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VISUAL ARTICULATION OF MODERNISM:
SELF-PORTRAITURE IN COLONIAL KOREA, 1915-1932

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Art History

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Julie Chun

August 2011

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

VISUAL ARTICULATION OF MODERNISM:
SELF-PORTRAITURE IN COLONIAL KOREA, 1915-1932

by

Julie Chun

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2011

Dr. Beverly Grindstaff	Department of Art History
Dr. Anne Simonson	Department of Art History
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ABSTRACT

VISUAL ARTICULATION OF MODERNISM:
SELF-PORTRAITURE IN COLONIAL KOREA, 1915-1932

by Julie Chun

From about 1914, Korean artists began painting on canvas using the Western medium of oil. This seemingly benign shift from ink on paper and silk to oil on canvas was pivotal in engendering Korean painting into the assured phase of artistic modernism. Prescribed conventions that had governed ink painting for over nine hundred years came to be supplanted within a few short years by a divergent artistic paradigm that centralized subjective identity and visually described the ambiguities of contemporary conditions.

The training and production of these early works of art took place not in Korea but in Japan where most young male artists studied at the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts). Moreover, the emergence of Korean modern art was compounded by the socio-political tensions of 1910-45 Japanese colonial rule. It was within this contested space of not only subjugation but also integration that the painted self emerged. A selection of self-portraiture by Korean artists from 1915 to 1932 is examined in this thesis. The self-portraits serve as historical traces of multiple and fluid articulations embodying national longings and modern ideals in response to the dual forces of global modernity and Japanese colonialism. By integrating the methodological framework of "colonial modernity" utilized in the field of Korean history, but predominantly unaccounted for in Korean art history, this thesis argues the significance of colonial self-portraiture as a construct of Korean modern art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are a confirmation that a thesis, while written in self-imposed isolation, represents a product of aggregate endeavors. This thesis is also born out of collective dedication by an academic community committed to extending the scholarship of Asian art history. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to Dr. Beverly Grindstaff, my chair and mentor, for constantly challenging me to reach new levels I did not think possible. She is my best critic and, in turn, has taught me to be my own uncompromising critic. My journey into the field of modern art and pursuit of committed research owes its beginnings to her, and I continue to derive inspiration from her support and encouragement.

Every graduate student should be so fortunate to have Dr. Anne Simonson as his/her advisor. For her unfailing support as an experienced academic counselor and unwitting role as life's counselor, she has set examples in and out of classrooms of what constitutes a true educator in the best sense of the word. For the honor of representing San Jose State University at the 2009 California State University Research Competition, I am deeply grateful for Dr. Simonson's nomination and support. I thank Dr. Kristy Phillips for our frequent discussions and numerous email exchanges on the topic of postcolonialism and its strengths and weaknesses in the narrative of Asian art history. I appreciate her pragmatic advice as well as her wonderful sense of humor during my time of thesis writing. I am also grateful to Dr. Anthony Raynsford for his thesis writing workshop which was beneficial in establishing the foundation for what eventually

followed. To Dr. Dore Bowen for her constant encouragement and ability to discuss seemingly opaque theories into transparency, I am also very thankful.

In our postmodern society, it takes more than an academic village, thus requiring a global community to accomplish a project. I thank Linda Choy Dreuhl for providing me the unique opportunity to work with her on the exhibition *The Offering Table* at Mills College in Oakland. Through the process, I witnessed how early twentieth-century Korean art provided the initial breath for provocative later works by contemporary Korean artists which continues to enhance and expand the boundaries of global art. I am also extremely grateful to Emiko Yamanashi for her time during my visit to Tokyo. Our lengthy discussion had a lasting and profound effect on the challenges of presenting Korean art within a broader historical and geographical context. My research also benefits from the assistance of Hwang Chae-kum of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, and Marie Suganami of Tokyo Cultural Research Institution, for their unfailing assistance in locating valuable contact information. To Yeonsoo Chee, Assistant Curator at Pacific Asia Museum, I am deeply thankful for securing my interview with Kim Byung-ki, the son of the artist Kim Chan-young.

