

History and Design of Nineteenth-Century *Minpos*, Korean Commoner's Wrapping Cloths – Focused on *Supo* –

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to survey minpo(the nations pojagi), especially supo(the embroidered pojagi), of the Yi Chosun of Korea during the nineteenth century. This study explores the history and background of minpo, its characteristics, including forms, designs, materials, and how they related to women's daily life during the Yi Chosun in social and cultural aspects. There were minpos for use in everyday life as well as for special occasions such as weddings, funerals and religions rites, including Buddhist and other services. The research undertaken here is done by classifying minpos according to composition, design, pattern and motif.

Key words: pojagi, minpo, supo, embroidered pojagi.

I. Introduction

During the Chosun Dynasty (1392~1910) in Korea, women lived in the shadow of men, their fathers, husbands or sons. Few outlets of expression were available to women; one of them was the creation of exquisite wrapping cloths and covers for food, *pojagi*, which were replete with creativity. These cloths were square in shape, and varied in size, color, material, and pattern. Koreans used *pojagi* not only as a practical and versatile item for wrapping, storing, covering or carrying things in their daily lives, but also for ceremonial use.

The *pojagi* were divided into two categories according to the users. One was *kungpo* or palace *pojagi*, used by the royalty in the court, and the other one was *minpo* or the popular *pojagi*, which was used by the rest of the pop-

ulace, from the aristocratic class to the non-titled Koreans.

This study explores the history and background of *minpo*, its characteristics, including forms, designs, materials, and how they related to women's daily life during the Chosun Dynasty in social and cultural aspects. There were *minpos* for use in everyday life as well as for special occasions such as weddings, funerals and religions rites, including Buddhist and other services. The research undertaken here is done by classifying *minpos* according to composition, design, pattern and motif. For a case study of the *minpos*, about forty one *minpos* from the Museum of Korean Embroidery in Seoul have been as primary sources.

Although *pojagi* have traditionally been widely used among all classes in Korea, many Koreans and foreigners do not recognize their proper value and significance in relation to

women's work and as one of the most important cultural heritages.

It is important to research this topic in regard to Korean textile history, thereby representing one of the highest artistic sensibilities of traditional Korea.

II. The Historical Background of *pojagi*

1. The Origin and Name of *pojagi*

The word *pojagi*, or *po* for short, refers to a square textile of various sizes, colors, and designs. *pojagi* are used for wrapping, covering, carrying, and storing objects of all sorts, both the ordinary and the precious: *pojagi* covers food on the Table, adorns religious altars, or encloses a gift to demonstrate respect for the recipient.

Wrapping cloths have been used throughout Korean life, not only in the royal palace, but since ancient times also by poor people who lived in grass huts. *pojagi* in Korean culture started, in part, with the shamanic folk religions of ancient times, which taught that keeping something wrapped was equivalent to keeping good fortune. The historical records show the many ways in which these wrapping cloths have been used. Historical records about the *po* are especially common from the late Chosun Dynasty of the 19th century.

Although it is not evident when the word *pojagi* was first used in Korea, many scholars and researchers think that the word *pojagi* comes from the Chinese word, *pojau*,¹⁾ which means "clothing for things".²⁾

The oldest wrapping cloth existing in Korea is the *Takui* in Temple *Seonam*.³⁾

The *pojagi* use a concept similar to clothing in wrapping and protecting the object, and in combining decoration and the practice of creating beauty. The standard names of *pojagi* vary according to the area. But they all mean good luck.⁴⁾

The wrapping cloths, *pojagi*, have two aspects : aesthetic and practical. In the aesthetic aspect, because the maker is not a professional worker, she does not get any education and expresses her peculiar characteristics in the selection of material and color, the matching process, or sewing technique. The practical aspects, as well as aesthetic aspects, are revealed in the Korean wrapping cloth. The *pojagi* is an object for ceremonial purposes in accordance with etiquette and formality as well as a daily commodity for carrying and storing items. In sum, *pojagi* can be thought of simply as a piece of cloth for carrying and storing objects; however the scope of its usage is diverse from decorating, covering, and holding to wrapping wedding gifts.

