

Lesson 4 Cultural Treasures

King Jeongjo's Grand Procession

Hey there! Let me introduce you to a fascinating piece of Korean history. Back on February 9, 1795, something remarkable happened in front of Changdeokgung Palace, where King Jeongjo lived. There was quite a crowd gathered there to witness a very special procession that's still talked about in Korea today.

Now, imagine this: more than 2,000 soldiers, hundreds of horse riders, and lots of important officials, all marching alongside the king and his mother with 50 musicians playing traditional instruments. When they crossed a bridge made of 36 boats on the Hangang River, you can imagine how that turned heads! That must have been something ordinary people rarely saw. Talk about a big event!

This was not just about putting on a show. No, it was serious business. Lasting four days and covering 68 kilometers, the procession moved alongside the king and his mother as they made a round trip to Hwaseong Haenggung.

Why did all of this happen? The first thing King Jeongjo had in mind was to show respect to his family. It happened around his mother's sixtieth birthday. Back in the Joseon Dynasty, just like today, turning 60 years old had a special meaning. And his father's tomb was near Hwaseong Haenggung. He was planning to hold a memorial service to honor his late father. By combining the two events, he was telling everyone how much family meant to him.

But wait. There's more. King Jeongjo was also making a statement about the Joseon Dynasty's strength. He dressed up like a military leader, wearing armor and sitting on a horse with his soldiers marching in perfect order. It was a way of saying, "We're ready to protect our land." He was really serious about making the Joseon Dynasty a powerful and successful kingdom.

Now, here's the twist: the procession also had something to do with Hwaseong Fortress, which was being built. In King Jeongjo's mind were big plans for Hwaseong. He wanted it to be a self-sufficient city with a strong military, farming, and trade as he hoped to make it the new capital, away from all the political chaos in Hanyang. So King Jeongjo gathered the best talents, such as Jeong Yakyong, and let them bring together the finest architectural techniques of his time from both the East and the West to build Hwaseong Fortress.

There's more to King Jeongjo's story. He treated his people well during the construction of the fortress. They received fair wages and breaks during bad weather and were even paid when they were sick, something that was unheard of at that time. Back then, ordinary people were typically required to work on public projects without getting paid. Once people got wind of King Jeongjo's plan, workers from all over the country came together in a rush. So, in under three years was the project finished, though it was initially thought to take about 10 years. Impressive, right?

Let's go back to the procession. The procession wasn't just some fancy show for ordinary people. It was actually a way for them to get up close and personal with the king. King Jeongjo set up a chance during the procession for common people to meet him and to share their concerns. This was a big deal, especially for those who couldn't read or write. They didn't have any other way to tell the king what was on their minds, so this was a direct line to him.

And here's the cherry on top: through the procession, King Jeongjo made government more accessible. During that time, the government used to hold exams to hire officials every three years. So, there weren't many chances available. He added special exams during the procession, giving more people a shot at joining the government. This move was innovative back then and made the government more diverse.

And guess what? King Jeongjo didn't forget a single detail. He made sure everything was documented properly by creating records for the procession and the construction of Hwaseong Fortress. These construction records were especially a lifesaver when the fortress was damaged during wartime. They were even part of why UNESCO recognized Hwaseong Fortress as a World Heritage Site.

At first, the people at UNESCO were a bit unsure about recognizing Hwaseong Fortress as the real deal. They weren't totally convinced it was authentic. But after checking out translated documents and comparing them with the restored fortress, they finally came around and agreed that the fortress had actually been restored just the way it was meant to be.

And among the records of the procession, there are these amazing paintings. One painting, Hwaneo Haengryeoldo, doesn't just feature the king's crew, but it also shows ordinary people watching along the road. It's a different take from the usual art of that time, which only focused on important figures.

So being kind to the people was a big deal for kings of the Joseon Dynasty. King Jeongjo's 1795 procession and Hwaseong Fortress stand as proof of that spirit. Hwaseong is more than just a fortress; it symbolizes a king who cared for his people. And this is a significant part of Korean cultural heritage.

4과 Further Reading

Suwon Hwaseong:**A Fusion of Defenses and Daily Life**

Suwon Hwaseong stands proudly as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but its uniqueness often goes unnoticed. This fortress artfully blends two distinct Korean styles: the mountain fortress, or sanseong, and the flat-land fortress known as eupseong.

Historically, the sanseong served as the final defense against invaders by utilizing Korea's mountainous landscape to its advantage. Defenders could fight from higher ground and effectively push back enemies with fewer soldiers. A famous example of this advantage was the battle at Haengjusanseong during the Japanese invasion of Korea in the late 16th century.

Living in the sanseong was not practical due to scarce farmland and poor living conditions though. So during peaceful times, people lived in and around the eupseong, such as Naganeupseong and Haemieupseong. Surrounded by low walls, the area housed administrative buildings, learning centers, and training grounds for soldiers. Common people, mainly farmers, lived outside these walls. In times of war, they withdrew to the nearby sanseong for safety.

After the Japanese invasion, a new type of fortress emerged that combined the strengths of both the sanseong and the eupseong. Built along the natural slopes of Paldalsan Mountain, Suwon Hwaseong displayed strong walls and defenses while also serving as a center for agriculture, commerce, and housing.