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OH, Youngsam. *Painting of Grasses and Insects* at the Koryo Museum in Kyoto

Painting of Grasses and Insects at the Koryo Museum in Kyoto is a set of two color-on-paper paintings depicting Chinese peonies and hibiscus manihots. The paintings carry the signature of secretary bureaucrat Shim Geon (沈銓) who held his post from November 1558 to February fifth, 1559.

The motifs and composition suggest that these paintings are reproductions of another painting entitled *Painting of Grasses and Insects* from the Yuan or Ming dynasty. However, the creator of the paintings that are the focus of this article did not pursue realism but rather described objects and spaces as flat, a feature similar to the characteristics of Joseon dynasty paintings. Furthermore, the painter used designs and composition seen 14th-15th century Chinese paintings, and painted on large paper with skillful touches and deep colors. These facts suggest that the painter is a professional, and it is therefore possible that these paintings were created by Joseon academic artists in 16th the century.

Together with the standard peony, the Chinese peony is known as “the minister of flowers” ; they are both symbols representing high bureaucrats. Hibiscus manihot is regarded as a symbol of loyalty because the blooms are known to follow the sun. These two flowers have been painted as auspicious symbols for centuries. Considering the circumstances of *Painting of Grasses and Insects* from the Koryo Museum a set of paintings of these two flowers likely meant that high bureaucrats required loyalty and rectitude, especially since they do not depict fruit and vines, which represent prosperity.

The style as well as the time of the signature indicate that this set of paintings were New Year’ s greeting paintings (歳画). Such paintings were given to dignitaries or messengers from abroad to promote Confucian loyalty. From 1559, Emperor Myongjong (明宗) strengthened direct imperial rule and demanded firm loyalty. Under these political circumstances, the hidden meaning of *Painting of Grasses and Insects* in the Koryo Museum is likely one of dignitaries’ Confucian loyalty.

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