The Story of 'Jikji'
The World's Oldest Metal-type Book

Special Interview
Im In-ho
Intangible Cultural Property No. 101: Movable Metal Type

Templestay
Beopjusa Temple

Temple Food
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Facing Human Mortality

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Seon poem by Huangbo Xiyun

Liberation is not easily attained
Work on it wholeheartedly, with great intensity.
If last winter had not been so bitterly cold,
How could you enjoy the scent of apricot blossoms in spring?

*In Hwadu, Koan.

The Joy of Discovering a New Culture
The Story of ‘Jikji’:
The World’s Oldest Metal-type Book

“Jikji’ is the oldest existing evidence of movable metal-type printing in the world. It greatly influenced the spread of printing culture and human history. Now only one volume is preserved in France, so it has been deemed that the book should be registered as a Memory of the World.”

Announcement by UNESCO in September 2001

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In 1377 in Heungdeoksa Temple, Cheongju, two Buddhist monks printed their master’s writings using metal type. That book is what is called ‘Jikji’. In September 2001, the book was listed in the World Register, marking the two monks’ work as a great historic event in the history of human printing.

Movable metal type is recognized as the greatest information revolution and the most influential invention that ever affected the world. It made printing technology more convenient and economic, easier to correct, as well as making the production of books quicker, enabling the general public to come in contact with information through mass-publication and distribution. ‘Jikji’ and its birth place Korea were the starting point for the information age, which was led by metal type printing.

Jikji’s original name was ‘Baegunhwasa Chonok Buljo Jejiimcheyojool’ and another shortened form was ‘Jejiimcheyojool’. It contains the essentials of Seon (Zen) Buddhism compiled by Master Baegun in the late Goryeo Dynasty. It introduced all kinds of writings that provided an understanding of Buddhism, including Buddha’s sayings, letters of praise, letters and poems on drawings, educational phrases and sentences, gathas, writings, orthodox teachings, and dialogues. It was printed into the metal type by his students Seokchan and Daldam to spread the master’s teachings three years after he passed away.

Type printing is the combination of various technologies including type-casting, typesetting, mass production of paper, and oiled ink for printing. The publication of ‘Jikji’ demonstrates that highly developed printing skill was spread into the region far away from the center of the dynasty, suggesting that a high standard of culture was enjoyed in the period. A record has it that in 1230–1240 the ‘Sangjeong-gogum-yemun’ was published, therefore it can be said safely that before ‘Jikji’ more books may have been printed by the government or prestigious temples. However, no evidence has been found yet.

‘Jikji’ originally consisted of two books, but the first volume has not been found yet and only the second volume is currently kept at the Manuscrit Orientaux of the National Library of France. The discovery of ‘Jikji’ was rather accidental. In 1968 Dr. Park Byeong-sun, who was working for the France National Library, came across an old book in heaps of Chinese classics. There was an inscription on the last page that it was printed with movable metal type at Heungdeoksa Temple on the outskirts of Cheongju in 1377. She was convinced
that it was a Korean book and furthermore, it would be the oldest metal type book in the world. The book had clear evidence of the exact year and place of production and the inscription of the printing method, but, the Europeans did not want to recognize this fact. The doctor borrowed molds of metal type from printing and newspaper companies to experiment and study printing, and she finally proved that ‘Jikji’ was printed using metal type, not wooden one. In 1972, she submitted ‘Jikji’ to the book exhibition celebrating the Year of World Books, causing a sensational shock around the world. ‘Jikji’ was at least 78 years earlier than Gutenberg’s ‘42 lined Bible’ which had been honored as the oldest extant example of printing with movable metal type. Dr. Park Byeong-sun’s persistent search and study changed the history of human printing.

