

Traditional Korean Crafts

by Bo Kim, Robert Sayers,
and Barbara Smith

The crafts represented here are typical of those produced during Korea's late feudal period, which ended with the termination of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910). Before 1800, most of the handcraft industries, such as pottery-making, metal-smithing, and stone-working, were strictly regulated by the royal court, which controlled much of the country's commerce. During the declining years of the dynasty, however, small cottage industries appeared, as peasant farmers sought to improve their precarious economic situation by producing textiles, baskets, and other crafts for market.

On appointed market days in the villages, peddlers, local vendors, and farmers would spread their wares on the ground or in booths, where they could be viewed by passersby. This traditional open-air market remains a feature of modern Korean life, even though many of the older handcrafts have been supplanted over the last few decades with machine-manufactured goods.

Because artisans, no matter how skillful, have historically been consigned to "commoner" status in Korean society, few if any of the great masters are remembered by name – a situation somewhat different from that in China or Japan. To remedy this situation, the Korean government in recent years has sought to recognize formally several of its remaining skilled craftsmen with the designation "intangible cultural property."

Bo Kim is a native of Seoul, Korea. She received her B.A. in Interior Design from the University of Maryland and currently works in the Washington, D.C., area in the design field. She is Program Assistant for this year's ethnic program.

Barbara Smith has a B.A. from George Mason University in American Studies. She worked as an intern in the Smithsonian Institution Folklife Program in 1981. She is a Program Assistant for this year's Festival.

The *onggi* Potter

The speed with which the Korean *onggi* potter turns a vessel belies the difficult nature of the work. Young men traditionally acquire the complicated motor skills for *onggi*-making around the age of twenty and can be expected to work for another thirty years or so. Today, a serious shortage of apprentices exists, largely because of other opportunities available to young people.

1. In turning a medium-size storage vessel, the potter starts with a clay bottom disc (*mitch'ang*) which he flattens with a wooden beater called *pangmang'i*.
2. After the disc has been flattened and trimmed to the correct thickness and diameter, the potter adds the first of several courses of coils (*t'aerim*). The long coils are prepared by the potter's assistant.
3. Additional coils are added in clockwise direction and are flattened with pressure from the potter's left hand.



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4. After several coils have been added, they are further flattened with a wooden paddle (*puch'ae* or *sure*). A round wooden anvil (*toge*), seen to the left of the potter in the previous photos, is held against the inside wall of the cylinder.

5. Further thinning and shaping are done with a trapezoid-shaped chip (*kun'gae*), usually used in conjunction with a second inside tool (*angun'gae* or *chogaepi*). Final shaping of the vessel's rim and application of the wavy dragon line (*yongddi*) are accomplished with strips of leather and quilted cloth (*mulgajuk* and *kamjaebi*).

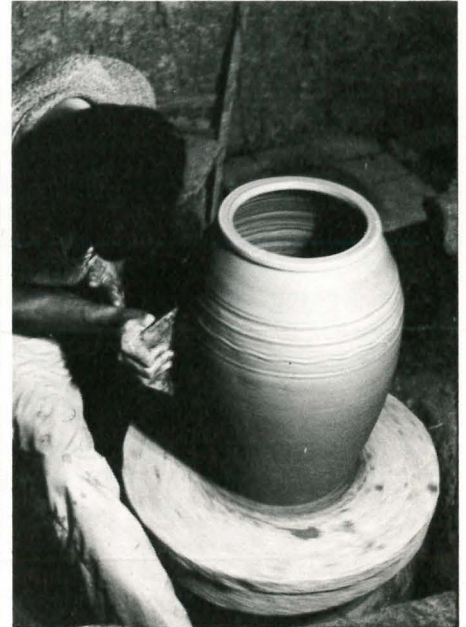
6. With his assistant, the potter carries the vessel away to the drying room in a cloth sling (*tulbo*).

