

The Hanji Culture and Industry Center is an institution established by the Korea Craft and Design Foundation to promote the excellence and the widespread use of Hanji, Korea's proud traditional heritage. More than twenty traditional Hanji workshops nationwide became the foci for this effort as the part of the comprehensive support system to cultivate Hanji's quintessence and value within the universal living culture. To facilitate the exemplary cycle for Hanji culture and to encourage national and international interest, the Hanji Culture and Industry Center seeks to foster a cooperate network with related personnel within the Hanji industry, invigorate and assist the production and distribution of the regional Hanji manufactures, and organize exhibitions, seminars, and conferences at home and abroad.

Hanji (韓紙) refers to a type of paper produced in Korea using the unique domestic techniques. Also known as Goryeoji (paper from Goryeo) in China, Hanji was highly esteemed by the Chinese nobility in ancient times. Famed for its sheer luster and superb ink absorptivity, it was coveted not only as an unparalleled writing and painting material, but also as the nonpareil of conservation in courtesy of its durability and colorfastness. Today, such virtues are once again in the spotlight. A wise saying in Korea reads that while silk would last five centuries, Hanji would last a millennium (絹五百 紙千年). This confidence is attested by the Great Dharani Sutra of Immaculate and Pure Light, a Buddhist script printed on Hanji in the eighth century, which has withstood 1,200 years of tumultuous history.

In the past, the uses of Hanji stretched beyond providing a ground for writing or painting. While never applied in the culinary sphere, it was widely utilized for the other two basic human needs: shelter and clothing. For example, as most Korean houses in the past were built from mud, their walls, floors, and windows were finished with paper, making Hanji an essential element for maintaining and mending homes. Along with metal, soil, and wood, it was further employed in

making or finishing various household items, such as brush holders, sewing boxes, dressers, fans, umbrellas and even lampshades. From a lady's chamber to the battlefield, Hanji knew no bounds. It functioned as a substitute for cotton when insulating a quilted blanket and could be molded in layers into an armor to protect the wearer from the spears and arrows. To the very end Hanji would steadfastly serve the owner, providing the final peace in the form of shroud. Therefore, even the used Hanji was rarely discarded, and often was dissolved in water and woven into cords to craft baskets and shoes.

Due to Hanji's versatility, Koreans actively planted paper mulberry trees—the bark of which is the main ingredient of Hanji—along the spare ridges in farmland. Villagers would gather at the end of autumn to harvest and administer bark through the winter until the next farming season. Nearly every village with a clean valley had a Hanji workshop that produced various types of Hanji that catered to individual needs. Hundreds of different types of Hanji could be created depending on the ratio of the ingredients, the techniques used in screening the fiber, and the thickness of the paper. Hanji makers were also specialized into those who made Jangpanji (floor covering paper), Changhoji (window covering paper), Sunji (plain paper), among many others.

Hanji was forced to concede the floor in the wake of modernization with the debut of the mass-produced Western style pulp paper, glass, and plastic. The population of traditional Hanji artisans also waned around this time. However, Hanji is being newly spotlighted and appreciated for its flexibility in color, density, design, thickness and luster that adhere to the clients' requirements the very elements that implemented Hanji at the center of the lives of Korean for two millennia. The tradition sometimes called Hanji as Baekji (百紙, one hundred paper), because it requires one hundred touches to finish a single sheet. Hanji makers would commit ninety-nine dedications during the process: from cutting and steaming of the mulberry tree to peeling and boiling the bark in lye;

from washing and pounding the mixture before adding the mulberry starch; from dissolving in water for screening to lying it flat for drying and refining of the surface. Only through such devotion Hanji would be ready for the finishing touch, which is reserved for the consumer. Through the users caress Hanji would begin its journey, and each new sheet today still awaits its one hundredth touch as others did for thousands of years.