After the discovery of ‘Jikji,’ there were many efforts to locate the Heungdeoksam Temple site, but to no avail. At last, in 1985, in Uncheondong, Cheongju, the ruins were found during construction work and 25 relics were unearthed, including a drum and Buddhist bowls made of bronze and inscribed with the word Heungdeoksam Temple, and roof tiles showing the time when the temple was established. Close examination confirmed that Heungdeoksam, where the book was printed, was founded in the 9th century and burnt to the ground in late 14th century. To commemorate the legacy of ‘Jikji,’ the government restored the Main Buddha Hall and stone pagodas on the site. In addition, it constructed the Cheongju Early Printing Museum to display items related to the world’s printing culture including ‘Jikji.’ It is thought that more volumes of ‘Jikji’ were published in Heungdeoksam. An all-out campaign to discover the other volumes of the oldest movable metal type book is actively taking part nationwide. ‘Jikji’ is the precious cultural heritage of Korea and also of the world.

Why ‘Jikji’ is in France now?
The circumstances under which the book left Korea were as follows. Collin de Plancy, the first charge d’affaires with the French Embassy in Seoul in 1887, was well versed in Oriental culture and deeply interested in collecting classics. When ‘Jikji’ came to be in his collection, he wrote down on its cover ‘This is the oldest Korean book printed using metal type in 1377’ in ink. He brought ‘Jikji’ to France and in 1911, during auction, the book came into the hands of Henri Vever, a collector of classics, and when he died in 1950, it was donated to the National Library of France, where it has been ever since.
I use the process of casting beeswax, which was supposedly adapted for printing ‘Jikji.’ It takes as long as 20 to 30 days to dry the molds in the natural way, while an artificial dryer can do the job in an hour. In type-casting, modern technology has been successful as well. However, the aim of my work is to restore the old techniques, following what old craftsmen did in those days. Through this work, I hope to revive the whole process of moveable type making and setting, as well as printing. I pay the utmost attention to this work in order to authentically transmit the traditions of moveable type to future generations.”

He completes every procedure with his own hands, including the character carving, casting the molds, trimming and setting the types, and the final procedure, printing. To attain the perfect piece of art, no part can be ignored. He never forgets his dedication to
this work, even raising bees native to the area around his workplace, to produce the best wax. This attitude came from his teacher, Oh Gook-jin who never tolerated even the slightest mistake in his work.

“In 1996, I came across a TV documentary on my teacher. When I saw him pouring hot molten iron into the casting molds, my heart began thumping – I might even say that I became possessed. Driven by some strong impulse, I went to study with him, and imagining that I was only a first grader in elementary school, I did everything I could to learn; of course, it was also my job to clean. I was so fortunate to meet him and to learn from him – he was the model of a true craftsman.”

After this period of harsh training, he was recognized in 2009 as an intangible cultural property, the youngest of those who have been honored with this title. He emphasized that it is not just his sense of duty which drives him to do this work, which is without fame or profit. Rather it is his passionate love for the moveable type characters which makes him commit to the hard work day and night.

“While the molten iron is cooling down in the mold, I get really worried. Will it come out well or will it have failed? When the clay mold is broken and reveals the new, perfectly-shaped moveable type characters, I feel like I’m on cloud nine.”

His hands, covered with scars, tell of the hardships he must have endured. When he started his training, not a day went by without an injury. He would either get burned by the exploding molten metal or else cut his hands while carving letters. Through numerous mistakes, he got hands-on knowledge that could not have been gotten through theory.

The further he advances in his work and study, the more he feels admiration for the scientific approach to type-making utilized by Korean people six hundred years ago. He senses some kind of connection between the old craftsmen and himself. Even though they lived in a different time with different materials and methods, the essence of making the characters has not changed.