2. The Characteristics of *pojagi*

The reasons that encouraged the development of *pojagi* in Korea are various. The first reason is due to the insufficient living space in the traditional Korean house. The living space for the commoner was very small. A lot of people had only one room for eating, sleeping and living, even if the number of family members was large. To live together in a small space, they had to wrap and store very large bundles. The wrapping cloth is appropriate for this purpose. When this square cloth is not in use, it is very flexible: it can be folded very small for easy storage, and it is relatively inexpensive,

¹ *Ui* means clothing.

² Dong-hwa Huh, *Uriga Alaya Hal Kubaemanwha* [The Important Culture to Know], (Seoul: Hyunamsa, 1998), 275.

³ *Takui* means cloth for table. It is from the middle of the Koryo Chosun.

⁴ In *Sangbangjeongrae*, *pojagi* was expressed as the *pok*. The other names of *pojagi* are *po*, *poja*, *pappujae*, *pottari*, *podaegi*, *potui* and so on.

and easier to make than wooden boxes or chests.

The second reason behind the development of the wrapping cloth had to do with its important role in ceremonies such as marriage and the practice of praying for happiness. In making these cloths, women prepared for the wedding for their daughters with a blessing. They thought that to wrap object with a *pojagi* is to wrap *pok*, good luck.

The last reason is attributable to the oppressive situation of women in the Chosun Dynasty. Because women could not go outside the gate of their home after childhood, sewing became one of their few creative pastimes. Sewing was one way that individual creativity could interrupt the monotony of women's lives.

3. The Classification of *pojagi*

pojagi have different names according to the class of the user, its usage, color, type of textile, material, structure, existence of motif, the kind of motif and so on.

According to the user, *pojagi* is divided into *kungpo* and *minpo*. *kungpo* was the wrapping cloth only for palace use, whereas *minpo* was used by the rest of the people, from *yangban* to *chonmin*.

In accordance with its structure, *pojagi* are classified into *hotpo* (unlined), *kyoppo* (lined), *shikgipo* (lined with oil-paper), *sompo* (lined with cotton padding), *nubipo* (quilted, with geometric pattern), and *chogakpo* (patchwork).

Some *pojagi* have designs, called *yumunpo*, while others, called *mumunpo*, do not have any pattern. *Yumunpo* is further divided according to method of production: *supo* (embroider), *jikmunpo* (woven self-patterned), *kumbakpo* (gilded), and *tangchaepo* (printed). The motif used is another important factor to classify *pojagi*: These include *hwamunpo* (flower pattern), *munjamunpo* (Chinese characters), *sumokmunpo* (tree),

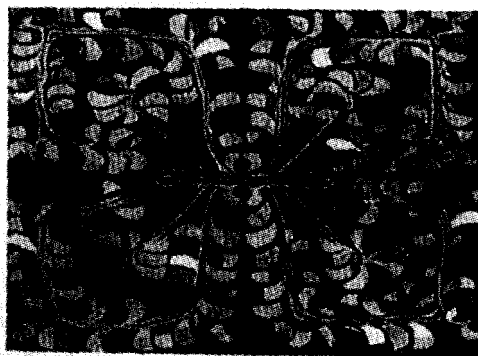
and *chomunpo* (birds).

The material used is either *myungjupo* (silk), *moshi* (ramie), *myonjik* (cotton⁵) or *kapsa* (thin silk, gossamer).

The width of *pojagi* is another element of classification. The *p'ok* is used as the unit of width in *pojagi*; a standard measure is between one *p'ok* to ten *p'ok*.⁶

The most complicated method for classifying *pojagi* is by their usage. In accordance with the usage, there are wrapping cloths for religious, marriage, common, and any other special purposes. Religious *pojagi* were often used in Buddhism ceremonies. Common *pojagi* were for everyday use. They had various names: *chaekpo* for carrying books, *patchimpo* for lining small jewelry or sewing boxes, *sangpo* for covering food, *ppallaepo* for laundry, *popusangpo* for wrapping and carrying merchandise, *posonbonpo* for sock patterns, and so on.

