle the lower parts of the pagoda (fig 43). The gods of the twelve earth branches engraved on slabs of stone are relatively precisely preserved and the pine trees around the pagoda evoke a cozy atmosphere.

Unlike those in Kyung Bok Palace, the twelve gods have human bodies; they wear clothes and hold weapons just like humans. The clothes and poses of each god are varied and on different size slabs, but their looks are all very elaborately expressed, such as the detailed pleats and ties of the clothes. Except for the faces, other parts of the bodies, such as the hands and feet are exactly human, and they are dressed differently civil or military officers (fig 44).

In fact, one of the characteristics of Korean traditional humor is personification of inanimate objects. Stationery, liquor, and sewing materials, such as a needle, become human beings in Korean classical literature. Through the process of giving life to inanimate objects, writers satirized human society. In this case, the twelve gods' exquisite and lively features are so dramatic that they evoke the images of characters from animal fables or animation. While watching them, we might imagine the scene in which they move, talk, and even fight with swords like humans.

From early times, humans have used personification of animals in art. The point of view of the animal might be seen as a pure standard that views human conduct objectively. Although, the meaning of the satire is not conveyed, there are a lot of cases of personification of animals in Ancient Babylonian and Egyptian wall painting, and it is regarded as the origin of cartoon. Today, it seems accepted convention that "human is the funniest object to human" in advertising

strategies. The twelve gods could be expressed with their original animal features, but they approach us more friendly and realistically through the use of humor. Again, humor shortens the distance between men and sacredness.



Fig 43. Nung Ji Tap Pagoda



Fig 44. Nung Ji Tap Pagoda – Sculpture of twelve gods (Rabbit)



## 5. Humanity in a Solitary Temple - Sunam Sa Temple

Located at the foot of Jo Gye Mountain, Sunam Sa Temple has more than a thousand years of history. It started as a hermitage called Biro-Am in 529, and was established as a temple in 861, Shilla period. With a charming stone bridge (fig 45) and a belvedere (fig 46) in a deep valley, Sunam Sa temple is known as a summer temple due to its picturesque scene in summer.

While walking around the precincts of this temple, a small, worn sculpture makes us turn our eyes upon it. Typically, the style of sculptures, statues, and pictures in temples is symbolic, grand, and even frightening in order to show the solemn Buddha or to express punishment for evil. Yet, this particular sculpture does not seem to be included in that category. If we watch it intently, we see two kittens clinging to their mother as if they are sucking milk, and the mother cat shelters them softly with her long, winding tail (fig 47). The two small kittens' round heads and eyes are so simple and innocent in warmth of maternal affection.

It is known that cat was imported with Buddhism to protect the Buddhist scripture from the rat. Also, there is a belief that monks should be always awakened to study hard like a cat that is catching mice. If that is true, the sculpture of the cat should have been made more gravely and splendidly. However, the technique of this sculpture is very simple and naive, which is definitely different from the formative art in most temples. I assumed that this warm and funny scene would only be possible in the context of understanding and feeling the love of parents, such a thought made me trace the history of this temple.

Sunam Sa belongs to the religious order of Tae Go Jong, which allows monks to be married and to have children, accordingly. However, even if the monks of Tae Go Jong could be married and have children, the original ideology of Buddhism, which abstains from attachment to personal feeling, might be taken preferentially to a love between mother and children. Is that why

this sculpture is placed inconspicuously, furtively with just simple technique and small size? The conjecture might be wrong, yet, this uncommon and naive scene of mother cat and kitten with funny gesture and cute face makes us smile and evokes heart-warming, as we spy out an ordinary emotion in monastic life.



Fig 45. Sunam Sa Temple - Stone Bridge called Sung Seon Kyo<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Source from <http://www.tourguide.co.kr/view.asp?Code=AO04G021> under the permission



Fig 46. Sunam Sa Temple – A belvedere<sup>131</sup>



Fig 47. Sunam Sa - Two Kittens and a mother cat

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<sup>131</sup> source from <http://www.tourguide.co.kr/view.asp?Code=AO04G021> under the permission

## 6. A Door to Heaven - A Temple Site of Jang Hang Ri

Jang Hang Ri is the name of the village where one of the temples from the unified Shilla period stood. The name of the temple is not known but the site of the building in which a Buddhist statue was installed and about ten meter-high-pagodas remain. As many relics of Shilla period, this five-story pagoda was also damaged, but was restored in 1932. The pagoda has two-stepped pedestal with two center pillars. Its bodies and roofs are made of same stone, but they are separated. The flat roof stones have cornices of five steps. This five-story pagoda is regarded as an important case of eighth-century Shilla's monument structure. In addition, it is famous for its door shape on the first story. Two Deva kings are standing each side of the door shaped carving<sup>132</sup>, and the handle of also were carved elaborately (fig 48).



