



16th C Norigae (Knotted Ornament)



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Barony of South Downs



What Is It?

Norigae were knotted decorative ornaments that were worn on the skirt or jacket ties of women from all classes during the Joseon Dynasty (1392 -1897) in Korea.¹ The word norigae translates to “playful object”.² Norigae were usually comprised of several parts: a single piece of cord folded in half and knotted, a decorative trinket, and separate tassels. They were worn on holidays, birthdays and for ceremonies.³ Certain colors were worn during certain seasons and certain trinkets were worn for their symbolic meaning or for protection.⁴

Decorative knotted items have been found in a mural in a tomb from as far back as 357 during the Three Kingdoms period (57 BC - 668 AD)⁵ and knots were depicted on a piece of celadon pottery from the Goryeo Kingdom (918 - 1392).⁶ Knotted ornaments were also used to decorate the ends of instruments and fans.⁷ There is one surviving pouch from the Goryeo Kingdom with knots on the string. This is the oldest existing artifact that has physical Korean knots on it.⁸ In an account of a Chinese envoy in Goryeo, noble women were noted to be wearing dangling brocade pouches containing fragrances from their waists.⁹ This is considered by some to be what norigae eventually evolved from.¹⁰

How Was It Made?

In Joseon, there was an office that oversaw the court’s artisans.¹¹ There were skilled artisans that worked on specific crafts. Court records show dahoejang, cord makers, and maedeupjang, knot makers, listed as court artisans.¹² The cords, or dahoe, for norigae are made of silk threads that have been dyed by a skilled dyer and then woven on a dahoeteul, or cord loom.¹³ The maedeupjang would use the finished cord to create the norigae and attach or string on the decorative trinket and tassels. The various decorative trinkets would have been made by the various artisans, depending on what the trinket was. It was common for the lower classes to create their own norigae for their own use while the court would have more luxurious materials used for their norigae.¹⁴

¹ Lee, K. (2005). *Norigae*. Seoul: Ewha Womans Univ. Press. 12.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ Kim, H. (2007). *Maedeup*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp. 9-10.

⁶ Kim, S. (2016). *Maedeup*. Seoul: Korea Craft & Design Foundation. 30.

⁷ Kim, H., *Maedeup*, 16-17.

⁸ Kim, S., *Maedeup*, 31.

⁹ Xu, J. and Vermeersch, S. (2016). *A Chinese Traveler in Medieval Korea: Xu Jing’s Illustrated Account of the Xuanhe Embassy to Koryŏ*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 148.

¹⁰ Kim, H., *Maedeup*, 43.

¹¹ Park, Y. and Choi, Y. (2014). A study on the distribution and tools of Dahoejangs in the Joseon Dynasty. *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, 22(5), 712.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kim, S., *Maedeup*, 53-55.

¹⁴ Lee, *Norigae*, 27.

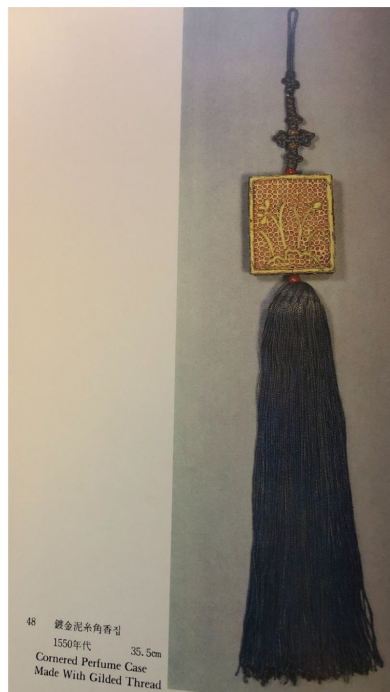
There are no extant pre-1600 cord looms that survived, but there are two late Joseon looms in existence. One loom is made of a wooden bowl with notches on the lip over a ceramic pot and the other is just a wooden bowl with no existing pot.¹⁵ Silk threads are wrapped around bobbins and rest in the notches on the wooden bowl. I used these looms as the inspiration for my own cord loom.



Dahoeteul at Court, Joseon, height: 8cm, diameter: 19cm, Ehwa Women's University Museum
A tool used to plait *Dahoe* resembling a wooden plate, it has grooves carved at the edge for draping thread around and a small hole in the middle to let the core through. When plaiting *Dahoe*, thread used for the core is fastened in the middle, the silk thread rolled up on each *Tojjak* draped around the plate, and then the *Tojjak* are turned in order. While working, it is supported from below with a ceramic base.

Dahoeteul at Court, Joseon, height: 20cm, diameter: 19cm, Sookmyung Women's University Museum
A type of *Dahoeteul* in which a wooden plate is placed on a ceramic base and draped with *Tojjak* to plait threads.