Without the kind support and generosity of the family members of the artists who granted permissions for the use of self-portraiture images, this thesis would have been incomplete. I thank Mr. William Koh, the great-grandson of Ko Hui-dong, Mr. Kim Youngmin, the great-grandson of Kim Kwan-ho, Mr. Kim Byung-ki, the son of Kim Chan-young, and Ms. Toh Yunhee, the granddaughter of Do Sang-bong. I am grateful to Miki Kobayashi and The University Art Museum at Tokyo for her assistance. I also

thank the Samsung Museum of Art, Leeum, and National Museum of Korea, without whose formal consent, historical examples would have remained lacking.

On a personal note, I owe much gratitude to Master Alejandro Mora and my fellow instructors and colleagues at Salinas Taekwondo Academy. For better or for worse, they have traversed almost every step of my graduate studies from inception to the last and final series of exams. Lastly, I am grateful to the four most important men in my life: Jae for his unfailing support and Jason, Cameron, and Kyle, who has balanced my sedentary life by teaching me to skateboard, snowboard, and boogie-board. In everything, I give thanks.

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NOTE TO THE READER

Throughout this thesis, Romanization of Korean words follow the McCune-Reischauer system. This was a difficult decision since it was done with full knowledge that the Korean Ministry of Culture in the Republic of South Korea had replaced the English language translation of Korean words from the McCune-Reischauer system to the Revised Romanization system of transliteration in 2000. As Kenneth R. Robinson, the compiler of Korean History: A Bibliography, notes, "The Korean language does not suffer Romanization easily."[1] Indeed, I experienced this first hand when I attempted to standardize the spelling to meet the most recent system. However, I soon realized readers may have the same difficulties I had sorting through discrepancies in words, names, and places in sources published prior to 2000. Since the majority of studies on Korean colonial history predate the Revised Romanization and thus use the McCune-Reischauer system, I have retained the older form of transliteration. For example, 조선 will remain Choson and not Joseon.

The exception applies to well-known persons and places which have over time been established as standard usage (e.g., Seoul) and authors and publishers who have established their own preferred Romanization. Following the East Asian format, names will appear with the surname first, except for Asian-Americans and those who have reversed this order for Western language publications. If Korean names appear under a

[11] Kenneth R. Robinson, *Korean History: A Bibliography*, http://www.hawaii.edu/korea/biblio (accessed March 2, 2010).

different spelling, they will be noted in brackets (e.g., Lee Kyung-sung [Yi Kyong-song]). Japanese and Korean cities and institutions are written without italicization. All other foreign words are italicized in lower case, followed by their English translation in parenthesis.

Titles of artworks and exhibitions are provided in English translation unless noted otherwise. Titles of published texts, books, newspapers, and journals are provided in original names, in italics, followed by their English translation in parenthesis. If a publication has a title imprint in English and Korean, both will be listed, partitioned by an equal sign (e.g., *Han'guk miseul 100 nyon =100 Years of Korean Art.*)

INTRODUCTION

Addressing the Lacuna in Korean Modern Art

The purpose of this thesis is to fill a lacuna in the discourse of Korean modern art. From about 1914, Korean artists began painting on canvas using the Western medium of oil. The training and production of these early works of art, however, took place not in Korea but in Japan at the state-run Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts).[1] Due to the complexities of the socio-political and art historical context in which the paintings emerged, early Korean oil painting has not received sufficient attention. English-language scholarship remains scarce due to inaccessible visual resources, undocumented primary accounts, and an absence of translated texts. In Korean-language publications, the works by the early oil painters are describe as precursors to modern art. Korean modern art, art historians concur, came to be established in the years after the Korean War (1950-53). Consequently, the importance of seminal Korean oil painting, as well as the historical circumstances of their production, has largely escaped visual and academic notice.