He is now re-writing the history of Korea and also of the world of printing through his restoration of Jikji’s moveable type. His steady and strenuous work continues in order to bring Jikji to life again as a living legacy of the world’s printing history. The types he makes with his hands will connect the past, present and the future of the world and then go beyond.
The gentle morning sunlight was filling the courtyard of Beopjusa when the three foreign students entered the temple; they were two Ukrainian students, Arina and Marianna, accompanied by a Russian man Emil. Their temple experience began with the fragrance of tea with Ven. Bogwan, the manager of the Templestay program. Out of curiosity and eagerness to understand Buddhism, they repeatedly asked about temple life, including the tea ceremony, 108 prostrations, and methods of meditation. In the meantime, the monk corrected their postures, telling them that correct mind can be found in correct posture. He also advised them to concentrate their minds with an image of the five chakra placed on their bodies: the lofty mountain embraces everything in its bosom and the humble temple welcomes everyone with its wide-open doors. Founded in 553 CE, the ancient temple cherishes innumerable cultural treasures, which will give you access to the essence of both Buddhist and Korean traditional culture, bringing both local and foreign visitors together.
The young students sat still, focusing on the breath, and soon they looked calm and peaceful. The simple yet tasty temple cuisine replenished their bodies and minds, so they excitedly started exploring the temple compound. Among all of the buildings and artifacts full of beauty and cultural value, the pagoda-style Palsangjeon caught their attention. It is the highest pagoda extant in Korea, and at the same time the only wooden five-story pagoda in Korea. The inside walls feature paintings that depict eight episodes from the life of Shakyamuni Buddha which gave it the name Palsangjeon (八/捌相殿), which means the ‘Eight’ (pal, 八/捌) ‘Painting’ (sang, 相) ‘Hall’ (jeon, 殿). While they were admiring the delicate, simple and elegant architectural splendor of the magnificent structure, it suddenly started to snow. The first snowfall of this season! These visitors from snowy countries held up their arms, welcoming the snow as if they were greeting old friends from home. The snow covered the buildings, pagodas and the statues, and like magic created a mystical scene. Walking along the mountain trail in the snow made an impressive memory for all of them. In a while, the snow stopped and the forest revealed the creatures it nurtures. Ven. Bogwan said, “The wind in the forest crown of head, the philtrum, solar plexus, lower abdomen, and the perineum. The young students sat still, focusing on the breath, and soon they looked calm and peaceful. The simple yet tasty temple cuisine replenished their bodies and minds, so they excitedly started exploring the temple compound. Among all of the buildings and artifacts full of beauty and cultural value, the pagoda-style Palsangjeon caught their attention. It is the highest pagoda extant in Korea, and at the same time the only wooden five-story pagoda in Korea. The inside walls feature paintings that depict eight episodes from the life of Shakyamuni Buddha which gave it the name Palsangjeon (八/捌相殿), which means the ‘Eight’ (pal, 八/捌) ‘Painting’ (sang, 相) ‘Hall’ (jeon, 殿). While they were admiring the delicate, simple and elegant architectural splendor of the magnificent structure, it suddenly started to snow. The first snowfall of this season! These visitors from snowy countries held up their arms, welcoming the snow as if they were greeting old friends from home. The snow covered the buildings, pagodas and the statues, and like magic created a mystical scene. Walking along the mountain trail in the snow made an impressive memory for all of them. In a while, the snow stopped and the forest revealed the creatures it nurtures. Ven. Bogwan said, “The wind in the forest
and the energy of the earth are better than any other medicine. Being in the forest itself is healing.” Breathing in the healthy energy, they appreciated the bliss of the nature.

With their minds lingering in the temple, they left for Cheongju Early Printing Museum where they could see all the materials related to ‘Jikji’, the world’s oldest existing metal print book, according to UNESCO’s Memory of the World. Following the explanation, they examined the printing process of the world’s oldest movable metal type, and compared Oriental and Western printing techniques. Emil commented, “It’s amazing that they made so creative an invention in 1337,” and the rest nodded in agreement.

In the Experience Hall, they made Korean traditional mulberry paper and printed the last sheet of ‘Jikji’ on them. They all admired how the metal-type letters emerged on the humble but enduring mulberry paper. Imitating ‘Jikji’, they put a diamond pattern cover on the prints and bound them using a thread. Marianna printed her Korean name ‘Woo Jin-ju’ on the cover with metal type as a present to herself. Remembering the value of recorded materials, they moved to Heungdeoksa, the birth place of ‘Jikji,’ right next to the museum. At this place where the 670 year old history has been preserved, the three young foreign students realized that past, present and future intertwine with each other through the channel of ‘Jikji.’