Two extant dahoeteul, cord looms
Kim, S. *Maedeup*, p. 54



1550 - Cornered Perfume Case Made with Gilded Thread, *Personal Ornaments of Yi Dynasty*



1610 - Enameled Round Perfume Case, *Personal Ornaments of Yi Dynasty*

There is one extant norigae dated 1550 and several just after 1600.¹⁶ I pulled elements from some of these pieces while making my own norigae.

¹⁵ Kim, S., *Maedeup*, 54.

¹⁶Sök, C. and Tan'guk Taehakkyo. Pusok Sok Chu-son Kinyom Minsok Pangmulgwan. (1981). *Personal Ornaments in Yi Dynasty*. Seoul: Tanguk Taehakkyo Chulpanbu.64,69.

The 1550 norigae has a series of knots, gold rings knotted of gilded thread above and below the largest knot, red small beads, a metal perfume case containing solid perfume, and a ttalgi sul, or strawberry tassel.¹⁷ The tassel is made by weaving together bundles of cord, inserting a mulberry paper and cotton core and letting the bottoms of the cords hang.¹⁸

A norigae from 1610 has an enameled perfume case, knots wrapped in gold thread, and two bong sul, or bell tassels.¹⁹ This tassel is made by wrapping the top of a bundle of threads with a strip of mulberry paper and glue, flipping the piece over so that the threads hang loose, and then wrapping gold thread on top, lifting pieces as the gold thread is wrapped around to create the character.²⁰

How Did I Make It?

For my norigae, I handpicked specific elements in order to fit the theme of the Labyrinth Challenge for Red Tower 2019. I wove the blue cord by hand on my cord loom using 8 spools of DMC satin rayon embroidery thread as a substitution for silk threads. I used rayon because I had not worked with silk threads yet, but had used rayon previously to make a different knotted ornament. I picked the color blue for South Downs. Each bundle of thread was wrapped around a weighted wooden spool and the ends of the thread were tied together in pairs. There is a needle in the center of the plate on my cord loom which helps feed the cord upward. The ends were draped over the needle to arrange the threads for weaving. The threads are then worked in two sets of four, with one set going clockwise and the other set going counterclockwise.

The first knot is called a Brocade Ball knot. I chose this knot for its round shape and resemblance to a labyrinth—the cords twisting and turning around and through each other. The decorative item is made out of blue silk fabric with gold cord couched to form the stylized Chinese character, shòu (壽), which means “longevity.” I chose this character for two reasons: its design looks a bit like a labyrinth and as a reference to the lyrics from Labyrinth - “It’s only forever.”

Couched gold thread was often used for embroidered norigae ornaments, so I used the same technique here as well. I used two pieces of round felt to lightly pad the embroidered piece. The red thread that holds the two pieces together is for the Red Tower of South Downs. The stitch is a vertical herringbone stitch called satteugi, which is commonly used in Korean sewing and embroidery to join two finished pieces together.²¹ The smaller knot under the ornament is a Clover Knot. I chose the knot for luck since Sarah needed a bit of luck to make it through the Labyrinth. The tassels are made with blue rayon thread and gold thread wrapped around the top. A tube of blue Korean paper, hanji, that has been rolled and glued around a straw is inside the tassels to give them their shape. I kept the plastic straw inside the tube to help the cord slide through the tube. The character woven into the top of the tassels is wang (王), which means

¹⁷ Ibid., 162.

¹⁸ Kim, H., *Maedeup*, 84.

¹⁹ Lee, *Norigae*, 16-17.

²⁰ Kim, H., *Maedeup*, 85.

²¹ Yun, Y., Kim, Y. and Song, S. (2016). *Chimseon*. Seoul: Korea Craft & Design Foundation. 57.

“king.” This character is commonly found on the top of tassels, but I also chose to use it to refer to Jareth, the Goblin King. The character was created by lifting a few blue threads as I wrapped the gold thread around the top of the tassel.

Next Steps and What I Would Do Differently

My next step is to make my cord using silk threads to get closer to the period materials and to see if it holds the knots differently from the rayon.

I want to weave thinner cord to get closer to period proportions. My tassels visually look short and my embroidered piece looks too large when compared to other extant norigae.

I want to make a strawberry head tassel since the one period norigae has this style of tassel. I've tried but have yet to make one successfully. I ended up doing the bell style tassel because it was simpler and weaving in the character gave it an extra layer of meaning, which was appropriate for the challenge I originally entered it in.

I want to make separate tassels instead of making them while the paper tube is on the norigae. I've found a slightly different technique to make the tassels separately in one of my books that I want to try. I would also try to weave the character on both sides of the tassel instead of just one.

I want to twist my threads for the tassels properly. Since I used rayon embroidery thread, the bottom of the tassels were just cut bluntly, but the tassel strings are typically twisted using a weight with a hook, leaving a loop at the bottom of each piece.

MAKING THE CORD



MAKING THE DECORATIVE ORNAMENT



MAKING THE TASSELS



WRAPPING THE TASSELS



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