It is my endeavor to fill a small gap in this lacuna. I argue that the Korean artists initiated a new phase of artistic modernism with the advent of oil painting. By examining the transformation that took place in the genre of portraiture as regulated artistic practice to modern expressions of individual identity in self-portraiture, I seek to recover the lost

[1] In 1949, the *Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō* (Tokyo School of Fine Arts) located in Ueno Park merged with the *Tokyo Ongaku Gakkō* (Tokyo Music School) to become, after several additional name changes, the present day Tokyo University of the Arts.

meanings of the important cultural artifacts from one of the most contentious periods in Korean history, the 1910-45 Japanese colonial rule of Korea. The polemics inherent in this pivotal historical juncture provide multiple dimensions for consideration in the study of Korean self-portraiture produced from 1915 to 1932.[2]

The intent of this endeavor is all the more necessary since there are over forty Korean student self-portraits from the colonial period currently sequestered in various storage facilities of the Tokyo University of the Arts in Japan. While the university museum reserves the retention rights of the collection, the institution is not at liberty to grant permissions for the use of these images without the consent of the artist. Since most of the artists who painted in oil during the early colonial years are deceased, the process of locating their family members has proven extremely difficult, if not impossible, as some artists voluntarily moved or were abducted to North Korea prior to the division of the country in 1953.[3] The obstacles posed in accessing and studying the material objects has diminished the memory of not just the self-portraits but also the artists. Yet,

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[2] My research of Korean oil painting encompasses a wider range of genres including landscapes and nudes with dates extending to 1936. That year marked the final public exhibition Sŏhwa hyŏpchon (Exhibition of the Society of Calligraphers and Painters). The late 1930s witnessed the rising tide of Japanese militarism as the colonial government, in 1938, instituted the policy of Japanese-only language in Korean schools. By 1939, Koreans had to change their names to Japanese names. In the years leading directly up to World War II, Korean artists were conscripted or commissioned to produce paintings that promoted the Japanese state.

[3] The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea does not have a comprehensive contact list of family members of the early twenty-century artists. As such, fair use of images by those artists who cannot be located are strictly limited to the requirements in the Korean copyright law: Chapter 2, Section 4: Subsection 3, "Duration of Author's Property Rights," Article 39 "Principles of Protection Period"
(1) Author's property rights in a work shall continue to subsist during the lifetime of an author and until the end of a period of fifty years after the death of an author, unless otherwise provided in this Subsection. Author's property rights in a work which is first being made public forty years after the death of an author and before a period of fifty years has elapsed shall continue to subsist for a period of ten years after it is being made public. Personal email from the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea staff Hwang Chae-keum, March 9, 2011. The law is cited from Korea Copyright Commission. Copyright Law of Korea, Laws and Treaties, http://eng.copyright.or.kr/law_01_01.html (accessed March 1, 2010).

such obstacles also urge us to examine the surviving pictorial autobiographies in search of forgotten voices.[4]

Re-situating the Parameters of Korean Modern Art

In the first English-language publication on Korean modern painting, *Modern Korean Painting* (1971), the venerated art critic Lee Kyung-sung [Yi Kyong-song] (1919-2009) situates the emergence of Korean modern art in the years following the Korean War. For Lee, 1957 in particular commanded a privileged place as the "starting point of modern painting."[5] This position is endorsed by the eminent art scholar and former director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea, O [Oh] Kwang-su (b. 1938). According to O, modernist Korean painting is categorically divided into two stages: paintings produced in the 1930s that exhibit "characteristics of incipient modernism," and those produced after 1957 that are "modernist for having absorbed the effects of Abstract Expressionist Movement."[6]

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[4] Within the group of male artists were two unprecedented female Korean artists who made significant contributions in the transformation of Korean painting. They were Na Hae-sok (1896-1948) and Paik Nam-soon (1904-1994). Since Tokyo School of Fine Arts did not accept female students, Na and Paik attended Tokyo Women's Art School and are regrettably excluded from this present study. A comprehensive study of Na Hae-suk's artistic as well as her feminist achievements are presented in a Korean thesis by Ahn Namwon, "The Painting of Rah Hye-suk: On the Relationship between her Painting and her Feminism" (master's thesis, EwhaWomen's University, June 1998). Most narratives of Korean female oil painter Paik Nam-soon is closely associated with the famous Korean artist Lim Yong-ryun whom she married in Paris in 1930. See Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi* (Seoul: Dolbaegi), 241-253.

