



# The Characteristics of Korean Traditional Fabric of Saekdong

Jisu Kim and Youngjoo Na\*

Department of Clothing and Textiles, Inha University, South Korea

\*Corresponding author: Youngjoo Na, Department of Clothing and Textiles, Inha University, South Korea. Email: youngjoo@inha.ac.kr

Received: 📅 April 24, 2019

Published: 📅 May 02, 2019

## Abstract

The origin of Saekdong is assumed from Kyung-Geum of Ancient Joseon of Korea. Kyung-Geum is warp faced multiple colored weave with patterns of relatively thick dense silk fabric and was precious in that time. It's patterned with the shapes of cloud, antler, swirling objects with gorgeous thick end-curved lines. Go-Joseon is very civilized society focusing Joyang and Geum-Ju near Balhae Bay civilization providence and the people wore colorful clothing trimmed with animal furs with jade and bronze decoration buttons. They produced a variety of yarns and Geum fabrics, and they had various colored design of tripod pottery as well as Saekdong or modernized Kyung-Geum, inferring to their high level of dyeing technique and eye for beauty. And from bronze mirror with delicate-pattern, violin-shaped bronze dagger, and fan-shaped hatchet with elegant curves as well as high-quality Geum design we found out they had high experties in delicate casting and craft skill.

**Keywords:** Warp Double Fabric of Silk; Antler Pattern; Balhae Civilization; Color Sensation; Pattern Design

## Introduction

Sericin, which is the name of silk protein originates from the word 'Seres', which is Roman for East Asian fabric merchants and their land. Henry Yule(1820-1889), a Scottish orientalist, about BC 5th century 'Seres, Serica' and their land, "Their Country is expansive in size reaching from Bactria, Imaus in the west to the coasts of East Asian seas. They are frugal, and good tempered in nature, they are educated and open-minded people avoiding unnecessary conflicts to neighbor countries but not actively engaging in intimate relations. Also, they were never stingy about trading away their manufacture goods, such as silk, fur and high quality of iron". Some view 'Seres' as the Qin (BC221-206) or Qin people of China, but we believe otherwise, 'Seres' is from 'Suksin 肅慎 or Joseon', first country of Korea, because,

- BC 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Warring states period, Qin of China did not border coasts of East Asian seas.
- Chinese imported fur not exported fur.
- Contrary to the peaceful nature of the Seres people, Jin actively engaged in wars and conquest.

Silk road had its shortest cut of east end to Joyang near Balhae sea for northern hemisphere and topography. Go-Joseon had high manufacturing techniques of iron, fur, dyes and silk as well as

horse riding, astronomy and archery skills. Silk road can not be studied without research of north horse-riding people, who was one of tribes of Go-Joseon(古朝鮮), ancient Joseon of Korea.

It is told that Geum is first made in East Asia, and it is assumed that Geum was introduced to the western world around the Warrior states period (BC403~BC221)[1]. By Herodotos, Greek and Persian merchants visited East Asia at BC 6-5<sup>th</sup> century. And Geum silk of Ancient East Asia was spread to Central Asia, north Africa, and Rome. Geum(錦) is silk fabric with beautiful patterns woven using multi-colored warp threads, differing to Ki(綺) which is one colored. The letter of Geum(錦) is a combination word of two different characters meaning of expensive gold(金) and total silk fabric(帛)[2]. The first historical record mentioning Geum is found in the Odes songs(詩經, about BC1000-200), for example, 錦衣狐裘 Geum apparel decorated with fox fur, 裳錦 Geum skirt, 錦衣 Geum apparel, and 貝錦 luxurious Geum.