The name *pojagi* can be used in connection with the above-mentioned classification scheme. Thus, the *pojagi* in Fig. 1 can be called "*Ahong Nabimun Han p'ok Honraeyoung supo*," which means, "*pojagi* about 35 centimeter in size, with dark red embroidery in a butterfly pattern, to be used at a commoners marriage."



〈Fig. 1〉 *Ahong Nabimun Han p'ok Honraeyoung supo*.

⁵ Korean Overseas Information Service, *Korean Craftsmen on Parade*, (Seoul: Korean Culture Service, 1982), 28. Cotton was introduced by Ik-chom Mun to Korea in 1367 from China and was the most widely used fabric during the Chosun Dynasty. Cotton fabrics were used as a substitute for money or tax duties.

⁶ One *p'ok* measures 35 centimeter.

III. *Minpo*: Embroidery Wrapping Cloth, *supo*

1. *Minpo*

Pojagi had been an essential part of everyday life for the common people before the suitcases or bags were introduced. As mentioned in earlier sections, the *pojagi* were organized into two groups by users, *kungpo* for palace use and *minpo* for use by common people. There are some important differences between *kungpo* and *minpo*. The color red was used only for *kungpo*. Common people did not use the red color as a rule, except in wedding ceremony *minpos*. The style of the stitching on the outer margin is another distinguishing factor. While common people used two or three small stitches to produce one large stitch, palace workers could use five to seven small stitches in one large stitch. Furthermore, when using gold thread, common people would stitch a single-thread outline, whereas two parallel lines were stitched in many *kungpo* designs.

As stated earlier, *minpos* can be divided into several categories according to method of production: *supo*, *chogakpo*, *shikgipo* and *tangchaepo*. Among these, *supo* and *chogakpo* are the most widely used wrapping cloths in traditional Korea. Therefore, *minpo*, and especially *supo*, will be discussed in this study.

2. The Description of *supo*

The term *jasu*, (*su* for short), means embroidery.) *supo*, employing *jasu* originated in *Kwandong* area, in the eastern coastal province of *Kwanwondo*.⁷

Embroidery culture in Korea encompasses everything from formal costumes to items used in everyday life, such as the wrapping cloth.

Whereas *supo* was usually used by the palace people on all their wrapping cloths, Commoners used these embroidered wrapping cloths only for their wedding ceremonies because the embroidery thread was very expensive at that time.

Among the commoners, the elaborate needlework was intended to conjoin the wishes of bride and bridegroom, ensuring them a happy life together.

3. *Supo* used in Wedding Ceremony

During the Chosun Dynasty, marriage was arranged by parents or matchmakers, not by the young people themselves. Several embroidered *pojagis* were used for the marriage ceremony. *Sajudanpo* was the *pojagi* used for wrapping a letter to the fiancée, written by a fortuneteller and stating the four auspicious aspects (year, month, day, and hour), called the "Four Pillars."⁸

On the day of a wedding, the groom brought a gift box for his bride and her immediate family members as a part of the betrothal ritual. The gift box was wrapped by *yemulpo*. *Yemulpo* was sometimes called a "bridal wrapping cloth.

Yedanpo is the wrapping cloth in which the bride sent the grooms immediate family presents, such as bedclothes for the grooms parents. While all of the wrapping cloths are embroidered, *yedanpo* is usually made out of patchwork.

Also, the groom typically presented a wooden duck to the brides house. This figurine was always wrapped with some textile. Koreans called this wrapper *kirogipo*. The duck is considered a symbol of the conjugal love and long life, which underlies the groom his pledge to live happily with his wife until parted by death.⁹

Norigaepo is another wrapping cloth for the wedding ceremony, which is about one *p'ok* in

⁷ Dong-hwa Huh, *Uriga Alaya Hal Kubaemanwha* [The Important Culture to Know], (Seoul: Hyunamsa, 1998), 283.