[5] Yunesuk`o Hanguk Wiwŏnhoe, *Modern Korean Painting* (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1971), 12.

[6] O Kwang-su, *Hanguk hyundai miseul ui miuishik [Aesthetics of Korean modern art]* (Seoul: Dosuh chulpan jaewon, 1995, reprinted 1997), 26.

The importance of 1957 is largely due to an artistic secession by the Hyundae misulga yonhaphoe (Contemporary Artist Society) that sought to displace the familiar idiom of figuration with abstraction.[7] Society members believed obliteration of recognizable forms was a stylistic innovation that led to the advancement in Korean art. The visual language of abstract form was praised as "modern" and possessing the "avant-garde spirit" by notable Korean art critics including Lee Kyung-sung. Critics and artists thus concurred that Korean abstract painting shared the visual grammar of autonomy and plasticity that characterized Western modernist art. As such, Abstract Expressionism became the basis for an indigenous contemporary art known as Korean Informel.[8]

According to Youngna Kim, the Director General of Korean National Museums, Abstract Expressionism in Korea served as a visual vocabulary for "political resistance to the structure of established art circles, particularly to state-sponsored exhibitions."[9] Indeed, the agenda of the Contemporary Artists Society was to protest against the conservatism dominating Taehanmin'guk misul taejon (National Art Exhibition) where

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[7] The Contemporary Artists Society held two exhibitions in May and December of 1957. The first exhibition was held from May 1-9, 1957 at the USIS (United States Information Service) gallery in Seoul. The paintings from the exhibition are no longer extant, as are exhibition information on the works, yet according to the Korean art historian Moojeong Chung, "critics displayed deep interest" in those paintings which displaced figuration with expressive Abstraction. The second exhibition, held from December 8-14, 1957 at Hwasin Gallery in Seoul, displayed even greater numbers of abstraction paintings. See Moojeong Chung, "Abstract Expressionism, *Art Informel*, and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2000), 191-199.

[8] Two dissertations address Abstract Expressionism as it paved the way for the construction of an indigenous modernist art called Korean Informel. The first is Moojeong Chung's dissertation cited above which provides a politicized account of Korean Informel's development. Another is Whuiyeon Jin's dissertation which examines Korean Informel as a construct of modernity utilizing Homi Bhabha's theoretical discourse of hybridity. See Whuiyeon Jin, "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean Informel and the Reception of the West" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997).

[9] Youngna Kim, *Tradition, Modernity and Identity: Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea* (Elizabeth, NJ and Seoul: Hollym, 2005), 34.

jurors were not receptive to novel forms of artistic expression, especially the renegade styles of Western Abstract Expression, Surrealism, and Dadaism.

The National Art Exhibition was established in 1949 as the only state-sanctioned public exhibition. It was adversely linked to the Choson misul chollamhoe (Choson Art Exhibition) on which it was modeled. The Choson Art Exhibition was instituted in 1922, during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea, by the Japanese authorities as part of their policy of *bunka seiji* (cultural rule) in the wake of the March 1st 1919 Korean mass resistance movement.[10] Despite its acculturating intent, many Korean artists and critics felt the annual exhibition served as a public forum for promoting the Japanese colonialist agenda. In the aftermath of the Korean War, when Koreans embarked on a critical period of national and economic recovery, artists and critics endorsed the liberating style of abstraction to symbolize the sovereign status of the Republic of Korea.[11]

During the national reconstruction of the 1960s and under the auspices of the South Korean government, nationally revered art critics such as Lee Kyung-sung and Yi Ku-yŏl began formulating narratives of Korean modern art. Their formal pronouncement, which continues to be perpetuated in Korean art history, acknowledges the artists Ko Hui-dong (1886-1965), Kim Kwan-ho (1890-1959), Kim Chan-young (1893-1960) and Lee Chong-wu (1899-1981) as the "first" Koreans to paint in oil. Yet the paintings by

[10] For a brief introduction regarding the Choson Art Exhibition which lasted from 1922-44, see O Kwang-su and So Song-nok, *Uri misul 100 yŏn [100 years of Korean art]* (Seoul: Hyonamsa, 2001; 2002 printing), 68-76.