Fig 48. A temple site of Jang Hang Ri - Pagoda



The door symbolizes that the pagoda preserves relics of Buddha in it. Namely, the door means a gate to the world of Buddha, a future life. Although the pagoda is made of stone and, of course, it is impossible to open or close the door, it has the exact shape of iron rings attached to the door just like a real door (fig 49). It is so realistic that I imagine grasping the handle, opening the door gently and entering heaven smoothly. Or, I have an illusion of touching the relics inside the pagoda. If there were only door shapes on the pagoda, it would not be humorous at all. The door imparts a meaning of inner space to the pagoda. Moreover, elaborately expressed door handles add reality and humor to it. The pagoda is an expression of admiration and supplication by ordinary people. Using humor, they try to ease the approach to the conceptual space within from this life.



Fig 49. A temple site of Jang Hang Ri – Pagoda (Ring shaped handle of the door)

## 7. A Majestic Parade on the Roof, and a Happy Guardian - Chang Kyung Palace

Chang Kyung Palace is one of the detached palaces in Chosun period(fig 50). Originally, great King Sejong built the palace for his father in 1418, and named it Su Gang palace. During the fifteenth year of king Sungjong's period (1484), several more buildings, including the Myungjeon Jeon<sup>133</sup>, Munjeong Jeon, and Tongmyong Jeon, were built and the name of the palace was changed to Chang Kyung. After that, there were frequent fires and reconstructions. During the period of Japanese colonization, the palace was degraded to a park. In 1909, the Japanese built a zoo and botanical garden in the palace, and opened it to the public. They also planted a thousand cherry trees, which is the national tree of Japan, and changed the palace into a park. After Independence, this unfortunate palace remained a park for forty years. Finally, the Korean government began restoration of the palace in 1984 and three years later, Chang Kyung palace retook its original dignity.

### (1) A Parade of Heroes – Jobsang

On the eaves of Tongmyung Jeon, the main building of Chang Kyung palace, several statues stand in a row, which is called Jobsang (fig 51). Jobsang includes statues of ascetics and animals that protect the palace, castle gate, and temple from evil spirits and disasters. Each statue has a different pose and features. There is a vanguard and other statues are following him. The vanguard and his party look familiar. They are characters from the ancient Chinese novel called the Seo Yu Ki, a story of the vicissitudinous journey to India to retrieve the true heart sutra. The main characters in the novel are the Buddhist priest Samjang, Son Oh Gong, a monkey with supernatural power, a wild boar called Jeo Pal Gye, and a lion-faced beast called Sa Oh Jeong.

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<sup>133</sup> Jeon means building in Chinese character

Priest Samjang is at the head as a vanguard, and Son Oh Gong, Jeo Pal Gye, Sa Oh Jeong and other statues of mythical animals are following in regular sequence.

Although the placement of the Jobsang is a symbol of protecting the palace from evil, this unique parade on the roof is interesting and funny enough. It seems that the characters are reborn and a scene in the novel is recreated. The dignified features of priest Samjang (fig 52) and imploring pose of Son Oh Gong are especially laughable since Son Oh Gong was an edified monkey who was audacious before due to his supernatural power in the novel. He looks cowed in the presence of his master priest Samjang (fig 53).



Fig 50. Chang Kyung Palace



Fig 51. Chang Kyung Palace – Jobsang



Fig 52. Jobsang – Samjang (Priest)





Fig 53. Jobsang – Son Oh Gong (Monkey)

## (2) A Smile for the Great King - Stone Monument to King Sung Jong's Umbilical Cord

In the meantime, deep inside of the palace, on the northeastern forest hill, an uncommon monument stands. It is the site where king Sung Jong's umbilical cord was buried. In front of a small stone chambered pagoda in which the king's umbilical cord was placed, they put a stone monument. This monument to the king's placenta in the palace is rare through many generations of kings. Yet, the hilarious prop of the tombstone is more rare (fig 54). Most of the tombstones have stone turtles as their props, but it is hard to see ones as happy as this turtle. The smiling mouth is so big that it has wrinkles on either side of the cheeks, and rounded eyes and dotted nostrils make a docile facial expression.

I carefully infer the reason for the soft smile from a characteristic of the place. Since this is not a memorial tombstone to death but a stone monument to commemorate a great king, the

turtle does not show a heavy heart. Unlike other stone turtle props of expressionless faces, this happy smile gives liveliness to this inanimate object and even makes the surrounding bright.