⁸ Edward B. Adams, *Korean Folk Art and Craft*, (Seoul: Seoul International Publishing House, 1987), 137.

size. It was used for protecting the brides jewelry. Usually this wrapping cloth features embroidered butterflies and flowers in one corner. To protect the object, sometimes a cotton pad was used.

4. Textiles Used in *supo*

During the Chosun Dynasty, cotton and silk were the only fabrics used for *supo*, embroidered wrapping cloths. According to the samples from the Museum of Korean Embroidery, most *supo* consist of two layers, of cotton and silk: cotton fabric usually is used as the background textile; and silk fabric, *myungju*, is used as the lining. Therefore, all *supo* are lined. The *supo* has one or more sashes to tie it in a bundle. *Myungju* is a lightweight, soft silk, which is lustrous, thin and transparent.⁹ It is used for hiding the back of embroidered textiles and protecting the objects wrapped.

Some embroidery samples are made of silk, both in the background fabric and linings.

5. Motifs Used in the Case Study

Because Koreans were not inclined to enjoy artificial beauty, the most popular motifs on *supo* were from nature, such as flowers, trees, birds, and insects. These motifs symbolized goodness, which reflected the Korean well wishing that goes into the making of *pojagi*.

The *supo* are often luxuriously embroidered with floral-tree motifs together with birds over the entire *pojagi*. Each motif has its characteristic meaning; the most important motifs on *supo* are flower patterns, called *hwamunsupo*. Generally, flowers stand as a symbol for concord, blessing, wealth, posterity and the fulfillment of ones wishes which means "The Three Abundances."¹¹

The peony, lotus, chrysanthemum and plum blossom are representative floral motifs. The chrysanthemum as the symbol of autumn, means the pleasure of comfort and longevity.¹²

The peony pattern, as the symbol for spring, represents wealth and honor.¹³ These motifs appeared on a lot of *pojagis* because the peony is referred to as the king of the flowers in Korea and China.¹⁴

The plum blossom stands for bravery and noble-mindedness, and is a symbol of winter¹⁵. The plum motifs are used in combination with butterflies and birds.

The lotus is a symbol of Buddhism, and means purity, rebirth, longevity and good fortune; traditionally, the lotus is a symbol of summer.¹⁶

Even though flowers are equally regarded as emblems of beauty in the East and the West, for Easterners, flowers tend to play a much more important role in all aspects of life and thought.

Other important motifs include the tree pat-

⁹ The National Folk Museum, *Wedding Embroideries and Ornaments*, (Seoul: The National Folk Museum, 1999), p.26.

¹⁰ Sunny Yang, *Hanbok: The Art of Korean Clothing*, (Seoul: Hollym, 1997), 40.

¹¹ Young-joo Yim, *Hankuk Jeongton Munyang II* [Traditional Korean Motifs 2], (Seoul: Ahn Graphics Ird., 1993), 180. "The Three Abundance" is a kind of motto of life, and refers to an abundance of blessing, wealth and posterity.

¹² Suk-mi Jin, *Chosoncho Poae Koawhan Youngu* [The wrapping Cloth in Choson], (Masters Thesis, Ewha Womans University, 1984), p.23.

¹³ Young-ja Baik, *Hankuk ui Mi* [The beauty of Korean Costume], (Seoul: Kyungchunsa, 1992), 460.

¹⁴ Young-joo Yim, 187.

¹⁵ C.A.S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1976), 37.

¹⁶ The National Folk Museum, *Wedding Embroideries and Ornaments*, (Seoul: The National Folk Museum, 1999), 129.



〈Fig. 2〉 Tree Motifs.



