

## EVENTS

*Hanji Takes Center Stage*  
Aimee Lee, USA

In December 2014, nearly 400 people attended the first international hanji seminar, hosted in Seoul by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and administered by the Korea Craft and Design Foundation (KCDF). The main event on December 19 was free and open to the public, with nine lectures and a panel that covered a range of topics: uses of hanji in conservation, calligraphy, painting, and printmaking; and most importantly, how hanji can become better known and sold around the world. Guest speakers came from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and US; Nicholas Basbanes treated us to a wonderful keynote placing hanji within the “grand continuum” of paper. We were treated to a pre-seminar tour that began with a visit to Mungyeong Traditional Hanji, a hanji mill in Korea that grows and harvests its own *dak* trees, makes its own plant lye to cook their *dak* fiber, and uses only *webal tteugi*

(the traditional Korean sheet formation technique). It happened to be the coldest day of winter yet, but people still ventured outside into the bitter winds to see the harvested and steamed *dak*, as well as the snowy mountains.

After three more hours on the tour bus, we reached Jeonju, where we were treated to a traditional dinner—Jeonju being famous for certain types of delicious food, like its *bibimbap*—with the mayor, complete with a *pansori* performance that even included a song about hanji. The next morning, we visited the Hanji Industry Support Center. While the group toured the Royal Portrait Museum, I slipped away to visit the only remaining hanji *bal* (screen) maker. Mr. Yoo Bae-gun had made three sets of papermaking tools for me and I left with big boxes that I stored in the bus while we visited the Chonbuk National University Museum archives. Our group was made up of conservators, paper dealers, artists, and bibliophiles, so we were delighted to be allowed into these spaces full of books, woodblocks to print books, documents, and paper artifacts. On the bus ride back to Seoul,

our hosts played Im Kwon-taek’s film, *Hanji*, which somewhat foreshadowed the seminar to take place on the following day. Not content to leave a minute unfilled, we disembarked in front of COEX, the big convention center where KCDF was hosting the 2014 Craft Trend Fair. We visited two hanji sections and then headed upstairs for another fancy dinner and musical performance, this time joined by special guests like Mr. Hong Chun-su, the national intangible cultural property holder of hanji making.

With barely a moment to rest, the final day was packed with valuable information, case studies, and ideas about how to support hanji both in Korea and abroad. It wasn’t surprising that some of our cohort was too exhausted to join us for the final dinner, and the dense day could easily have been spread across two. Though it remains to be seen how many of these conversations will continue, and what tangible changes will be made to improve the health and survival of high-quality hanji, it was heartening to see the rising interest in Korean paper.



Dak left after the harvest at Mungyeong Traditional Hanji.

LEFT: Mr. Kim, the fifth generation in a line of traditional hanji makers, shows the group *dak* shoots that have been harvested, steamed, and stacked.



Jiseung lamps made of corded hanji at the Hanji Industry Support Center.



Mr. Kim demonstrates *webal tteugi*, which is the only sheet formation method that he has ever learned, practiced by only a handful of papermakers in Korea.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Books at the Chonbuk National University Museum archives; Woodblocks used for printing books at the Chonbuk National University Museum archives; Documents at the Chonbuk National University Museum archives.

**LINKS:**

*(some may only be accessible to Korean readers)*

**Hanji Seminar website:**

<http://hanji-seminar.kr>

**KCDF:** <http://www.kcdf.kr/eng/main/userMain/engMain.do>

**Mungyeong Hanji:**

<http://www.문경한지.kr/>

**Hanji Industry Support Center:**

<http://hisc.re.kr/new/eng/inner.php?sMenu=main>

**Craft Trend Fair:** <http://craftfair.kcdf.kr/index.php>