NATIONAL SYMBOLS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Uniting People and Elevating National Pride

National Symbols of the Republic of Korea

Ministry of the Interior
Origin of the nation’s title, Daehanminguk

In a royal edict issued on October 13, 1887, King Gojong proclaimed the country as Daehan and the king as emperor. "I, Emperor Bongcheoungseungun, set down the following ordinance. Since the times of Dangun (legendary founder of Korea) and Giya (legendary ruler of ancient Korea), the territory was split, with different clans fighting with each other for supremacy. It was later, during the Goryeo (Kingdom in place from A.D. 918 to 1392) era that the ancient Three Han Confederacies of Mahan, Jinhan, and Byonhan were integrated."

On September 17 this year, I performed a ritual for heaven at the south of Mount Baegaksan and ascended to the throne of emperor. The country shall be named Daehan (Korean Empire) and this shall be the first year of the Gwangmu era…" (Gojongsillok (Annals of Emperor Gojong), Volume 36)

The title Daehan became ineffective after the fall of the empire in August 1910. On April 11, 1919, the Provisional Government stipulated in Article 1 of the Provisional Charter that the nation would be a democratic republic. Daehanminguk (The Republic of Korea) became the official name based on Article 1 of the Provisional Constitution (promulgated on September 11, 1919), which provided that Daehanminguk shall consist of the Daehan people.

Following the nation’s liberation on August 15, 1945, the Constitution of the First Republic (Jeheon Constitution), which was proclaimed on July 17, 1948, stipulated in its Preamble and Article 1 that the country be named Daehanminguk.
Following the trend for modern states to adopt national flags, the decision to create a national flag for Korea emerged with the ratification of the Korea and United States Treaty of 1882. No accurate records remain of the Korean flag chosen for use at the signing ceremony; however, some argue that the flag was similar to the ensign flag featured in the Flags of Maritime Nations issued by the U.S. Navy Department’s Bureau of Navigation and found in 2004.

Origin

In his capacity as Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary under King Gojong, Park Yeong-hyo kept a record of his diplomatic mission to Japan in 1882. According to his journal, known as Sahwagiryak, in September of that year while aboard the ship to Japan, Park created a four-trigram flag with a taegeuk circle (instead of the flag with eight black bars that had been used prior to 1800). The flag was used from September 25, 1882, according to Park’s report to the government on October 3 of that year.

By royal order on March 6, 1883, King Gojong promulgated that Park’s flag with a taegeuk circle in the center and four trigrams around it (the flag named Taegeukgi) be the national flag. However, due to a lack of specific guidelines, the flag design took different forms. On June 29, 1942, the Provisional Government issued a national flag style guide to ensure that subsequent flags would be created in a consistent manner. Despite these efforts, however, ordinary people were unaware of these guidelines.

After the establishment of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948, the government felt an increasing need to standardize flag construction. Thus in January 1949, it formed the National Flag Correction Committee, which announced the National Flag Construction Guidelines on October 15 of that year.

A number of regulations were later implemented, providing for the systematic management of the flag: the Act on the Flag of the Republic of Korea, enacted in January 2007; the Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Flag of the Republic of Korea, in July 2007; and the Regulations on the Hoisting, Management, and Promotion of the National Flag in September 2009 (by instructions from the Prime Minister).
I, standing before the noble Taegeukgi, solemnly pledge allegiance to the Republic of Korea, to its glory, liberty and justice.

Pledge of allegiance to the flag (revised on July 27, 2007)

Construction of the Flag of Korea

The Taegeukgi consists of a white background, a red and blue taegeuk circle in the center, and four black trigrams (collectively called geonggangamri), one in each corner of the flag. The white background represents brightness, purity, and peace, qualities that are highly valued by the people. The taegeuk, which has long been a commonly used motif, denotes the harmony between the negative cosmic forces (yin : blue portion) and the positive cosmic forces (yang : red portion), depicting the truth of nature that all things are created and evolve through the interaction of yin and yang. The four black trigrams are specific representations of the movement and harmony of these forces. In detail, the geon symbolizes the sky, the gon the earth, the gam water, and the ri fire. Together, they create harmony around the taegeuk mark.