〈Fig. 3〉 Bird Motif: Crane.

terns called *sumokmunpo*. Tree motifs showing roots, trunks, and branches express the long history of mythology and nature worship in Korea.¹⁷ Koreans have worshipped trees as the physical embodiment of sacred spirits, and have prayed to them for miracles of good fortune. 〈Fig. 2〉 is an example of *sumokmunpo*. This is basically symmetrical on the vertical axis. The tree motifs express hope, with their branches suggesting long family genealogies for the prosperity of children.¹⁸

¹⁷ Young-joo Yim, *Hankuk Jeoungton Munyang X: Namu*, [Asian art Motifs from Korea 10 Tree patterns], (Seoul: Ahn Graphics Ird. 1993), and 9.

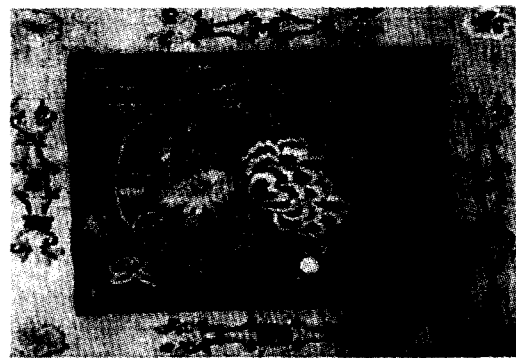
¹⁸ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁹ Vos Ken, *Symbolism and Simplify*, (Leiden: Hotei-Publishing, 1993), 21. Traditional Koreans and Chinese have believed that the crane lives for a thousand years. Ten Longevity means the blessings of a long and healthy life: Manchurian crane, tortoise, peach, mountain, clouds, water, sun, pine, deer, and *bulnocho* (the mysterious fungus of immortality).

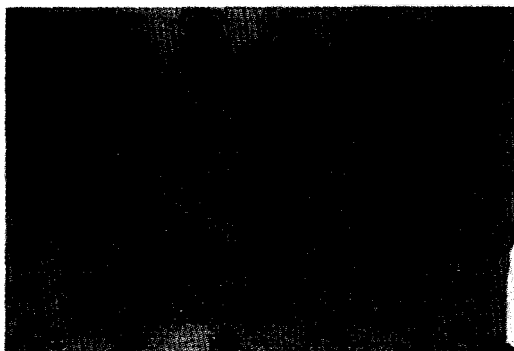
²⁰ Yoon-hee Kwon, *Symbolic and Decorative Motifs of Korean Silk: 1875~1975*, (Seoul: Iljisa, 1988), 87.

Birds are also popular motifs on *supo*. The most representative bird motifs are cranes and bats. The crane is one of the symbols of longevity.¹⁹ These cranes are not embroidered singly, rather they are always embroidered in groups or pairs. This motif is used for the wrapping cloth for an engagement ceremony, symbolizing the blessing of a long life. The symbol "X" refers to the connection between the two cranes living together until death. (Fig. 3)

Another important motif is an insect, the butterfly. The butterfly is an emblem of joy, signifying the age of seventy or eighty years.²⁰ Both 〈Fig. 1〉 and 〈Fig. 4〉 show butterfly motifs, but the methods applied to the wrapping cloth are very different. The butterfly in 〈Fig. 4〉 shows realistic butterflies only on a part of the *supo*, while the butterfly in 〈Fig. 1〉 doesn't show the real object, but only a large outlined butterfly, harmonized with flower leaves. The butterflies on both are embroidered with flowers. This expresses the thoughts of the Koreans. Korean people used to say that because



〈Fig. 4〉 Butterfly Pattern.



〈Fig. 5〉 Ideographs Motif.

flowers are loved by the butterfly, flowers and butterflies always stay together.

Chinese characters are applied as an important motif, and are embroidered at the edge of the *supo*. It is called *kilsangmunzamunsupo*, or ideograph pattern as in 〈Fig. 5〉. 〈Fig. 5〉 is embroidered with the Chinese character for "Confucian Virtues"²¹ on two opposing sides, and the words for the symbols of happiness on the other two sides. The words in the Plate 16 are *Hou Je Choung Shin* and *In We Yeou Gi*. *Hou je chou shin* means filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, and fidelity. *In We Yeou Gi* means benevolence, righteousness, decorum, and wisdom. The other side has the words, *Su Pu Da Nam* and *Kui pok Kang Nyung* which means longevity, happiness, peace, wealth, nobility, and many sons.²²

In addition, there are "Ten Longevity" motifs used on *supo*, implying the blessing of a long and healthy life²³.

