

Yun Yong Gu (1853-1939)

Calligraphy

Korea, late Chosŏn dynasty, ca. 1900

Hanging scrolls; ink on paper

Gift of Byung and Keum Ja Kang, in honor of Julia White, 2006
(13572.1, 13573.1)

The government official Yun Yong Gu, like many of his fellow *yangban* (the well-educated ruling elite who excelled in the arts of Confucian culture), was a renowned calligrapher and painter at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. Before retreating to the foot of a mountain outside of Seoul, he held a number of important government posts. During the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945), he was even offered an official title by the Japanese government-general, although he refused it.

This work is written in Classical Chinese, the preferred mode of writing for scholar-officials even after the creation of the Korean alphabet (*han'gŭl*) in the mid-15th century. Each scroll includes, in the lower left, the signature and seals of this artist.

The text on the right reads;

*To trace the past, to rectify the present,
There is significance in reading.*

The text on the left reads;

*Eliminate the cunning mind,
To truly enjoy beyond limits.*

Chae Yong Shin (1848-1941)

Birds and Flowers

Korea, Chosŏn dynasty, late 19th – 20th century

Ten-panel screen; monochrome ink on paper

On loan from Chester Chang

(L38757)

Bird and flower paintings were used in the women's quarters of a traditional Korean home. This sort of depiction, the pairing of faithful birds amidst colorful flowers, was thought to bring happiness and harmony as well as offspring to married couples. It is one of the most common themes depicted on Korean screens. The individual panels can be read as independent compositions or seen as a series of paintings on the same theme.

Chae Yong Shin was a prominent portrait painter who applied Western techniques to his paintings. He was also adept at bird and flower themes. His depiction of birds active and at rest in this screen is realistic, and the botanical motifs are accurate renditions. Auspicious themes are expressed through symbolic imagery of lotus, plum, chrysanthemum, geese amongst reeds, pomegranate, cranes and pine trees.

Attributed to Lee Do Young (1884-1933)

A King's Daily Life

Korea, Chosŏn dynasty, 20th century

Eight-panel screen; ink and color on paper

On loan from Eddie Lee

(L40396)

This eight-paneled screen depicts the daily life of a king, which symbolically represents the Confucian ideal of the sage king who is respected as political leader and moral authority. In one panel he plays a zither-like musical instrument, which has traditionally been favored by Confucian scholars as an instrument of great subtlety and refinement. In another, he performs official duties, welcoming court and military officials at the palace. Various auspicious images — a phoenix (which symbolizes high virtue and grace), a pair of deer (symbolic of longevity), a *qilin* (a mythical animal who brings serenity), and a dragon (a divine mythical creature that resides in heaven), — indicate the glory and prosperity of his reign.

As a student, Lee Do Young learned traditional painting from famous Korean painters of the time such as Ahn Joong Sik (1861-1919) and Cho Seok Jin (1853-1920). He is known today as the first cartoonist in Korea, drawing political cartoons at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty for national newspapers.