Fig 54. Stone monument of King Sung Jong's umbilical cord

#### 8. A Temple of Full of Smiles – Whang Ryong Sa Temple

Now, about six thousands and sixty square meters of desolate temple site is left where great Buddhist priest Won Hyo exerted his influence upon the public 1300 years ago. Only two lonely stone pillars called Dang Gan Ji Ju stand, telling us where once the magnificent temple of Whang Ryong Sa was located (fig 55). In fact, Whang Ryong Sa temple is one of the matters of gravest concern for historians due to its size and treasures, such as the nine-storied wooden pagoda that is the biggest in the world (80 meters high), and the grand Buddhist statue called Jang Yuk Jon Bul, which was made of iron and gold sent from King Ashoka of India. The temple was established in 566 and the pagoda was built in 643, but whole temple, including wooden

pagoda, was burned by the Mongolian invasion of 1238. In July 1076, this mysterious temple awoke out of legend. During the restoration work between 1976 and 1993, several sites of buildings, gates, and pagodas were recovered. Thus, the excavation team discovered Dang Gan Ji Ju, stone flagpoles for ritual, and some pieces of statues and tiles that are holding 1300 years of time and tide. Although it is still hard to envision the overwhelmingly sublime temple on this empty land, we find the trace of humor in these remains. The granitic pillars are 3.7 meters high with the prop of a turtle shape prostrate inbetween, unlike most props of Dang Gan Ji Ju, which are simply squares (fig 56, 57). Interestingly, the turtle is smiling. With goggling eyes, well-knit lips draw a fishhook-like curved line (fig 58).

Meanwhile, a statue of a young boy shows another smile (fig 59). This very childlike face expresses artlessness and bashfulness. One more unique smile was found in the remains. It is a huge tile called a Chimi, which is attached at the end of the ridge of a roof as decoration. On this 1.5 meter sized tile, a smiling face is carved. The drooped outer corner of the eyes and opened mouth seem to show a free and easy-faced people during the Shilla period (fig 60). We do not know how many more examples of smiles there are. Yet, all of these smiles might say that the temple was brimming over with the mercy of Buddha. Further, it seems that they show the prosperity and happiness of the golden age of Shilla period.

## 9. Humor of Metaphor and Imagination – Chang Duck Palace

In 1405, Chang Duck Palace was established as a detached palace of the Kyung Bok palace, which was the main palace of the Chosun period to provide for all emergencies. Although it was a detached palace, Chang Duck palace played an important role since Kyung Bok palace suffered frequently from Japanese invasions and fire.



Fig 55. Site of Whang Ryong Sa Temple



Fig 56. Whang Ryong Sa Temple –Dang Gan Ji Ju and the prop





Fig 57. Dang Gan Ji Ju and the prop



Fig 58. Whang Ryong Sa Temple – Smiling turtle



Fig 59. Whang Ryong Sa Temple – A statue of young boy



Fig 60. Whang Ryong Sa Temple – Chimi

In spite of the destruction during the Japanese invasion of 1592, Chang Duck palace was rebuilt and, luckily, still retains the scale and shape of its original form among the five palaces in Seoul (fig 61).

The formation and atmosphere of this detached palace are quite different from those of the Kyung Bok palace. Unlike the principal buildings which are arranged in a straight line in Kyung Bok palace, Chang Duck palace was designed by making the best use of its topography and surroundings. The landscape design, including the beautiful rear garden is especially famous for its elegance and naturalness. They only applied man-created beauty where they really should, but tried to keep the natural form and original characteristics of the space. That is why Kyung Bok palace is expressed as a masculine image and Chang Duck palace as a feminine image. For these reasons, Chang Duck palace is registered as a world heritage site by UNESCO.

Chui Gyu Jung pavilion is located deep inside the rear garden. Actually, the view from this pavilion is not opened since it is surrounded by thickly wooded forest (fig 62, 63). What would the king see except trees from this enclosed space? A small quadrangular pond has the key to the question. To achieve a scene, they made a pond in front of the pavilion. Moreover, they made a stone turtle's appearance on the edge of the pond (fig 64). Producing this interesting situation seems clever and humorous at the same time. Watching the pond and the turtle, the king could dream of the seashore in the middle of the forest.