Cheongju Early Printing Museum

1. Cheongju Early Printing Museum keeps approximately 3000 items including the materials related to ‘Jikji’, other classics, printing devices, and relics from the Heungdeoksa site. In the Jikji Experience Hall, you can try the old printing method, make hanji (Korean paper), and also create your own book in the old style.

2. The guide gives an explanation while touring through the halls featuring ‘Jikji,’ Heungdeoksa, the oldest printing culture in the world, type founding, typesetting, etc.

3. They are making books with traditional methods, using a cover printed in the diamond-pattern woodblock.

4. Marianna is printing her Korean name ‘Woo Jin-ju’ on the cover with metal type.

5. In the ‘Jikji’ Experience Hall, they are putting pasted fibers into a bucket, called the process of “scooping the paper.” After dried on the flat board, they become hanji.
The Bo-eun region of Chungcheongbuk-do Province is known for its good living conditions and warm-hearted people. There are therefore many attractions worth visiting around Mt. Songnisan, the symbol of Bo-eun, and the temple Beopjusa, the gate to the mountain. You can breathe the fresh air of Songnisan National Park, find the various joys hidden in the every corner of the mountain trail, or heal your weary body and mind in the ancient forest. You can also encounter fables handed down from generation to generation by various family traditions.

The Mt. Songnisan Information Center opposite the Songnisan Intercity Bus Terminal is full of information for those traveling in this area, everything from interpretation and tour guide services to Internet, fax and printing facilities.

Mt. Songnisan Tour Information Center +82-43-542-3006

The Mt. Songnisan National Park

Mt. Songnisan National Park features exceptional beauty – enough so that it was selected as one of Korea’s eight most picturesque attractions. The nine peaks towering against the sky offer a panoramic view centered on the main peak, Cheonhwangbong, which is 1058 m above sea level. The sharp granite peaks of Mt. Songnisan and the deep valleys of sedimentary rocks are also spectacular. The cherry blossoms in the spring, the green pine forest in the summer, and the lovely autumn leaves in the fall make this place spectacular all year round. The snowy scenery in the winter in particular makes this mountain look other-worldly, as its name implies: “Renounce the secular world.” This natural sanctuary is the home of 1000 species of plants and 2000 species of animals.

Telephone +82-43-542-5267
http://songni.knps.or.kr
The Old House of Mr. Seon Byeong-guk

Houses have minds, just as humans do. The old residence of Mr. Byeong-guk Seon embodies the open-mindedness and generosity of its owner, who practiced the philosophy “To do good for others is the greatest happiness.” The building was constructed in 1919 by the best carpenters of the time as a 99 kan structure – the word kan refers to the space between two columns of a traditional Korean building. While it preserved the traditional Korean architectural structure, it also applied new trends of the time, such as wider spacing between the columns and higher ceilings. Sarang-chae, the detached guesthouse in front of the premises where travelers could stay, enjoying the hospitality of the generous householder, has been transformed into a traditional tea house. A stay at this old house will give one a rare opportunity to experience the life of upper class society in those days, as well as taste the 350 year old traditional family dishes and various foods made from jujubes, for which this area is known.

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The Orisu-gil Path

The path leading to the temple Beopjusa passes through a forest dense with oak and pine trees. It was named Orisu-gil, Ori Forest, because it extends for about five Ri, or 2km – “Oh” means five and “ri” is the Korean traditional measurement for distance. Chosen as one of Korea’s ten most beautiful forests in a national contest in 2011, its colors change magnificently according to the seasons. Buddhism is referred to as the “religion of trees and forests” due to its close relationship and devotion to them. For over a thousand years, the forest has preserved the temple and vice-versa.