## Kyung-Geum of Ancient Joseon (BC2333~)

While China was going through its Warring state period, Go-Joseon(古朝鮮), ancient Joseon of Korea which had an expansive land, located north of China was at its golden age, controlling power East Asia[3]. Go-Joseon has much lower tax than China,

and salubrious. Kyung-Geum(經錦), which colored threads are warps, earliest form of Geum, is being massively discovered in the historical site of Joyang, Liaoning (朝陽, 遼寧市), one of the capitals of Go-Joseon. Joyang is not only a big city of Go-Joseon but also the center of cultural development of Balhae bay(渤海灣), which was the center of Hongshan(紅山) or Liao river(遼河) Civilization (BC 5000). And we call this civilization as Balhae civilization or Go-Joseon people. As known, here is the Lelang Commandary(渤海), Dangun Joseon(檀君 朝鮮, BC2333~108), Buyeo(夫餘, BC200-AD494), early Goguryeo(高句麗) and early Baekje(百濟). The Liao ha river ran besides, and Joyang has lots of rivers running along the city which make the soil rich, and one of those rivers was called Joseon ha (朝鮮河) and the name was changed to Jo ha (潮河) after Ming Dynasty(1368-1644) [4]. In ancient record, Suksin, Jusin or Siksин 息慎 are the names used interchangeably, and the word Joseon originates from Suksin [5].

Silk is told to be originated from Sil-kurry(실꾸리), which 'Sil' means threads in Korean(실) and 'kurry' means spool(꾸리) or reel from ancient Joseon or Goguryeo time. When Persian merchants saw silk or silk bobbin of Goguryeo, they might call this as silk. Go-Joseon was very rich abundant society and produce enormous quantities of silk, various furs and good iron. Records indicate that even Confucius said hoping peoples good manner that he wanted to live in a peace in Go-Joseon. The Yellow river downstream and neighboring Balhae bay which were both rich and productive soil allowing for Mulberry field, every household had a facility for culturing silk worms[The Odes]. Among the Kyung-Geum being discovered till today, those discovered in Joyang have the longest history [2]. Even these are very small pieces of fabrics, they are high value as first excavated warp double silk woven of multicolored. In Chinese and Japanese historical records, they said the origin of

Kyung Geum is unknown, or maybe from Xinjiang Uyghur(新疆). But for the above reasons we believe the origin of Kyung Geum is Joyang region of Balhae or Go-Joseon civilization. Here we have lots of relics proofs from Wee-young-ja (Chaoyang Wei-ingts, 朝陽 魏營子, BC 13-10C), and Sip-i-dae-young-ja (Chaoyang Sier Tai-ingts remains, 朝陽 十二大營子 遺蹟, BC 9-6C) [6].

Geum-Ju (錦州), which was the center of Geum production, is in the Joyang region. San-hae-kwan(山海關), called as 天下第一關, the first or number one gate in the world was located near Joyang as international trade harbor BC 9th century as well [7]. This wonderful city of Joyang is possible because Balhae, Hongshan or Liao river civilization existed almost 1000~1500 years ago before Yellow river civilization. And we think Xinjiang Uyghur is more trading center rather than a place of cultivation of silk worms or manufacture of Kyung Geum, which cumulated wealth after activated silk roads between the west and the east. The record says that diplomats from Buyeo(夫餘) which was main country of Go-Joseon wore the apparels made of Geum and Kye, wool Geum and overcoat of fur during visits to other countries [8]. Fabrics from Goryeo (高麗, 918-1392) after Goguryeo had beautiful patten of luxury Geum(貝錦, PaeGeum) resembling precious sea shells, its patterns and colors were of superior beauty compared to Chinese Donghwa-po(撞華布), its woven pattern were splendid and highly detailed, Jeo-po(苧布) and Mapo(麻布) were as white as fresh snow according to the praises from Chinese emperor of Later Jin 後晉 (936-946) [7]. Therefore, fabrics from ancient Korea has a great value of research due to its beauty and complex weaving techniques, distinct from the fabrics of neighboring countries. But this area of ancient Korean fabrics has never been studied carefully and is mostly unknown. Thus, we will like to collect concrete evidences for the visualization of the clothing and lifestyle of Go-Joseon people.