(photos by Ralph Rinzler, 1971)

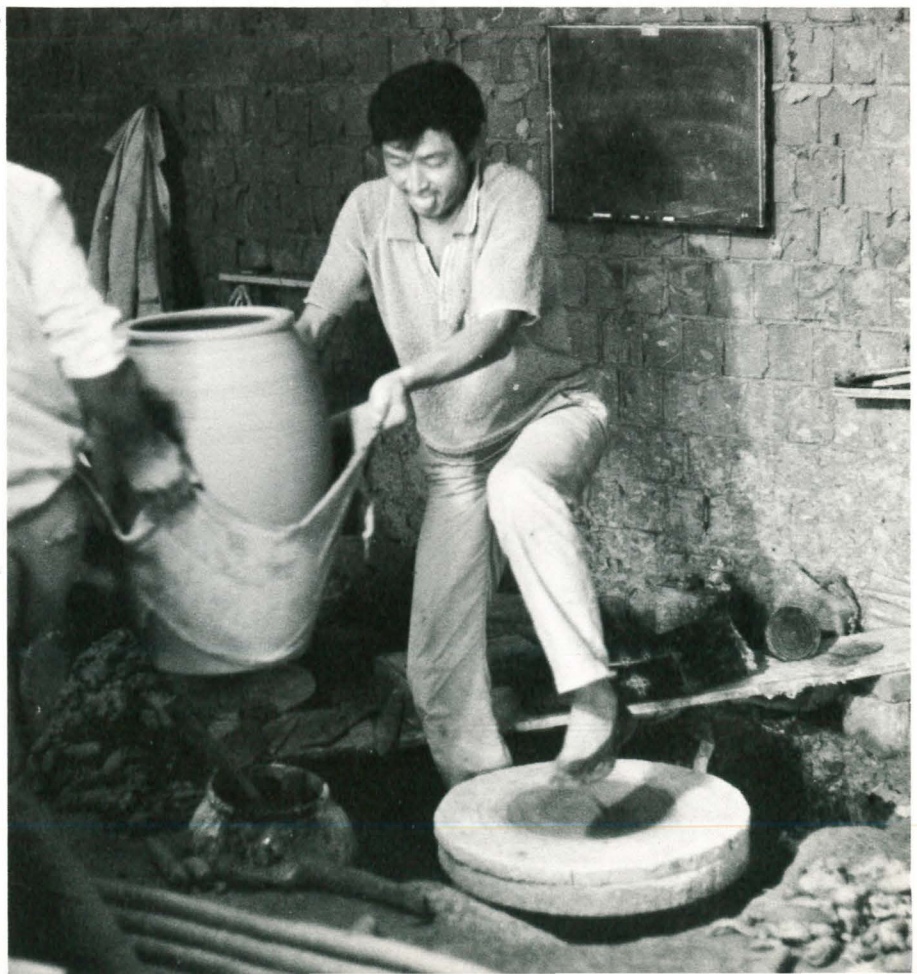
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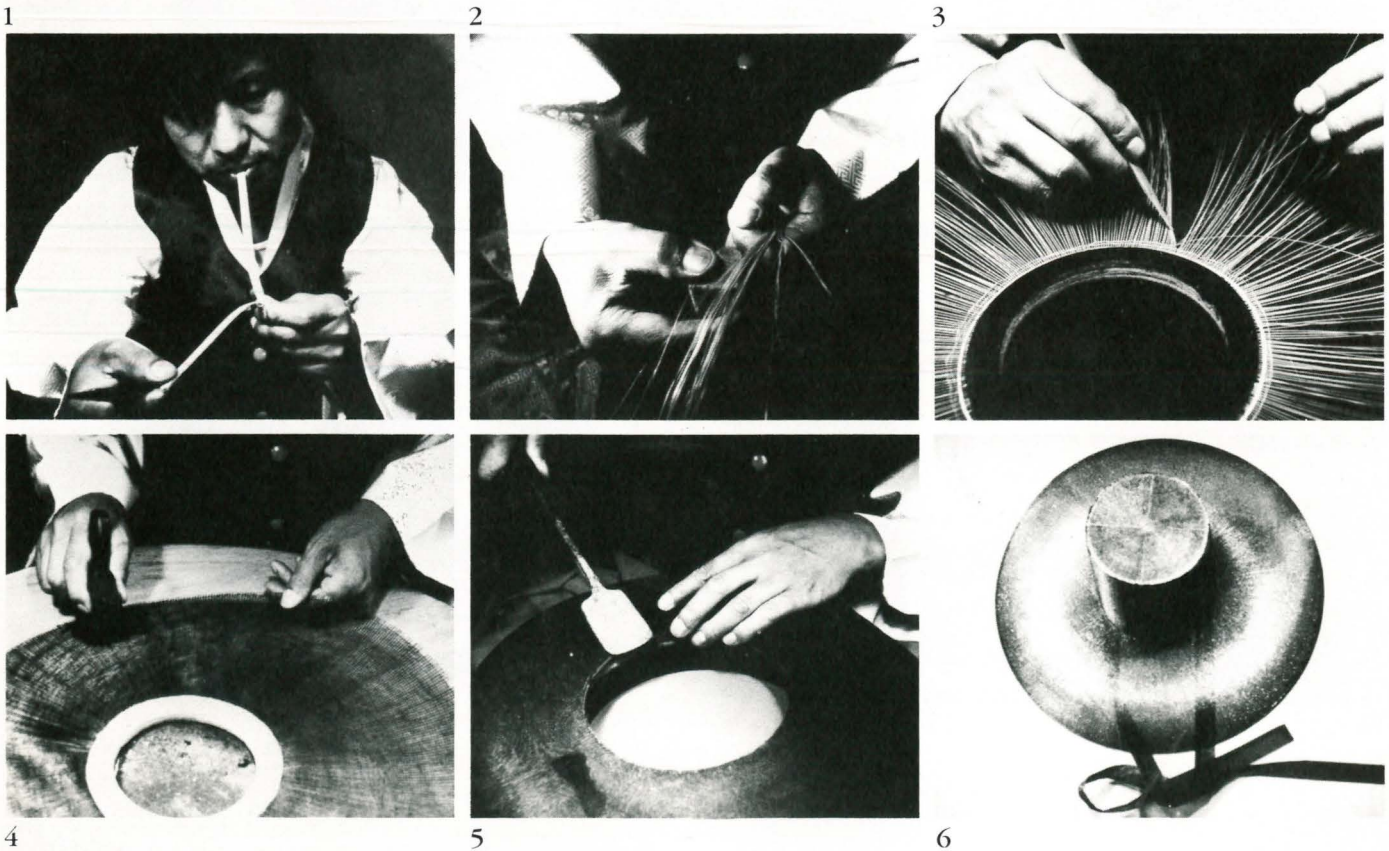