Placing oddly shaped stones is one of the essential design techniques in Korean traditional landscaping. Usually, they put the stone in the flowerbed in rear gardens (fig 65), around ponds and by the side of pavilions, or into the stone pot (fig 66, 67), and enjoyed the scene through imagining and interpreting the meanings. In Chang Duk palace, there are several stone pots of unique stones in Yoen Kyung Dang<sup>134</sup> and Nak Sun Jae<sup>135</sup> because they usually



designed flowerbeds around the buildings where the King and Queen slept, decorating with flowering trees and stones of unique shape on the flowerbed.

In the case of Nak Sun Jae, elaborate engravings of mythical animals are on the stone pot and its prop. One is sticking out his tongue with googling eyes and big snob nose. In addition, his eyebrows look like flying clouds (fig 68). The other shows a very funny and cute figure. Big eyes and nose, and a pursed mouth are rather like a pet and his bobbed hairstyle is still funnier. Contrasted with the size of his body, the drooping bell is so big that it extends outside the frame (fig 69).

The stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang has a more refined sense of humor. Four frogs are crawling on each corner of the pot, yet one is going in and three are going out (fig 70, 71, 72, 73). Beyond their comic motion, a deep philosophy is there. It speaks of one input and three outputs that express traditional Taoist thought: an abundance of offspring, an abundance of blessings, and an abundance of years to live.

Unfortunately, there is no record when and why these were created, and who designed them. Even if there were records, they might be lost by fire or wars. On the other hand, I assume that the devalued social position of craftsmen might pass over the importance of documentation. Now, preservation and application of these valuable properties is our mission.





Fig 61. Chang Duck Palace



Fig 62. Chang Duck Palace – Chui Gyu Jung Pavilion



Fig 63. Chang Duck Palace – Chui Gyu Jung Pavilion



Fig 64. Chang Duck Palace – Chui Gyu Jung Pavilion (A pond and a turtle)





Fig 65. Chang Duck Place - Flowerbed in rear garden



Fig 66. Stone pot in Nak Sun Jae



Fig 67. Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang



Fig 68. A mythical animal 1 - Chang Duck Palace





Fig 69. A mythical animal 2 - Chang Duck Palace



Fig 70. Chang Duck Palace – Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (A frog coming out)





Fig 71. Chang Duck Palace – Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (A frog coming out)



Fig 72. Chang Duck Palace – Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (A frog coming out)



Fig 73. Chang Duck Palace – Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (A frogs getting in)

## CHAPTER VII. FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR

As in every artistic activity, the Korean way of thinking, way of expressing emotions, and ideologies, which ruled them in different ages, are well reflected in the forms of humor in the examples that I have reviewed.

In many cases, smiling faces induce humor. Except for the big laughing of stone lions at Gue Rung, most of the smiles are soft and calm, which also make viewers quietly smile. Some cases stimulate our imagination through symbolic objects or pattern, and finally make us realize the humor. These are so metaphorical that the humors in them need our careful attention. Occasionally, more a direct way of expression using exaggerated and ridiculous figures like at Suk Jang Seong, and mythical animals on stone pots, is also used.

In opposition to the strict main ideologies of the time, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, an approach to ordinary human emotion was carefully expressed as well. On the other hand, a certain ideology is stressed through the design humorously as frogs surrounding stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang represent a Taoist virtue. Moreover, the personification of animals, which is a traditional way of representing humor in Korea, and reappearing characters of ancient novels also become unique forms of humor.

The forms of humor represented in the examples are classified as; breaking fixed ideas, values, and rules; emphasizing unexpectedness and imagination; exaggerating figures artlessly; intimating certain meanings; expressing humanity. These examples also can be categorized as; public versus private, situational versus archetypal, Buddhist versus Taoist, upper class versus lower class, urban versus rural (Table 1).

Humor also functions variously upon surroundings and viewers. Most of all, humor



creates intimacy between the design and viewers. If design is a matter of communication between the designers and the viewers, humor becomes a catalyst between the two. It makes us feel humanity, gives full play to our imagination, makes us think again, and finally gives us a warm-heart and tranquil smile.

As a technique of design, humor creates a sense of place. Sometimes it gives an accent on the place and describes the character of the place. In addition, humor softens rigid spaces, such as palaces, temples, and graves. It makes people relax from such seriousness so that they can approach and feel the space easier. Ultimately, humor becomes an important factor to attract people.

In most cases, the way of representing humor is subtle and indirect as the Koreans admire not extremes but moderation. However, once it is recognized, it might act deeper and longer in viewer's mind.

