

Historic Site of Jo Sik

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1. Jo Sik, the Great Scholar of the Joseon Dynasty

Welcome to the Historic Site of Jo Sik.

Jo Sik was one of the leading Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty. He was respected by many for emphasizing principles and criticizing the corruption and contradictions of society and the politics of his day.

As you pass through the gateway roofed with tiles, you will see the memorial hall surrounded by sculptures. Next to the white statue of Jo Sik, the letters he wrote to the king during his lifetime are displayed as inscriptions in miniscule *Hangeul* script. According to part of the contents, he expressed his opinion that the reigning king was not ruling properly. He also expressed his fears for the future of the country. Although the king was greatly angered by these letters of appeal, Jo Sik was always a model of correct speech and behavior and so the king was unable to simply punish him as he might have liked. As you would expect, there were some officials in the royal court who said “He must be punished for his insolence to the king”. However the majority of them actively defended him by saying “If he is punished, in the future it will be difficult for vassals to speak truth to the king”.

2. The Map of His Philosophy

Now let’s have a look inside the Nammyeong Memorial Hall. This museum, which was named after his pen-name, was built in 2001 in honor of the 500th anniversary of his birth. In the memorial hall the first thing you will encounter is none other than a map. As a map that expresses his philosophy, it describes how humans can attain a high level of virtue through control of the mind and body. It is hard to understand, much like a treasure map.

To explain it simply, see if this accords with what you have been thinking. The inside of the fortress represents the inner mind of a person, and emphasizes that we must let nothing upset this and thus remain pure in spirit. The outside of the fortress represents the temptations that upset our inner being, and the flags express the need to defend against them. Further, the three doors on the fortress represent the human eyes, ears and mouth, and it is from the external temptations that enter through these three doors that we must defend the inner sanctum of our mind. To take his teachings a step further, he also emphasized the importance of action by saying “It is no use to just have an upright mind and not act upon it. One has to move and act accordingly.”

3. The Meaning of a Bell and Knife

There are two artifacts that illustrate his value particularly well. These are a bell and a knife. They say that he always carried these two items with him wherever he went. The bell indicated his vow to “always keep an awakened mind.” Whenever he moved the bell would ring, reminding him to think about where he was and make an effort to calm his spirit. The second item is a knife. On the inside and outside of the handle of the knife there are inscriptions relating to the control of one’s inner mind and putting this into practice in one’s life. By inscribing his personal philosophy onto the knife, he showed his willingness to put his own life on the line to practice his beliefs.

4. Yeojaesil Shrine and the Tomb of Jo Sik

If you go up to the left on the right-hand side of the memorial hall you will come to a shrine for him. This is where his descendants placed the ancestral tablets of him and his wife, and performed ancestral rites. It is said that on the day that he died at the age of 72, a great tree on Jirisan Mountain dried up and died, heavy snow fell and the hills crumbled. This story expresses how great the people’s grief was at losing such an important figure. If you go up past the shrine and make your way slowly up the path through the dense pine grove for about ten minutes, you will find his grave. The grave is so small and the surrounding area so humble that you may think that you have come to the wrong place. But if you think of the way that he avoided empty formalities and vanity during his life, you can see that this grave is consistent with the philosophy by which he lived.

5. The Place where He Pursued His Studies until His Death

This is where he spent his last years. Having achieved a high level of scholarly understanding and having no interest in becoming a government minister, he worked here until his death to complete his studies. But while he strived to concentrate on his studies, a steady flow of those who sought to become his disciples continued to arrive. Many of the great figures in Korean history followed his teachings. In the front garden, you’ll find a Korean plum tree. This was planted when he built this place. This tree is now around 440 years old. The tree still blooms brightly, so we recommend that you visit in the springtime to see the beautiful plum blossoms.

6. The Place that Honors Him

This Confucian academy was built in 1576 after the death of Jo Sik by his disciples to honor his studies and virtuous conduct. The overall structure of the academy is uniquely divided. The front area is a ‘space

for study' and the back area is a 'space for rituals'. In front is the main hall where his disciples would gather to study and debate his works. Next to the main hall, there are two buildings which were a kind of dormitory for disciples.

If you go through the door at the back of the main hall, you will find a place called Sungdeoksa where the ancestral tablets of Jo Sik can be found. Even today, disciples gather to perform ancestral rites in the third and ninth months of the lunar calendar. Also, on the second Saturday of October, a festival is held to celebrate his birth.

7. The Pavilion that Cleanses the Mind

Across from the Confucian academy, there is a pavilion that overlooks Deokcheongang River. The name of the pavilion literally means "a pavilion that cleanses the mind". Jo Sik had a habit of using a bell to bring his mind to the present and under control, and they say that his disciples followed him and came here to calm their minds.

These have been the stories of Jo Sik, who worked hard to consistently live with a righteous mind. They say that his incorruptible character has become a model for future generations as well. We hope that if you too have worries you wish to carve away from your mind, spend some time here before you leave to calm your spirit.