[11] On August 15, 1948, South Korea was established as the Republic of Korea with Syngman Rhee as the first president. On September 9, 1948 North Korea formed as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the dictator Kim Il-Sung.

the artists are generally ascribed as "precursors" or belonging to a "formative phase" of Korean modern art.[12] Even in more recent publications, only a few pages, at best, provide information about these artists. The general focus is not on their works per se but on their personal awards, distinctions, and appointments at prestigious Korean art academies and institutions. As a result, the importance of the artistic mediation achieved by the artists as well as critical inquiry of their paintings remains overshadowed by paintings from the 1950s. While scholarship from the 1980s and thereafter has placed a few incipient Korean oil paintings under the rubric of *kundae misul* (modern art), the narrative of Korean modern art is eminently grounded in post-war modernist paintings.

The imbalance of art historical scholarship is reflected in the collections and exhibition history of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, which serves as the largest national repository for both on-loan and state-acquired Korean oil painting. In the permanent gallery of "Early Twentieth-century Western Painting," Ko Hui-dong's 1915 *Self-portrait with a Fan* and Kim Whan-ki's *Self-portrait* from the 1920s (year unspecified) are eclipsed by later works reflecting the various styles of Abstract Expressionism and Monochrome. There has been only one exhibition, held in 1997,

[12] Lee Kyung-sung [Yi Kyong-song], *Modern Korea Painting*, 12-13. The "incipient phase" of modernism in Korean art established by O Kwangsu ranges from 1930 to 1957, O Kwang-su, *Hanguk hyundai miseul ui miuishik [Aesthetics of Korean modern art]*, 26. About 8 pages, exclusive of images, are ascribed to the "first" oil painters of twentieth century in the monumental 707 page art historical compilation of Korean modern art in Kim Yoon-su et al.'s *Han'guk miseul 100 nyon = 100 Years of Korean Art,* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 2005), 143-149 and 224-245 . Youngna Kim considers the first graduates of Tokyo School of Fine Arts as "Early Pioneers" and oil paintings from 1920s as representative of "formative period of modern art." See Youngna Kim, *20th Century Korean Art* (London: Laurence King Publishing., 2005), 16-21.

dedicated exclusively to Korean oil painting produced during the early decades of the twentieth century.[13]

Surmounting Postcolonial Constraints

The larger politics of postcolonialism and the ongoing Korean desire to erase Japanese rule from the collective national memory have led to the obscuring of seminal works of Korean oil painting. Understandably, there is the nationalist reluctance to associate a historic shift in Korean art with Japan's colonization of Korea. Current politics in Korea continue to limit acknowledging the role Japanese art instruction and instructors had in establishing a new phase in Korean art. Such admission would be met not only with internal dissent but would, more importantly, serve to discount the strength of Korean nationalist history.[14]

The Korean art historical practice of situating modern art outside the parameters of colonial rule upholds the Korean "internal development theory," an ideology that

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[13] In conjunction with the exhibition *Kundae rul ponun nun = Glimpse into Korean Modern Painting* which took place at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea from Dec. 12, 1997 to March 10, 1998, a 461 page accompanying book was published by the museum which features, to date, the most fully assembled plates of Korean artists' self-portraitures belonging in the collection of the University Art Museum at Tokyo University of the Arts. The appendix of this text also provides a chronological listing (yet without proper citation) of Korean newspapers, journals and theses on the topic of Korean modern art. The presentation as well as the scope of study, however, is entrenched in nationalistic bias with essays written solely by indigenous scholars. See National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, *Kundae rul ponun nun = Glimpse into Korean Modern Painting* (Seoul (Soul-si): Sam kwa K'kum, 1997).