In short, the Taegeukgi flag embodies the vision of the Korean people who, like the universe, seek continuous creation and enrichment. By upholding the spirit and significance of the Taegeukgi, the people seek to realize unity and unification and contribute to the happiness and peace of humanity.

Designated days for national flag flying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National holidays and celebration days</th>
<th>Rule for flag hoisting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1 (Independence Movement Day)</td>
<td>National holidays and weekdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6 (Memorial Day, flag flown at half-mast)</td>
<td>Days of mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17 (Constitution Day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 15 (Liberation Day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1 (Armed Forces Day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3 (National Foundation Day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 9 (Hangeul Day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

※ The flag can be displayed 24 hours a day.

Symbolism of the flag

The white background represents brightness, purity, and peace, qualities that are highly valued by the people. The taegeuk, which has long been a commonly used motif, denotes the harmony between the negative cosmic forces (yin : blue portion) and the positive cosmic forces (yang : red portion), depicting the truth of nature that all things are created and evolve through the interaction of yin and yang. The four black trigrams are specific representations of the movement and harmony of these forces. In detail, the geon symbolizes the sky, the gon the earth, the gam water, and the ri fire. Together, they create harmony around the taegeuk mark.

In short, the Taegeukgi flag embodies the vision of the Korean people who, like the universe, seek continuous creation and enrichment. By upholding the spirit and significance of the Taegeukgi, the people seek to realize unity and unification and contribute to the happiness and peace of humanity.
Aegukga
The National Anthem

Generically, Aegukga refers to any song that expresses love for one’s country. However, the term has become synonymous with Korea’s national anthem.

During the period of enlightenment in the late Joseon Dynasty, several patriotic songs were used. In 1896, the first editions of the Dongnipsinmun (The Independent) featured a number of lyrics for such songs but it is unclear as to what melodies were sung with those lyrics. According to records, a song entitled “Daehanjeguk (Korean Empire) Aegukga” was composed in 1902, and the government organized a western-style military band to play it during major state functions.

The lyrics of Korea’s national anthem were first written sometime around 1907 with the intention of inspiring love and allegiance to the country, as well as a sense of independence at a time when the country was under foreign aggression. Following adaptation by several composers, the lyrics gradually took the form we know today.

Initially, the Aegukga was sung to the tune of the Scottish folk song, “Auld Lang Syne.” While studying abroad, Korean composer Ahn Eak-tai felt that this foreign melody was unfit for Korea’s national anthem. In 1935, he composed the Symphonic Fantasy Korea, the finale of which became the current melody for the national anthem. Even though the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea adopted this tune as their national anthem, it was only known abroad.

In Korea, the lyrics continued to be sung to the Scottish folk song until the Korean government was established in 1948 following the nation’s independence from Japan. At that time, the current version of Aegukga was sung during official government functions, and gradually, with its inclusion in all student textbooks, it gained popular acceptance. Afterwards, the song was widely disseminated abroad and finally became established as the national anthem of Korea.

Whenever people sing Aegukga, which, for almost a century, has been part of the people’s destiny both in good times and bad, they are reminded of the love that their forefathers held for the nation.
Mugunghwa
The National Flower

The Mugunghwa, or the rose of Sharon, is an object of deep affection. Meaning “eternal blossom that never fades,” it has been an important symbol of Korean culture for centuries. Ancient records show that even before the Gojoseon era (ancient Korean kingdom), the mugungwha was treasured as a “blossom from heaven”. As further testimony of its cultural value, the Silla Kingdom (57 BC–AD 935) called itself Geunhwahyang, meaning Country of the Mugunghwa. The ancient Chinese, too, referred to Korea as the “land of wise men where the Mugunghwa blooms.”

Over time, the public affection grew stronger when a phrase extolling the flower’s beauty was included in the national anthem in the late 19th century. Those words are “Mugunghwa samchieoni hwaryeogangsan (Three thousand ri* (equivalent to 1,200 kilometers, the length of the Korean Peninsula) of splendid rivers and mountains covered with Mugunghwa blossoms)”. Even during the dark days of Japanese colonial rule, the people’s devotion to the flower never faded. Hence, it was only natural for the government to adopt it as the national flower after Korea regained its independence from Japan.

Koreans cherish the national flower because it honors the country’s noble spirit and symbolizes the many successes as well as tribulations that the nation has experienced. Mugunghwa varieties are grouped based on the colors of their blossoms. The groups are Baedal, Dansim, and Asadal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varieties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baedal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dansim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asadal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The flower is a symbol in the flags of government and national organizations, decorations, and badges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emblem of the President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawmaker’s badge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court logo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical name</th>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Flowering season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hibiscus syriacus L.</td>
<td>Rose of Sharon</td>
<td>Korea, China, India, Japan</td>
<td>From early July to mid-October</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, emblems were adopted in western countries to symbolize the genealogical records and authority of a clan, organization, or the state. The national emblem of Korea is called Naramunjang or Gukjang. The design is based on the motifs of the Taegeukgi flag and the Mugunghwa flower, which are national symbols. The taegeuk motif is surrounded by five Mugunghwa petals, and the entire design is encircled by a ribbon with the letters ‘대한민국’ (The Republic of Korea).

Based on the Regulations on the National Emblem formulated on December 10, 1963, the national emblem is used as a state symbol on major documents sent to foreign institutions, on medals and other decorations, Presidential commendations, and signage on diplomatic missions abroad.

The emblem is designed in the form of a badge or a brass die. If necessary, the size can be scaled up or down depending on the usage.

Usage (Article 3, Regulations on the National Emblem)

1. Official documents sent abroad, international organizations or foreign institutions stationed in Korea
2. Certificates of appointment for 1st-grade or higher grade government officials
3. Medals, certificates of decoration, and Presidential commendations
4. Public official ID cards
5. Graduation certificates or diplomas issued by national or public universities
6. Vessels or aircrafts owned by the government
7. Diplomatic missions overseas
8. Currency
9. Documents, facilities, or goods on which the use of the national emblem is deemed necessary by the head of a ministry or agency
The national seal has been called by various names—sae, bo, eobo, eosae, oksae, and guksae. Sae and bo are generic terms for national seals; eobo and eosae refer to the seal of the king engraved with his/her pen name and eulogistic title; oksae refer to a seal made of jade. The modern term for the national seal is Guksae.

As an official seal for state affairs and an important national symbol, the Guksae is stamped on important state documents. It represents national authority, and reflects the nation’s power and culture, and the characteristics of the era in which it is used. Unlike the West, where such seals are usually embossed, in Eastern countries, a national seal is an imprint.

It is made of gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iridium. The use of iridium, which is a rare metal, makes the alloy more tightly integrated, thus preventing fissures. The seal is engraved in the hunminjeongeum style font with the letters ‘대한민국 (Daehanminguk: The Republic of Korea)’. The handle of the seal features a pair of seated phoenix with dynamically sculpted wings and tail feathers. A fully open rose of Sharon rests on their backs.

Usage (Article 6, Regulations on the National Seal)

1. Preamble to a promulgation announcing a revision to the Constitution
2. Certificates of appointment for government officials bestowed directly by the President, appointment certificates for government officials, the presentation of which the President has delegated to the relevant Minister on his/her behalf, in accordance with Article 5-1 of the Official Appointment Regulations
3. Certificates of national decoration in accordance with Article 9 and Article 19 of the Awards and Decorations Act and Article 17 of the Enforcement Decree of said act
4. Ratification instruments in the name of the President or other diplomatic documents that require the affixed seal, by order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5. Other documents on which the affixing of the national seal is deemed necessary by the Minister of Security and Public Administration

The creation of the Fifth Guksae currently in use was preceded by an extensive opinion-gathering process, which involved expert discussions, opinion surveys, and public hearings beginning in September 2010. Based on the views gathered, a Guksae Creation Committee comprising experts from various fields was set up in November 2010 and the production of a new national seal was completed in September 2011. The seal has been in use since October 25, 2011.