Mt. Songnisan National Park

Phone +82-43-542-5267

The Imhan-ri Pine Park

Imhan-ri village in Tanbu-myeon is known for its fog. Pine trees more than 250 years old stand in a 3 acre field immersed in fog, creating a fantastic and unworldly scene. When the fog disappears, the trees emerge with dignity and vigor. Their sublime beauty explains why Koreans value pine trees the most among all trees. In the spring the park is filled with green waves of barley, and in the fall sun flowers cover the vast area, making it all the more picturesque. It is frequented by photographers looking for places to take pictures.

Tanbu-myeon office

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The Songnisan Maltijae Recreational Forest

Maltijae, the gateway to the mountain Songnisan, is a steep, zigzagging, uphill path which offers incredible scenery at its peak. In particular, the break of dawn towards Mt. Songnisan and the glow of the sky at sunset towards Boeun are both unforgettable. With a grand reservoir in front, this recreational forest offers an opportunity to enjoy the forest and water at the same time. In addition, it runs ecologically oriented activities in the wild flower field and the herbal botanical garden, and also a woodworking experience program. For its main facilities there are walking trails, mountain paths, water parks, public cooking areas, and there also forest cabins divided into 16 villages which can be used for lodging. You can also use the 1.5km hiking route from the forest trail to the top of Maltijae.

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http://www.huyang.go.kr
Ven. Beopsong’s winter specialties come straight from the cutting board. She feels the new season through the fresh, natural produce lying on her kitchen counter. To preserve the taste, nutrition, color and fragrance of the ingredients, she prefers simple cooking with basic recipes. Her secret is using the least amount of seasoning and cooking for the shortest possible time. Following her guidelines, let’s make something special to keep healthy and warm in the cold weather.
Deep-fried Sweet Potato Balls

Preparation
1. Steam, cool and then crush the sweet potatoes.
2. Crush the pine nuts and mix with the sweet potatoes.
3. Divide into pieces and shape each into a ball.
4. Roll the balls in the starch powder and bread them with the batter, then deep-fry them twice in boiling vegetable oil at 180°C.
5. Put the grain syrup and soy sauce in the pot and heat until boiling. Add roasted sesame seeds and ground perilla seeds to make the sauce.
6. Roll the balls in the sauce to make them sweet.

Ingredients
- 2 sweet potatoes
- 20g pine nuts
- 2C vegetable oil
- 5g starch powder
- Batter
  - 1C flour
  - 1C water
  - ½C starch powder
  - a pinch of salt
- Sauce
  - 2T ground perilla seeds
  - 1T soy sauce
  - 1T roasted-pine-seeds
  - 1T sesame oil
  - 1T home-made grain syrup

Cooking Tip
Tasty and nutritious sweet potatoes are the symbolic winter snack for Korean people. The fragrance of the pine nuts matches well with their sweetness, enriching the flavor. The thinner the layer of powdered starch, the better the balls will be breaded with the batter. When you dip the batter into the boiling oil and it sinks to the bottom of the pan and then floats to the surface again, that is the best time to deep-fry the balls.

Korean Radish Dumpling Soup

Preparation
1. Make the dough for dumpling wrapper skins the day before – mix the ingredients, knead them, then keep them in a refrigerator overnight.
2. Cut the radish into thin strips, sprinkle them with salt. A few minutes later, fry them in the heated pan and cool them. Cook the spinach in the same way but with a little salt.
3. Prepare the pumpkin in the same way as the radish and cut the shepherd’s purse.
4. Squeeze all the water out of the tofu and jic fruit. Mince peanuts and pine nuts.
5. Chop the shiitake mushrooms, mix with perilla seeds oil and soy sauce, then fry.
6. Make the dumpling wrapper skins with the prepared dough.
7. Place the disc in your palm and add the filling to the center. Lift the edges of the disc up and around the filling, then press the edges together, sealing the filling tightly inside the dumpling.
8. Put the dumplings into the soup and boil for about 3 minutes.