### Kyung-Geum Changed to Current Saekdong

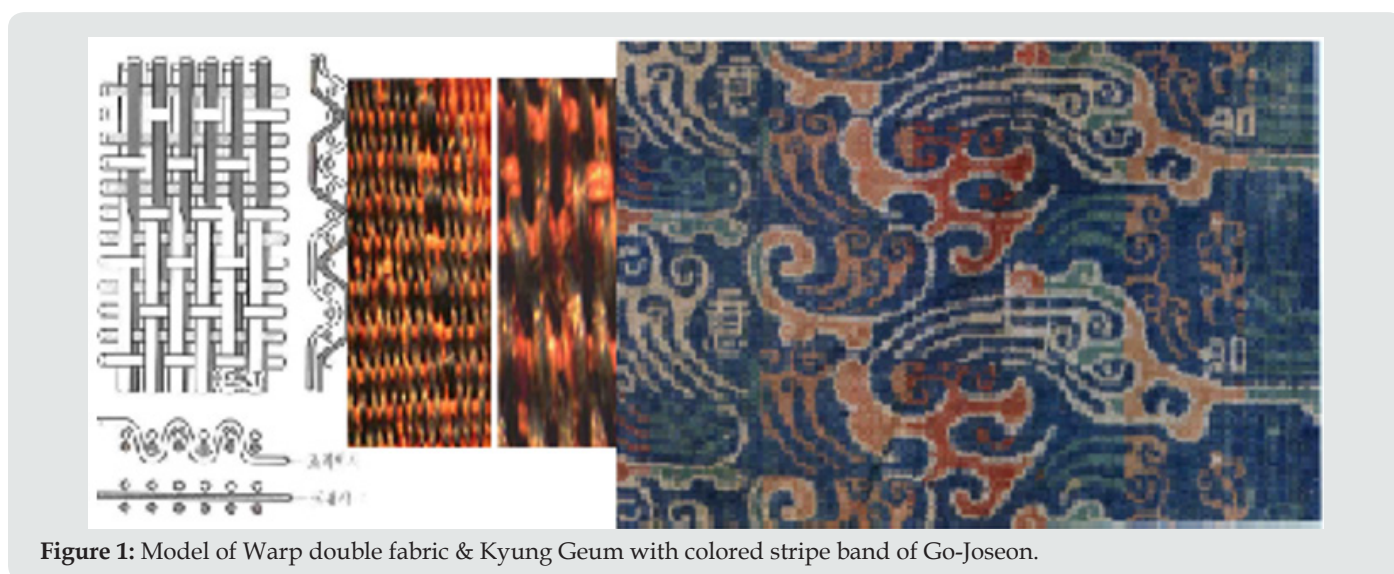


Figure 1: Model of Warp double fabric & Kyung Geum with colored stripe band of Go-Joseon.

In Figure 1, it has overlapping colored yarns as vertical warp threads –creating patterns through occasional emergence of different colored thread layers to the surface (warp faced double rib structure). Thus the fabric is dense and thick, which was not for the hot and humid weather. This fabric swatch was excavated in

Sinkiang relic, and we assume that it is of Go-Joseon origin. The warp yarns are ordered as green, yellow, red, green, yellow and green, having constant widths and its own rule of color arrangement. These colored stripes in the Geum pattern are rhythmical yet natural, containing traces of whimsical randomness. The orderly

and rhythmical pattern makes Geum aesthetically pleasing through its simpleness, while the randomness incorporated within gives a natural and organic feeling. The Tibetians have similar color stripes in their costume, but theirs are not always vertical, nor have the same thickness throughout the whole pattern (Figure 1) [2]. The weaving technique for the Kyung-Geum travelled to western Asia around AD 0. During this process, the weaving technique was modified to use colored thread as the filling thread. This technique produced a new form of Geum, Wee-Geum(緯錦). Wee-Geum started to replace Kyung-Geum from Balhae dynasty(AD700) [8].

The bigger patterns and curves of Wee-Geum gained more popularity over the traditional Kyung-Geum and Kyung Geum disappeared for its complex manufacture process. But it has survived in Korea as the form of Saekdong, which is warp faced satin with vertical colored band and with simple pattern. The ancient Kyung Geum had its own beautiful characteristics. The patterns were often decorated with vibrant portrayals of clouds, whirlpools and antlers. The fabric consisted of complex combinations of straight and curved lines within the patterns. The Geum pattern also often contained pictures of great beasts, and ancient characters “韓” Han means Korea and “王” wang means king[8]. Art depicting great beasts is characteristic of the Northern horseback-riding tribes' culture. The records say Goguryeo (BC237-AD668) had lots of Kyung Geum such as beautiful Cloud Geum 雲錦, King letter Geum 王字文錦, and Geum tent or wide long shawl fabrics of Geum [7].