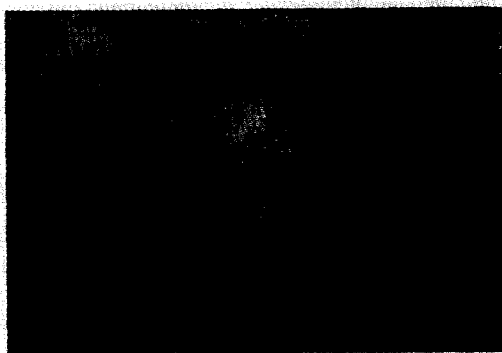
6. The Composition of Motifs

The application of motifs on *supo* is peculiar, and the viewpoints of motifs on *supo* are divid-

ed into two kinds. One has the viewpoint of a cross-section, which yields a three-dimensional effect 〈Fig. 2〉. This *pojagi* is very lively, as compared to 〈Fig. 4〉. This embroidery has a more pictorial feeling. Even if the motifs are from natural forms, they are flattened and simplified, and can easily be viewed as abstract designs.

There are several modes of organization of these motifs: symmetrical between the left and right, symmetrical between top and bottom, symmetrical in four areas demarcated by two diagonal lines, symmetrical in four areas demarcated by vertical and horizontal lines, and free in all directions.

Most embroidered motifs on *supo* look like they attempt to perfect a symmetrical pattern between the left and the right side, but they are not exactly symmetrical. 〈Fig. 1〉 is perfectly symmetrical. 〈Fig. 4〉 is typically asymmetrical: this is totally different in pattern and color. The rest of the samples are symmetrical in outline of motif, but they do have some differences between the left and the right sides.



〈Fig. 6〉 Peony Pattern: Asymmetrical.

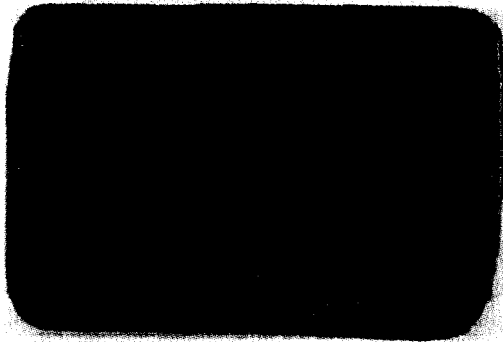
²¹ The eight Confucian Virtues are benevolence, righteousness, decorum, wisdom, filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, and fidelity.

²² Young-joo Yim, *The Beauty of Traditional Korean Motifs*, *Korean: Korean Art and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), 30. These words were called *obok* which means the five blessings: longevity, wealth, health, virtue and a peaceful death. It was considered necessary for meaningful life.

²³ Young-yang Chung, *The Art of Oriental Embroidery*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), 170.

The motif of stems and leaves in <Fig. 2> is slightly asymmetrical. <Fig. 6> has different kinds of flowers between the left and the right. As they attempted this pattern, women tried to embroider the motif symmetrically, but because they were not professional and did not have enough materials, including thread; they made some mistakes in creating these patterns.

The embroidered motifs are not realistic, but they often express an imaginary world. <Fig. 1> and <Fig. 7> are good examples. Although birds do not live in water, in <Fig. 7>, they play with fishes in the water. The leaves on the trees in <Fig. 1> metamorphose into birds at the four corners of the *pojagi*. These images can be explained by reference to the life of women in the Chosun Dynasty; women admired the world of their creation in which they could be free, and could draw the ideal world they wanted, against



<Fig. 7> Imaginary World.

their fates in the present world. These motifs allude to Korean beliefs, philosophy and religion.