Table 1. Categories of humor

<b>Public</b>		<b>VS</b>	<b>Private</b>	
HaeTae (Kyung Bok Palace)			Flower wall (Kyung Bok Palace)	
Seosu (Kyung Bok Palace)			Chui Gyu Jung (Chang Duck Palace)	
Wol Dae (Kyung Bok Palace)				
<b>Situational</b>		<b>VS</b>	<b>Archetypal</b>	
Westerner in Gue Rung			Seosu	
Nung Ji Tap Pagoda			Suk Jang Seong	
Job Sang (Chang Kyung Palace)			Stone lions in Gue Rung	
Chui Gyu Jung			Mythical animals on Stone Pot in Nak Sun Jae	
Frogs on stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (Chang Duck Palace)				
<b>Buddhist</b>		<b>VS</b>	<b>Taoist</b>	
Nung Ji Tap Pagoda			Stone pot in Yeon Kyung Dang (Chang Duck Palace)	
Sunam Sa Temple				
Temple Site of Jang Hang Ri				
Dang Gan Ji Ju (Whang Ryong Sa Temple)				
<b>Upper Class</b>		<b>VS</b>	<b>Lower Class</b>	
Flower wall			Suk Jang Seong	
Gue Rung (Royal tomb)				
Stone pots				
<b>Urban</b>		<b>VS</b>	<b>Rural</b>	
Flower wall			Suk Jang Seong	
Stone pots				

## CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

Finding and interpreting a nation's humor seems like a jigsaw puzzle. Since humor is deeply rooted in human emotion and culture, it is like pieces of the whole picture of a puzzle called "culture". As we need the whole picture when we put together the pieces of a puzzle, we have to understand culture first to grasp the humor. And vice versa, those pieces, humor, become a part of the whole picture, culture. For this reason, identifying the characteristics of Korean humor in relation to Koreans' sentiment and culture is essential to understanding the humor in their design. Based on this understanding, cases in which humor is applied to landscape design works in Korean traditional space show how humor was used as a unique design concept. At the same time, the examples suggest the idea that humor is part of Korea's cultural and material heritage and should be developed in today's designs.

Optimism can be interpreted as one of the distinctive characteristics of Koreans, and their efforts to endure hardship through history and through their social system is the basis of Korean humor. This humor was expressed not in a very direct way but metaphorically and symbolically. These characteristics cover the whole field of Korean traditional art and literature, and in particular, certain design examples of landscape works express it strongly. The detailed examples I have reviewed verify the special quality of humor and can be summarized as follows.

Smiling is often used to express humor in design; applying symbolic objects such as a bell, butterfly, pouch, and door are used; expressing the love between parents and children is used; exaggerating and changing the figure, or making ridiculous features were represented; enacting a scene of literary works by presenting characters in the story was applied; personification of animals is used; putting specific animals with funny poses was used as a

technique to give special meanings and accent on the works.

Through these designs, humor induces intimacy from too much solemnity and gravity by breaking expectations such as fixed ideas, and shapes; it produces a humanity beyond strict ideology; it concretizes and secularizes myth, and creates a scenery using imagination; it hints at certain meanings by metaphor so that people think about them again; it creates a sense of place; it softens serious space and makes it warm. With these strong points, humor attracts people into a place or to the designs. Namely, humor plays a significant role as a design element.

Generally, Korean landscape design was formed based on the notion of naturalness, and harmony of people and nature. Consequently, it does not overwhelm people but makes them feel cozy. On this peculiarity, humor adds up to a feeling of intimacy and humanity, and harmony with surroundings.

However, in spite of its worth and importance as a design concept, humor has rarely been analyzed with and applied in today's design world, even in Korea. These findings, therefore, provide an opportunity to reintroduce an aesthetics of humor which reflects the interesting and valuable culture of Korea. Finally, it is clear that the results of this study offer important data in understanding Korean design concepts. More over, these results could be significant in the creation of design guidelines for not only Koreans but westerners, because, often, creation comes out of old wisdom. And, often, inspiration is delivered from the opposite side of the earth.

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## VITA

Sung Mi Han was born on July 30, 1967, in Korea. She was raised in Daegu, Korea, and graduated from Kyungbuk Girls' High School in 1986. In 1986, she entered Catholic University of Daegu where she received a Bachelor of Agriculture degree in 1990 in landscape architecture. After getting the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Sung Mi Han joined the graduate school in 1993. Her main interest during the program was environmental psychology, and received Master of Science degree in landscape architecture in 1996. For two years, she worked as a part time instructor in Catholic University of Daegu and Daegu University. She also took an English program in Intensive English Institute at the University of Urbana Champaign for six months.

In the fall of 2001, Sung Mi Han started her second master's program in Louisiana State University, and anticipates graduating in May 2004 with a Master of Landscape Architecture degree.

After graduation, She will start to work at Korean Culture and Tourism Research Institute in Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a researcher.