Ingredients
Radish Dumplings
- 800g Korean radish
- 1/3 block of tofu
- 100g spinach
- 100g pine nuts
- 3 shiitake mushrooms
- 1t salt
- 3t perilla seed oil
- 1t soy sauce
Soup
- 500g Korean radish
- 20g dried Chamgajuk
- 1t soy sauce
- 1t seasoned mushroom
- 1t sesame oil
- 1t seasoned soy sauce
Seasoned soy sauce
- 1 green chili pepper
- 1t sesame seeds
- 1t soy sauce
Dumpling wrapper skins
- 1C flour
- ¼C water

Cooking Tip
The yellow-colored vegetables, including pumpkins and sweet potatoes, supply vitamins A and E and Beta-carotene which our bodies need during the winter. Sprouts and shepherds purses have the best flavor in this season, so be sure not to make the seasoned soy sauce too salty.
The Joy of Discovering a New Culture:  
The Happiness of Finding Your New Self

Geumsunsa Daily Templestay Program
Nestled in a dense pine forest on the slope of Mt. Bukhansan, Seoul, Geumsunsa literally rejuvenates this busy metropolis. Even half a day's stay at this temple will breathe new vitality into your weary body and mind. The time you spend in this tranquil environment is both an opportunity and a present for yourself, as you are surrounded by breath-taking natural beauty and take in new cultural experiences while you rediscover your inner being.
My day started at 8:00 a.m. at Hapjeong station, as I had an appointment with my two photographers: Kil Tae and Dae Geun. After warming up in the car, as the temperature that morning was quite cold (-1°C), we headed to our final destination – Geumsunsa Temple. Close to the city and yet completely removed from it, Geumsunsa Temple is located in Gugi-dong, Jongno-gu, in front of Mt. Inwangsan, near the Blue House and Gyeongbokgung Palace. It is formed by a set of traditional Buddhist temple buildings which all have specific meanings and uses. But before reaching the temple, you have to follow a narrow mountain path which leads you to a small cave inside of which a magnificent stone Buddha statue is standing. There, my two hosts took a small break to explain the fundamentals of bowing, according to Buddhist principles. First of all, you have to take off your shoes and stand in front of the statue. Then you have to join both hands as if you wanted to say a prayer, and lower your head in a sign of respect to the Buddha. Without interrupting this posture, the second step involves kneeling down and bowing again, while the third and last one requires you to prostrate yourself on the floor, with your hands also on the floor. This entire ritual has to be repeated three times in a row, each time as you face the Buddha.

After this little break, we moved on to finally reach the entrance of the temple. Wonderfully set in a rocky mountain hollow, with a bubbling stream flowing past, surrounded by pine trees, Geumsunsa temple inspires peace, quietness and serenity. Yes, it is a change from the hustle and bustle from the city! Once in the temple, I changed my clothes into the traditional grey monk clothes. So warm and comfortable! Right after that, I was introduced my guide for the day, a very nice nun, who perfectly understood the history of the temple and the teachings of Buddhism. We first went to the main Buddha Hall which was entirely made of wood and brightly decorated with bright colors, in the center of which were standing three Buddhas. I was told that the Buddhas were actually the same person but were expressing different aspects of Buddhahood. On the side walls, different paintings depicted other representations of Buddha as well as the guardians of the temple. Every painting had a particular meaning and was essential to the whole. One of the most important times in in the daily life of a monk is the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony is not just about tea, it is also a time especially devoted to concentration, reflective thoughts, and meditation. It happens at least three to four times a day. Two types of tea are drunk, black and green, the first one originating from China, the other one from Korea. One essential ritual you have to follow is never to drink the first cup of tea. First it would be too hot, and second it contains most of the impurities of tea. Following the tea ceremony, I was introduced to another lady who taught me how to make lotus lanterns. According to Buddhist beliefs, the lighting of a lotus-shaped lantern
Nature has its own path. When you turn a blind eye to it, overcome by greed, you will become lost in evil. The desire to make a profit without the appropriate effort or process will deprive you of moral sense as well as mar your clear judgment. Just as the parched sesame seeds cannot sprout, so greed cannot lead you to enlightenment.

