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**The Power of Absence and Desire for Presence:
Portraits and Documentary Paintings of King Jeongjo (r. 1776-1800)**

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How was the king visualized in Korea during the late eighteenth century? To answer this question, some fundamental issues of earlier portrait productions should be addressed first: the debate as to the merit of human portraits among Confucians, the display and concealment of portraits, and the avoidance of representing the body of the king in historical paintings. Non-representation or un-exhibition had been ways to symbolize the divineness of the king since the beginning of Joseon Dynasty. The presence of the king, however, tended to be emphasized through monumental court paintings and grand rituals for portraits by the 18th century during the reign of King Yeongjo (r. 1724-1776), and his successor, King Jeongjo (r. 1776-1800). In the later part of the lecture, I will examine the case of the King Jeongjo by discussing his invention of portrait rituals and closely examining one monumental screen painting, *King Jeongjo's Journey to His Father's Tomb in Hwaseong* (華城陵行圖).

- **King Jeongjo (正祖 r. 1776-1800):** 22nd ruler of Joseon Dynasty. He was born in 1752 as the son of Crown Prince Sado and Lady Hyegyegyeong. At the age of 10, he had to witness his father's execution by his grandfather King Yeongjo. He survived several assassination attempts before ascending to the throne at age 24. In spite of his tragic youth, King Jeongjo led the golden era marked by peace, relative political stability, economic prosperity, and cultural flowering. His sudden death at the age of 48, with many projects left unaccomplished, aroused speculations and historical imaginations that are still dealt with in numerous novels and movies today.
- **Kyujanggak(奎章閣):** royal library established in 1776 by King Jeongjo. It was first initiated as a royal library where manuscripts of kings were published and royal collections were stored. More importantly, it functioned as a secretarial institute to educate talented young courtiers who carried out Jeongjo's reform policies. The library was also an important place for his art patronage – it was the place where his portraits were produced and enshrined and the institution in which selected court artists were trained to deliver his message through visual media.

- *King Jeongjo's Journey to His Father's Tomb in Hwaseong (Hwaseong Neongheangdo, 華城陵行圖)*: 8-panel folding screen produced in 1796.

It includes eight paintings that depict selected events held during King Jeongjo's journey to Hwaseong where the tomb of his father, Prince Sado, was being constructed. During his reign, he made a total of 13 visits to Hwaseong, but the eighth visit in 1795 was especially significant, because that year marked both his parents' 60th birthday and the 20th anniversary of his reign. The eight panels of this screen depict eight separate events from Jeongjo's journey, as follows: (1) the birthday celebration for Jeongjo's mother; (2) a banquet for elders; (3) a visit to a Confucius shrine; (4) the special civil service exam; (5) military reviews; (6) a ceremonial archery event; (7) the return procession and; (8) crossing the pontoon bridge. Three complete screens with all eight panels are held by the National Museum of Korea, the National Palace Museum of Korea, and the Leeum Samsung Museum.

Try to mark "True/False" to the following statements.

You should get the answers by the end of the lecture.

1. During the Joseon dynasty, the kings' portraits were consistently produced for generations to demonstrate the legitimacy of the lineage.
2. Portraits of the kings were displayed in the reception hall where foreign envoys first paid their respects to the Joseon King.
3. During the Joseon dynasty, the body of the king was never represented in documentary paintings that depicted the royal ceremonies the king attended.
4. King Jeongjo invented rituals for the production, enshrinement, and maintenance of his portraits.
5. King Jeongjo included the scene of the memorial ceremony at his father's tomb in the painting *King Jeongjo's Journey to His Father's Tomb in Hwaseong* in order to restore his father's honor and legacy.

Suggested Readings

Hongnam Kim. *Korean Arts Of The Eighteenth Century: Splendor And Simplicity*. Place: Weatherhill. 1993.

National Museum of Korea. *Celebrating Events with Banquets and Ceremonies in the Joseon Dynasty*. Seoul: National Museum of Korea. 2011.

National Museum of Korea. "Portraits of Joseon Dynasty," *Journal of Korean Art and Archaeology*, Volume 5. Seoul: National Museum of Korea. pp. 8-71.

Asian Art Museum. *In Grand Style: Celebrations in Korean Art during the Joseon Dynasty*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum. *Forthcoming*.