7. Colors Used in the *supo*

From ancient times, dresses and textiles of bright colors have played an important role in Korean life. These brilliant colors of textiles and clothes are not only functional, but also artistic in respect both to people and objects.

Generally, colors for textiles used in the Chosun Dynasty were solid. There were five principal colors used in this time: red, blue, yellow, white and black. These five colors are related to the *Yin-Yang* theory²⁴ and to "five color theory."²⁵

Each color has its peculiar symbolic meanings. Red means the sun and fire, symbolizing creation, passion, love, excellence, happiness and women.²⁶ Blue is the symbolic color of the east, spring, creation, immortality, hope and man, and the color of the commoner, which is used without any social limitation.²⁷ Basically, many motifs consisted of red and blue. Kum-ja Kim explains: "red and blue fabrics symbolize respectively female and male, negative and positive, and dark and light, which are symbolic of a harmonious world in the East Asian cosmology."²⁸ Yellow signifies the center of the universe as a symbol of the earth. White means fall and west, and is widely used by the commoners of Korea since ancient times, while black represents winter and the cosmic direction

²⁴ *Yin-Yang* means that all things in the universe come into existence and change according to the principles of *Yin* and *Yang*. When *Yin-Yang* is out of harmony, misfortune, defect, loss and illness ensued. *Yang* in color means the five colors, red, blue, yellow, white and black. *Yin* is the neutral colors, such as pink or green.

²⁵ This is the traditional philosophical principle related with five different elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth, which were important elements in the way Koreans understand the workings of the universe.

²⁶ Young-heun Kim. "The Symbolism of the Five Colors, *Craft Culture*. Vol. 4 (February 1992), 64.

²⁷ Yoo-hee Kwan, 83.

²⁸ Kumja-paik Kim, *Profusion of Color: Korean Costumes and Wrapping Cloths of the Chosun Dynasty*. (Seoul: The Museum of Korean Embroidery, 1995), 26.

²⁹ Hye-Kyoung Yoo, *Hankuk Boksiksa Youn-gu* [Korean Costume History Study], (Seoul: Ewha Womans Univ. Press, 1980), 94.

〈Table 1〉 The Relation between Five Colors and Elements of Universe

Element	Colors	Direction	Seasons
Wood	Blue	East	Spring
Fire	Red	South	Summer
Earth	Yellow	Center	72days
Metal	White	West	Autumn
Water	Black	North	Winter

of North²⁹).

Supo are embroidered with not only the thread of the colors of the five principles, but also by gold and extended color threads: pink and orange from red, and light blue, green, and light green from blue. 〈Fig. 1〉 shows all kinds of colors, including *Yin-Yang* colors.

Although black was not used for costumes during the Chosun Dynasty, it was used for wrapping cloths. The *yemoulpo* and *kirogipo* use black as the background color. The black wrapping cloth is decorated dramatically with pink, violet, blue and yellow.

A particularly interesting aspect of *supo* is the harmony of color. Most leaves in 〈Fig. 1〉 express the imaginary world. The leaves are executed in a mixture of several colors, including red, blue, pink, yellow, etc. The harmony of color is magnificent, and gives the entire motif life. The care used in harmonizing colors shows the devotion that went into making the *supo*.

8. Embroidery Technique of the *supo*

The *pojagi* is embroidered with shiny silk threads, in a variety of colors. Although these threads are thicker, they provide harmony with in the overall composition.

Several techniques in embroidering are shown

in *supo*. The general stitches used in *supo* are *pyungsu* (ordinary embroidery stitch), *kumsajingkumsu* (couching stitch with a gold thread), *maedupsu* (knot embroidery stitch), *jaryunsu* (long and short stitch), *iumsu* (outline stitch), and *karumsu* (satin stitch).

Pyungsu is the most common stitch for making horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines.³⁰ The stitches in both front and back are the same.