Parable of the Roasted Sesame

From The One Hundred Parable Sutra Seeds

Roasted sesame seeds taste so good indeed, while the raw ones just taste awful.

Ah! If I sow the roasted seeds, then I will get tasty ones directly from the plants.

Why haven’t they sprouted yet? They’ve got enough sunshine and water….

Hey, is it true? Did you really sow roasted seeds in the field?

Heh, heh! You would sow cooked rice to get rice grains. Greed makes even an experienced farmer ignore the laws of nature.

Why not? You can get the tasty seeds right from the plants. You don’t have to bother roasting them.

Hihi, hehe! You would sow cooked rice to get rice grains. Greed makes even an experienced farmer ignore the laws of nature.

On the rocks looking out the Mount Namsan in the distance, I thought of who I am and how I had lived so far. The fragrance of the pine trees and the cool breeze accompanied my ruminations.

symbolizes devotion to performing good deeds and brings light to the dark parts of the world that are filled with suffering. The lantern-lighting practice was developed throughout the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties and has been preserved through events such as the lotus lantern parade. I had learned so many things in such a short time that I needed a break – time for lunch! As Buddhists don’t eat meat, we only had rice and vegetables, but the food was really delicious in such a nice and pleasant atmosphere. After lunch, it was time to climb the mountain! After following the steep path for fifteen minutes, we arrived at the top, where the view over the city was really amazing. We could see as far as Mount Namsan! There, we took a break and I was introduced to another essential element of a monk’s day: meditation. Meditation is important because it allows you to have time for yourself and realize the interaction of you and your surroundings. You learn how to breathe, how to sense your surrounding environment, and how to live in the present moment. It is a great opportunity to relax and get rid of one’s daily troubles. And I must say that meditation in such a great place was something completely unforgettable. The day was already about to end, it was time for me to thank everybody for this great experience and to promise to come back very soon.
The Emotions of Korea

Facing Human Mortality

After Death: From Judgment to Consolation

Korean Buddhist temples have a special hall dedicated to the deceased. These halls are called by different names such as the Myeongbu-jeon (Judgment Hall of the Dead,冥府殿), Jiijang-jeon (Hall of Ksitigarbha,地藏殿), Siwang-jeon (Hall of Ten Kings of the Underworld) and Jassi-jeon. The word ‘Myeongbu’ means the place where dead souls go after death to be judged according to their deeds in life by the Ten Kings (Siwang,十王), and it is also the place where the Earth Store Bodhisattva strives to save their souls. The Jassi-jeon hall features his virtue of loving kindness (Ja,慈). Any hall related to the underworld, whatever it is called, displays the bodhisattva in the center, surrounded by Domyeong-jonja, Mudok-guwang and the Ten Kings. Domyeong-jonja tries to convert and teach the evil souls in the hell, whereas Mudok-guwang safeguards the correct teachings of the Buddha. It might be said that this hall answers the question ‘Where do people go after they die?’ B

Buddhists believe that souls of the dead are judged by each of the kings, in succession, every seventh day until the 49th, then again on the 100th day, as well as on the first and second anniversary of their passing, for a total of ten times. The kings examine the positive and negative aspects of the soul’s life and decide where the person should be reborn in the six realms of existence within which rebirth takes place: (1) godlike realm, (2) demi-god (asura) realm (3) human realm (4) animal realm (5) hungry ghost realm (6) hell realm Hell, needless to say, is where souls are destined to pay for their sins through various torments. They can be thrown into a big pot with molten iron, tied up with ropes and crushed, or else their limbs are cut off every moment, all of them screaming out from the infinite, incomparable pain of the abyss.