[14] For an overview of Korean historiography see Pang Kie-chung and Michael D. Shin, eds. *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea* (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2005), 1-17 and Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-22. For a concise interpretation that addresses the modern Korean nationalist historiography, see Henry Em, "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1999), 336-361.

promotes the internal dynamics and achievements by the Koreans for progress.[15] Unified by nationalist convictions, many Korean historians uphold the internal development theory and assert that indigenous efforts were crucial in surmounting Japanese oppression and overcoming national division to achieve current social, political and economic successes.

One of the main objectives of this essentialist theory was to challenge "modernization theory," an evolutionary model for interpreting Western modernity developed by Talcott Parsons. Modernization theory became widespread as an integrative framework in American Asian Studies of the 1960's and 1970's.[16] For many Korean historians, modernization theory was resonant with "stagnation theory," a concept formulated by Japanese historians in justifying colonial rule based upon the premise that Koreans were incapable of modernization without Japanese assistance.[17]

Tensions in theoretical discourse notwithstanding, Korean nationalist history also had to counter claims of competing narratives arising in Communist North Korea as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea advanced its official version of history.[18] The

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[15] A brief synopsis of the theories in Korean historiography is presented in Michael Shin, "Introduction," in *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, 1-17.

[16] Modernization theory served as an influential tool for the study of non-Western societies by scholars reflecting an Orientalist worldview such as Edwin Reischauer's research on Japanese history and society, ibid., 5.

[17] Modernization theory within the discourse of East Asian Studies have also been examined by Harry Harootunian in *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 25-58, and William M. Tsutsui, ed. *A Companion to Japanese History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 1-10.

[18] The tightly restricted access to Communist Korea, compounded by political tensions, has hindered scholars from exploring the art of North Korea. The exception is the British art historian Jane Portal's general survey, *Art under Control in North Korea* (London: Reaktion, 2005).

complexities inherent in decolonized politics have led to maintaining internal development as the framework for master narratives in not only Korean history but also the subfield of Korean art history on both sides of the fractured peninsula. However, as historian Prasenjit Duara has demonstrated with his studies on Chinese modern history, master narratives advanced by the state must be challenged and re-evaluated to reveal the obscured, multiple, and often conflicting counter-narratives to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the past.[19]

In my examination of Korean oil painting, I suggest that the dichotomies of internal development and modernization theory ought not to be conceived as diametrically opposed, but rather as mutually constitutive. In the sphere of the arts, the internal development theory cannot be adequately sustained without reconciling modernization theory precisely because Korean painting transitioned and transformed in direct response to external factors and stimuli beyond its borders. Korean students received their training in Japan. As such, they benefitted from Western artistic ideas that were transmitted, principally from Paris, to Tokyo by Japanese artists since the late nineteenth century.[20] With confluence and negotiation of Western modernity accelerated by political, economic, and social forces, the construct of Korean oil painting was articulated by the Korean artists as a modern discourse.

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[19] See Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1995) and his essay "Provincial Narratives of the Nation: Centralism and Federalism in Republican China," in *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity*, ed. Harumi Befu (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 9-35.

[20] See Shūji Takashina, J. Thomas Rimer with Gerald D. Bolas, *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation; St. Louise: Washington University 1987.

Negotiating Modernism under Colonialism

It was within this complex milieu that Korean artists sought to locate the rising national consciousness that stemmed from the dual forces of colonialism and modernism. As leading scholars of nationalism studies such as Anthony D. Smith and Ernest Gellner affirm, nationalism is closely linked with the process of modernization.[21] Thus to overlook the aspects of Korean artistic modernism during colonialism discounts the magnitude of Korean modern nationalism which gained mass impetus under Japanese rule and affected all areas of everyday life.

As the benefit of hindsight reveals, Japanese colonialism, while fraught with public and private tensions, proved to be a period of interdependency producing paradoxical tensions of Korean resistance and collaboration.[22] In the realm of the arts, Japanese colonialism facilitated greater access to the metropole of Tokyo for young Korean students seeking artistic instructions in oil painting, a technique absent from Korean academies. The first group of Korean artists who specialized in oil painting received their training in the department of *seiyōga*, commonly referred to as *yōga* (Western-style painting) at the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts).