The uniform widths of the stripes represent equality, a valued characteristic of the Go-Joseon people. They valued the virtues of equality, peace, worshipping the heavens, justice, manners, and Hongik Human 弘益人間- Wide goodness for Human [3]. also the stripes composed of five to seven different colors, the garment of

the gods. The Mongolians have called the Goryeo(高麗) people “Solongus,” meaning “rainbow” in their tongue. From this evidence, we can infer that Goryeo people had a colorful and vibrant culture. The Saekdong consists of colored stripes of uniform widths. The vertically woven warp threads are the main color threads, just like the Geum. The repeated color stripe pattern of Saekdong is rhythmic, concise, natural and elegant – rather than fancy and gorgeous. Within the vertical colored stripes, Geum had gorgeous and complex patterns that symbolize the power of the king or gods. But as it evolved into the Saekdong pattern, the complex designs were simplified in order to emphasize the restrained beauty and order of the striped pattern itself. The color stripes are emphasized, and the patterns are minimalized, opposite to the characteristics of Geum.

### Kyung-Geum of Baekje Socks (~AD660)

The Figure 2 shows the Kyung Geum socks(Mal, 錦襪) from Baekje, which went oversea to island and build Nara dynasty in Asuka period. we assume this was worn by Baekjae King Family. After this royal family of Baekje died, Shosoin temple (正倉院, 東大寺) wanted to keep all of the royal family's belongings in storehouse as their own treasures. But the Japanese say that this sock belonged to the musicians of temple ceremony, and they sent people all over the world to learn the weaving techniques of Geum and Neung (陵, twill) in AD 711 in order to produce their own Geum[9]. But we think that only the skillful master of Geum could make this gorgeous fabric, and because it was precious it was only worn by a royal family. Both socks have colored stripes and small patterns: the purple one has Buddha with lotus, whereas the orange one has curly haired lion's head (symbol of Buddha). These Geum socks of Baekjae represent religious values as well as the prosperity of Baekjae (Figure 2)[9].



Figure 2: Baekje socks of Kyung Geum, Saekdong of 1950's, and current of Korea.

### Color Beauty of Saekdong

Red, yellow and blue were used as warp thread in Geum. Red represents fire, the sun and summer, while blue represents the supernatural or sky. According to the Yin-Yang theory [10], when these two extremes meet, they support each other through synergy and produce a power of revitalization [11,12]. Additionally, the third color yellow means center, earth, brightness, peace, gold and hope. Using these three colors together, the Go-Joseon people invited good luck and protected themselves from evil [13]. We can

easily find Saekdong of three basic colors, but today's Saekdong includes a larger variety of colors. Adding white creates space and a sense of relaxation, also emphasizing the pattern and accentuating the neighboring colors. And adding colors on the opposite side of the color wheel enhances the color scheme. The Go-Joseon people were ingenious in assembling the Saekdong pattern with their unique aesthetics. The vivid color is bordering another vivid color, but they do not collide with each other, forming a harmonious mood [14]. This type of arrangement is crucial in making patterns, since

a wrong arrangement can induce a sense of discomfort. Saekdong pattern cleverly avoids this, and on top of being harmonious, it even has delightful touch to it. Even with only 2-3 colors, the complex arrangement of it makes the Saekdong pattern far from monotonous. Recent Saekdong has smaller patterns and longer intervals, compared to the Geum.