The only help they can rely on comes from the Earth Store Bodhisattva, who takes upon himself the perilous task of not merely plumbing the depths of existence and bringing relief and consolation to those in torment but of transforming hell into heaven, and even the foulest dregs of the samsara, into the pure radiance of Nirvana. (Samsara is the relentless cycle of birth and death in which ordinary, unenlightened sentient beings are deeply entangled. The cause of samsara is the presence of defilements, particularly greed, hatred, and delusion.) B

Being born, growing old, becoming sick, and dying are the basic realities of human existence, causing people unavoidable suffering. In particular, the death of a loved one causes intense sorrow for Koreans, who especially cherish their family members. The nianhwa ( Giving the Western Pure Land, offers hope to a family in mourning. It allows the family members left behind in the world to feel connected to their loved ones again and continue their devotion to them.)
‘Not until the hells are emptied will I become a Buddha; Not until all beings are saved will I realize Bodhi.’ - The Earth Store Bodhisattva

The sutra of the Earth Store Bodhisattva describes the bodhisattva as following: ‘Seated on a lotus flower, he has the face gentle like a full moon, eyes crystal clear like a stream, and the Cintamani (wish-fulfilling jewel) on his hand demonstrates magnificent power. He spreads the light of loving kindness and compassion to the world, with the sword of wisdom brightening the path of the deceased.’

The Ten Kings, on the other hand, look rather solemn. With strict facial expressions, the underworld judges wear crowns on their heads, ceremonial robes, and hold a royal scepter in their hands. They all look identical except the Wheel-turning King (Cakravartin) who appears as a warrior armed in a helmet and armor and Yama who has the Diamond Sutra on his head, which suggests that the Buddha’s teachings can remove the tremendous sufferings of even the most afflicting hell.

Every month Korean temples hold a ritual dedicated to the Earth Store Bodhisattva. Participants pray that their dead family members or relatives might be admitted to the Western Pure Land as the result of the purification of their bad karma under the auspices of the Bodhisattva’s compassion. It may be safely said that the hall enshrining the bodhisattva, the savior of all beings in the underworld, along with the ten judge-kings, embodies the worship of the bodhisattva and the Ten Kings, demonstrating the Korean attitude towards life and death.

You can find good examples of this hall at Jeondeungsa Temple in Ganghwa, Beomeosa Temple in Busan, Seonunsan Temple in Gochang, Yeong-goksa Temple in Gurye, Yongmunsa Temple in Namhwa, and Daejeonsa Temple in Mungyeong.
16 Selected Temples for Foreigners

Where to Experience Templestay

The temples are available in English

**Seoul**
- Bongeunsa Temple
  - +82-2-3218-4826
  - www.bongeunsa.org
- Geumsunsa Temple
  - +82-2-395-9955
  - www.geumsunsa.org
- Myogaksa Temple
  - +82-2-763-3109
  - www.myogaksa.net
- International Seon Center
  - +82-2-2650-2242
  - www.seoncenter.or.kr

**Gangwon**
- Woljeongsa Temple
  - +82-33-339-6006
  - www.woljeongsa.org

**Gyeonggi/Incheon**
- Jeondeungsa Temple
  - +82-32-937-0152
  - www.jeondeungsa.org
- Yongjoosa Temple
  - +82-31-235-6886
  - www.yongjoosa.or.kr

**Gyeongbuk/Gyeongnam**
- Gyeongbuk/Gyeongnam
- Goguls Temple
  - +82-54-775-1689
  - www.sunmudo.com
- Haenira Temple
  - +82-55-934-3110
  - www.haenira.or.kr
- Jikjisa Temple
  - +82-54-436-6084
  - www.jikjisa.or.kr

**Jeonbuk/Jeonnam**
- Geumsansa Temple
  - +82-63-542-0048
  - www.geumsansa.org
- Mihwangsa Temple
  - +82-61-533-3521
  - www.mihwangsa.com
- Seonunsa Temple
  - +82-63-561-1375
  - www.seonunsa.org

**Busan/Daegu**
- Beomeosa Temple
  - +82-51-508-5726
  - www.beomeo.kr
- Donghwasa Temple
  - +82-53-982-0223
  - www.donghwasa.net

**Jeju**
- Yakchunsa Temple
  - +82-64-738-5000
  - www.yakchunsa.org