Horse-hair Hats

According to murals discovered in tombs of the Koguryo period, horse-hair hats were in use as early as the Three Kingdom period. However, during the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), the uses of the *kabt*, or black top hat, which is made of finely woven horse-hair, was at its peak and was the mark of the gentry. The width of the brim and the style of the hat indicated the status of the wearer. The horse-hair hat is rarely seen today but it is still revered as a uniquely Korean symbol.

1. The hat material is bamboo and horse-hair; the bamboo is split into thin strips of premeasured brim size.
2. The *jookdo* tool is used to produce thin and even strips.
3. The craftsman weaves the strips to form the brim.
4. After applying the oxhide glue to stiffen the brim, the craftsman must wait until it dries. Then he paints the brim on both sides with a Korean ink-stick.
5. The end of the brim is bent with a heart-shaped iron. The brim is then attached to the crown of the hat which is made of horse-hair or hair from a cow's tail. The process of making the crown is the same as that used for making the brim.
6. The finished product.

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YOON YEOL SOO, EMILLE MUSEUM



Hempcloth

Hand-woven hempcloth, the oldest and most widely used fabric of the Korean people, is stiff and coarse compared to cotton or silk. Hempclothes are frequently worn in summer and for ceremonies, funerals, and ancestral ritual services. The finest hempcloth was presented to the King as a tribute from the community. The weaver cultivates the hemp himself and accomplishes many of the complicated processes involved in preparing the material.

1. The raw hemp is steamed, peeled, split, soaked and dried several times.
2. The weaver splits the short fiber and at the same time ties it by twisting it over her leg. The twisted long fiber is then collected in a bamboo basket.
3. The reel spins the long fiber tightly as it is reeled onto the spindle.
4. The fiber is unwound from each spindle onto the square-shaped reel.
5. The fiber is then bleached with wood ash and water and rewound onto the spool.
6. The spool is inserted in the shuttle and the weaving begins.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
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Komun'go

The stringed instrument called *komun'go* was invented by Prime Minister Wang Sanak of the Koguryo Kingdom around the 4th century. Since then it has been included in both court orchestras and folk chamber ensembles. The instrument consists of six strings of twisted silk over a sound box made from the wood of the paulownia tree.

1. Planing the soundboard of a *komun'go*.
2. Cutting openings in the soundboard.
3. Attaching one soundboard to the other with oxhide glue.
4. Stringing the instrument.
5. Filing the frets of the *komun'go*.
6. Tying the strings in preparation for tuning.