## Conclusion

As a result of tracing the history of Kyung-Geum - a famous fabric of East Asia - many evidences were found to confirm that Kyung-Geum originated from Go-Joseon around B.C. 500. Joyang, Geum-Ju and Balhae civilization has exposed its oldest swatches. Kyung-Geum is double-woven with vertical colored threads (warp double rib fabric), and it is characteristic for its repeating vertical stripe patterns. The fabric itself is rather thick with a high thread count and was a major export to other surrounding nations during the period. The stripe patterns have a uniform width, as it is with the current Saekdong. Saek dong is a warp satin, and it is a simplified and modernized version of the ancient Kyung-Geum. The Saekdong consists of complementary colors, and its color scheme is harmonious, delightful, simple yet active. Since Saekdong was thought to produce supernatural powers, it is still being used in shaman's costumes, and in children's hanbok for a purpose of warding off evil spirits. Go-Joseon was governed through eight major laws (8條禁法), and the people led a prosperous life. Because Geum was so abundant in Go-Joseon, everyone from the king to the common people wore it as daily clothes. During the cold seasons, they would add a layer of fur on top or bottom of their Geum clothing or wool Geum, Kye.

From the excavation sites of Go-Joseon, a variety of spindles were found threads of various thickness were produced to weave all kinds of complex fabrics, and the clothes were decorated by numerous jade gems and bronze buttons. The trims of the fabrics were decorated with furs of tigers, leopards, foxes, and weasels. The Go-Joseon people were fond of using multiple colors: the fashion back then was to wear mismatching colors for top and bottom, pants for riding purpose - which is one of unique styles in the world, colorful pottery of tripod as well as Kyung-Geum fabrics of multiple colored stripes were very popular. The color scheme used by the

Go-Joseon people closely resemble the vibrant and complementary color scheme of the modern Saekdong. The Go-Joseon people had an eye for aesthetics and color, which also contributed to their development of advanced fabric dyeing techniques. The cloud and antler patterns present in the Kyung-Geum fabrics can also be found with the bronze mirrors with fine lines and violin-shaped bronze daggers of the Go-Joseon excavation site. These exquisite designs made by the skillful craftsmanship highlight and represent the prosperity and elegance of the Go-Joseon people.

## Acknowledgment

The research was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) (NRF2016-R1D1A 1B01015336).

## References

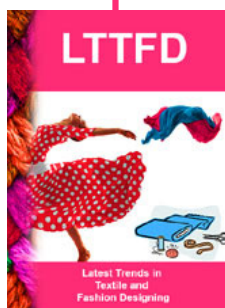
1. Museum of the World, KangDamSa, Tokyo (1978).
2. G J Min, YO Shim (1998) Historical Fabric of China, Hanrimwon, Seoul.
3. DI Lee, BK Kim, Go-Joseon was the Ruler of Asia Continental, Morning of History, Seoul (2006).
4. KD Bok (2016) Journal of the Japan Association of Comparative Culture 120: 81-90.
5. CH Shin, Joeseon Sang Go Sa, by K. B. Park, Bibong pub. Seoul (2006).
6. SH Park, Findings of Clothing Culture of Go-Joseon, Jisiksanupsa, Seoul (2011).
7. GoRyeoSa, by JG Park, Humanist, Seoul (2015).
8. GJ Min, YO Shim (1994) Journal of the Korean Society of Costume 22: 61-70.
9. EA Kim, HK Kim, YJ Na, KW Oh, EH Yim, et al. (2013) Fashion & Textiles, Kyomunsa, Seoul (2013).
10. J M Shin, Symbolism of OBang Colors of Korea and China focusing Red, Master thesis, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (2013).
11. K S Geum, Art of Joseon Clothing, Yeolhawdang, Seoul (1997).
12. Y J Cho, Analysis on Coloration of Multicolored Stripes appeared in Dress and Use of its Pattern, Master thesis, Kyungsung University (2003).
13. P K Cho and H M Cheong, Fashion Design and Color, Jeonwonmunwhasa, Seoul (1998).
14. J S Kim, Y J Na, (2018) The Origin and Emotion of Saekdong in Our Surroundings, Science of Emotion & Sensibility 21.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

To Submit Your Article Click Here: [Submit Article](#)

DOI: [10.32474/LTTFD.2019.03.000163](https://doi.org/10.32474/LTTFD.2019.03.000163)



### Latest Trends in Textile and Fashion Designing

#### Assets of Publishing with us

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles