

## Between Palaces and Stars: Women Who Have Shaped Korean History

Throughout Korean history, women have forged their own paths, leaving a legacy that has transcended time. In honor of International Women's Day (March 8), we delve into the stories of five exceptional women whose lives and achievements continue to resonate in the nation's narrative. Their contributions highlight the vital roles women have played in shaping Korea's social, cultural, historical, and political fabric.

### Queen Seondeok of Silla

She was the first and only woman to ascend the throne of Silla, ruling from 632 to 647. During her reign, she established the Office of Astronomy and oversaw the completion of the Hwangnyongsa Temple in Gyeongju. She also contributed to other constructions, including the Cheomseongdae Observatory and various Buddhist temples. Her governance significantly advanced education and promoted gender equality by appointing women to governmental positions.

### Heo Nanseolheon

A 16th-century poet during the Joseon dynasty, Heo Nanseolheon displayed an early interest in literature and poetry. Her works encompass themes such as love, nature, and spirituality. Her contributions to culture and history are commemorated at the Heo Gyun and Heo Nanseolheon Memorial Park in Gangneung, Korea.

### Yu Gwan Sun

A young independence activist, Yu Gwan Sun was a leader and participant in the March 1919 movements. After being detained in her hometown following the Japanese military's suppression and the killing of her parents during a "manse" demonstration, she was tried and imprisoned at Seodaemun Prison. In 1920, while incarcerated, she organized and led a "manse" movement within the prison to commemorate the March 1, 1919, demonstrations. She died in September 1920 due to the severe torture she endured in prison. Her legacy endures, and she is recognized as one of Korea's most significant independence activists for her bravery in fighting for the country she deeply loved.

*If you wish to learn more about this courageous woman, consider visiting the Seodaemun Prison History Museum.*

### Cho Nam Joo

A 20th-century Korean writer, Cho Nam Joo began her career as a television program scriptwriter, a job she left upon becoming a mother. When attempting to resume her career, she encountered various obstacles, leading her to pursue writing.

Her third novel, "Kim Ji-young, Born 1982," is a fictional biography depicting the inequality, discrimination, and harassment that women face. The book's release coincided with the #MeToo movement in Korea, and due to its powerful narrative, it gained significant impact.