The Fifth Guksae is square, measuring 10.4 centimeters on all sides, and weighs 3.38 kilograms. Compared to previous national seals, the new one was enlarged for greater dignity and authority. The seal, which is hollow inside, was produced in such a way that the seal’s face and grip are constructed as one piece, rather than separately executed.

Significance

The national seal has been called by various names—sae, bo, eobo, eosae, oksae, and guksae. Sae and bo are generic terms for national seals; eobo and eosae refer to the seal of the king engraved with his/her pen name and eulogistic title; oksae refer to a seal made of jade. The modern term for the national seal is Guksae. As an official seal for state affairs and an important national symbol, the Guksae is stamped on important state documents. It represents national authority, and reflects the nation’s power and culture, and the characteristics of the era in which it is used. Unlike the West, where such seals are usually embossed, in Eastern countries, a national seal is an imprint.

The Fifth Guksae

The creation of the Fifth Guksae currently in use was preceded by an extensive opinion-gathering process, which involved expert discussions, opinion surveys, and public hearings beginning in September 2010. Based on the views gathered, a Guksae Creation Committee comprising experts from various fields was set up in November 2010 and the production of a new national seal was completed in September 2011. The seal has been in use since October 25, 2011. The Fifth Guksae is square, measuring 10.4 centimeters on all sides, and weighs 3.38 kilograms. Compared to previous national seals, the new one was enlarged for greater dignity and authority. The seal, which is hollow inside, was produced in such a way that the seal’s face and grip are constructed as one piece, rather than separately executed.
National Symbols of the Republic of Korea

Development of Korea’s National Seal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>First Guksae</th>
<th>Second Guksae</th>
<th>Third Guksae</th>
<th>Fourth Guksae</th>
<th>Fifth Guksae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impression</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="" /></td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Square (6.06×6.06cm)</td>
<td>Square (7×7cm)</td>
<td>Square (10.1×10.1cm)</td>
<td>Square (9.9×9.9cm)</td>
<td>Square (10.4×10.4cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material and weight</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Silver, 2.0kg</td>
<td>Gold alloy, 2.15kg</td>
<td>Gold alloy, 2.9kg</td>
<td>Gold alloy, 3.38kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations</td>
<td>Regulations on the National Seal (Presidential Decree No. 103)</td>
<td>Regulations on the National Seal (Cabinet Order No. 643)</td>
<td>Regulations on the National Seal (Presidential Decree No. 18061)</td>
<td>Regulations on the National Seal (Presidential Decree No. 20541)</td>
<td>Regulations on the National Seal (Presidential Decree No. 23233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle design</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Turtle</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National flag: Taegukgi
Consistent parts: White background, taeguk circle, and four trigrams

National anthem: Aegukga
Composer: Ahn Eak-tai (November 1935)
Lyrics: Four parts and refrain * Writer unknown
Background: Conventionally recognized as the national anthem

National flower: Mugunghwa
Meaning: Eternal blossom that never fades
Background: Conventionally recognized as the national flower

National emblem: Naramunjang
Consistent parts: Mugunghwa, taeguk mark, star, ribbon, and the letters “대한민국”
Basis: Regulations on the National Emblem (Presidential Decree No. 23399, November 28, 2011)

National seal: Guksae
Dimensions: 10.4 centimeters on all sides, 3.38 kilograms
Form: (Grip) Phoenix, (Font) Hunminjeongeum style font
Basis: Regulations on the National Seal (Presidential Decree No. 24425, March 23, 2013)
Taegeukgi is a national symbol of the Republic of Korea representing Korean traditions and ideals.

To honor and cherish the Taegeukgi is to uphold our national pride. Showing respect for the flag and preserving the dignity of the nation are ways to strengthen the foundation of our country.