



**Special Review II**

# Goryeo Historical Architecture

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## Goryeo Historical Architecture

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For the Special Review of the Summer 2025 issue, the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) chose to return to the area of History and host a group of reviews, of which the topics were not only of a historical nature but would thematically overlap with the area of Architecture. In other words, the “archaeological history of the Korean premodern society” was envisioned to be the focal point for this occasion, and for that goal we have invited four scholars, who graciously agreed to provide us with their own unique reviews. The exact era selected for this time was the Goryeo period (918–1392), which would be the medieval chapter in the history of Korea. We politely asked the reviewers to provide us with either reviews of important historical vestiges from that era or reviews of vestiges and remains of medieval Korean architecture whose characteristics bear significant cultural importance.

The first reviewer, Yi Min-Ki, who received Ph.D. at the Academy of Korean Studies, offered us a review on the spaces reserved for certain state rites that were held by the Goryeo court, under the title “Where Rites Meet Power: Venues for State Sacrificial Rites in the Goryeo Dynasty.” The rites discussed here are specifically “sacrificial rites,” which used sacrificed animals for the occasion. In this review, the reviewer examines the political meaning and symbolism from details that would have been featured in such rituals. According to the reviewer, the rituals at the *hwangu* altar and the *sajik* altar, the most exemplary sacrificial rituals of the time, were key rituals where the king could declare his legitimate control over the country, by directly paying respect to heaven and land. The reviewer also discusses the possible location of the ritual site, the site’s projected structure and internal composition, and other details as well. The reviewer’s take on the space that witnessed these rituals is that it was not a mere physical space, but more like a philosophical sphere where political power was displayed symbolically.

Park Seongjin (Korea Heritage Service) provided us with a review of

the single most important historical vestige from the Goryeo period, the Manwoldae palace site no less, under the title of “An Archaeological Review of the Site Formation Process of the Western Architectural Complex in Manwoldae, Kaesong.” As the reviewer emphasizes, Manwoldae in Kaesong was the primary royal palace of the Goryeo dynasty. The reviewer first offers a general outline of the palace’s construction and then, based on the archaeological data gathered through all the excavations conducted over the years, examines the formation process of the palace, especially the western building complex. Most interestingly, in the process of examining the sequence of events that would have led to the current state of the site, the reviewer stresses that the area was continually in use prior to the foundation of the Goryeo dynasty. The reviewer also points out that unlike other palaces, this main palace was built on a mountain slope. The characteristics of the site clarified by the reviewer are quite impressive.

Kim Bo-kwang (Gachon University) provided us with a review of a particular hall that existed in the Goryeo period, which had the portraits of founder King Taejo Wang Geon and his ancestors enshrined inside, under the title “The Symbolic Significance of Gyeongnyeongjeon Hall in the Goryeo Dynasty Seen from the Spatial and Political Perspective.” First, the reviewer gives us a brief review of the Manwoldae palace, as well as the joint excavation project which proceeded with cooperation between the two Korean authorities. Then the review proceeds to discuss the spatial structure of the Gyeongnyeongjeon Hall. Although the hall was of the utmost importance for the Goryeo kings, governmental officials, and people in general, of course the structure is now gone. Only the site where the hall would have stood is now identified within the Manwoldae excavation site, and the reviewer elaborates on the hall’s exact location, before discussing the symbolic significance of the king’s procession to this hall, along with all the ritual protocols that would have been observed for such occasions.

Hyun Seungwook (Kangwon National University) reviewed the beauty of extant Goryeo period architecture and its characteristics, also raising the question of how much we actually know and understand this period’s architectural style and qualities, under the aptly put title, “We Do Not Know Much about Goryeo Dynasty Architecture.” As mentioned, the reviewer does discuss the elaborate decorations, beauty of curves, complex structures, and proportional modules of the architectural achievements from this period, but

the review itself is driven by the aforementioned core question. According to the reviewer, less than 10 Goryeo buildings remain today, with some of them not even in South Korea, and most of them are Buddhist constructions from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, the level of their genuine representation of Goryeo architectural culture is unfortunately still in question. But the author also observes that the architecture of Goryeo reflects qualities and characteristics that were featured in other regions of East Asia at the time and would have served as a bridge connecting ancient and modern times on the Korean peninsula.

*RKS* expresses our deepest appreciation for all the four reviewers who generously agreed to share their insight on Goryeo historical architecture. We are sure that their efforts will go a long way to remind the readers that premodern Korean culture has a lot to offer. *RKS* will continue to explore relevant issues in premodern Korea and, not long before, return to the area of cultural history as well.