Both *kumsajingkumsu* and *iumsu* are embroidered stitches for finishing. *Iumsu* is the simplest possible line stitch.³¹ Although *kumsajing-kumsu* is similar to *iumsu*, it has some chains on the outline stitches. Another difference between them is that while several color threads are used in *iumsu*, only gold thread is used for *kumsajing-kumsu*. 〈Fig. 1〉 shows both *kumsajing-kumsu* and *iumsu*. While the outline of the leaf is stitched by the *kumsajing-kumsu*, with some chains in gold thread, the outline of the butterfly shows *iumsu*, done with colorful threads. Using *kumsa*³² on *supo*, common people could use only one line with a gold thread, while people in the palace could stitch in two lines.

Maedupsu and *jaryunsu* are usually used for flowers. *Maedupsu* means knotted looping, which is a single element looped structure in which the loops are secured by knots.³³ *Jaryunsu* is a long and short stitch, which means that adjacent stitches are alternate in length.³⁴

Karumsu, slanting satin stitches, is shown around the sun in 〈Fig. 7〉. It is a simple, straight, flat stitch on a diagonal line.

The general technique of *supo* is to express the trunks and branches of trees in multi-colored outline stitches (*iumsu*) and leaves and other objects in satin stitches (*karumsu*).

²⁹ Young-hwa Han, *Jeontong Jasu* [Traditional Embroidery], (Seoul: Daewonsa, 1989), 89.

³¹ Emery Irene, *The Primary Structures of Fabrics*, (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1996), 238.

³² *kumsa* means gold thread.

³³ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁴ Marion Nicolas, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery Stitches, Including Crewel*, (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1974), 38.

IV. Conclusion

This study has investigated the *minpo*, or Korean commoner's wrapping cloth, created exclusively by women of the late Chosun Dynasty in the nineteenth century. The Korean wrapping cloth is not only beautiful but also a very practical item. It reflects the taste of the various classes of people who used them and the skill of the women who created them. Nevertheless, in spite of its value and remarkable cultural heritage, it is not highly esteemed in Korea. Recently, wrapping clothes have fetched good pieces in the historic textile market. A few dealers specialize in these types of textile.

Because the wrapping cloths are the creation of women, Korean women's roles and status were explained and related to the strict Confucian society of Chosun Dynasty Korea. Because women followed the "Three Tenets of Obedience" and were discouraged from engaging in education, they turned their individual sense of harmony and beauty to the making of these wrapping cloths. Therefore, the wrapping cloth can be said to reflect the minds of women.

Supo were used in wedding ceremonies. The characteristics and significance of the color and design in creating the wrapping cloth related to the philosophy of the theory of *Yin-yang* and the *five color theory* was basic to oriental thought. The range of color schemes a very wide and included such colors as red, purple, blue, green, yellow, pink, dark blue and white. Silk and cotton were all popular fabrics for making wrapping cloths. The motifs used were based on trees, flowers, birds, clouds, and ideographs, with their special symbolic meanings pertaining to the desire for a life of abundance, prosperity and lasting good fortune.

The techniques used in *pojagi* construction are quite different from the embroidery and stitching of the Western world. The color and composition of the wrapping cloth are not only completely original, but also full of excitement

and vitality, because they represent the makers' imagination, free from the oppression of male-dominated society. Women's strong emotions as well as their good wishes for the recipients of *pojagi* can be seen through the brilliant use of color and sophisticated designs.

This study helps people, both Korean and foreign, understand one of the most wonderful Korean cultural heritages. *Pojagi* must be one of the most interesting, outstanding and beautiful textiles, which was made by women in the Chosun Dynasty. It is no coincidence that *pojagi* played an important role in commoners' everyday life. Women's creativity and aesthetic sense are clearly evident in *pojagi*. It can be recognized by the pursuit of perfection on the color composition and good structure, nevertheless the women in the Chosun Dynasty didn't have any chance to learn a special skill in making them. These wrapping cloths are the wonderful textile art works of anonymous Korean women artists.

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