It was in Tokyo and not their native country that Korean artists had the unique opportunity to witness public art exhibitions, some which featured original works of art by European masters such as Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Paul Cezanne, and Vincent

[21] See Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism and Modernization," and Anthony D. Smith, "The Crisis of Dual Legitimation in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55-63 and 113-121 respectively.

[22] A collection of personal histories exemplifying the paradoxical realities of collaboration, resistance and even neutral stance by Koreans during Japanese colonialism can be located in Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

van Gogh.[23] They were also exposed to artistic societies and were introduced to contemporary modes of thought through Japanese art journals such as *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art News) and *Mizue* (Water) in which ideas about Western and Japanese art were disseminated.[24]

While painters of ink struggled to retain and even redefine traditional art, oil painting in Korea became the emblematic visual signifier of modernity. This important shift in medium from ink on silk and paper scrolls to oil on canvas dramatically transformed the sphere of Korean painting and led to a departure from the aesthetic dictates and artistic practices that had governed Korean art for over eight hundred years.[25] Previously marginalized subject matter such as the common man was redefined and became asserted on canvas as characterizing Korean identity. Oil painting became the platform for visually expressing the dialectic of modern nationalism as Korean artists re-constructed the way their contemporary lives were perceived and presented. As Korean artists engaged with Western artistic techniques that allowed them to depart from

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[23] Regarding Japanese collections and collectors of European art during the Taishō Era, see Alicia Volk, "A Unified Rhythm: Past and Present in Japanese Modern Art," in *Japan and Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism, and the Modern Era*, with essays by Christine M.E. Guth, Alicia Volk and Emiko Yamanashi (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2004), 39-55.

[24] *Mizue* was produced by ŌshitaTōjirō in 1905 in conjunction with the association Shunchōkai for the promotion of water-color painting. According to art historian Omuka Toshiharu, while the art journal *Bijutsu shinpō* provided "sophisticated contents" by famous Japanese writers and journalists, the popularity and longevity of Mizue rested on its "correspondence column" which was dedicated as the "The Readers' Domain" or "Readers' Discussions." For brief account of the emergence of *Mizue*, see Omuka Toshiharu, "The Formation of the Audiences for Modern Art in Japan," in *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*, ed. Elise K. Tipton and John Clark (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 50-60.

[25] The origins of Korean painting tradition is art historically traced to early fifth century tomb mural paintings from the Three Kingdoms Period (37 BCE to 668). The Buddhist paintings are traced from the Silla dynasty (668-935). Since this study focuses on landscape paintings and self-portraiture, I use as my starting point, the beginnings of ink landscape painting which predate self-portraiture.

conventions, they recognized that the newly available visual vocabulary of representation could supplant traditionally stagnant codes and converge Korean art into an assured phase of artistic modernism.[26]

Defining Terms

In describing East Asian art as "modern," I adhere to the following conditions prescribed to the term by the Asian art historian John Clark.[27] First, due to a growth of artistic society, a style is marked modern "for reasons intrinsic to the culture by comparison with its past." Second, modern art involves "an increase in the speed and formalization of knowledge transfer" resulting from "institutional introduction and reinforcement of society-wide modernization process." Finally, modern art in Asia involves "transfer to Asian art cultures a penumbra of styles ranging from academy realism to late Impressionism followed by a re-situation of formal practice and introduction of critical functions."[28]

I also apply "colonial modernity" as designated by the postcolonial scholar Tani Barlow as my analytical framework.[29] In this, I follow scholars of Korean history, Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, in their studies which challenge nationalist master

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[26] I use the term modernism to refer to activity in the visual arts and the term modernity to refer to the cultural condition or period, see Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

[27] John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 14.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Tani E. Barlow, "Introduction: On Colonial Modernity," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity,* ed. Tani Barlow (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-20.

narratives by reevaluating the conditions and functions of peasant protest and broadcast media respectively during the Japanese occupation.[30] They agree colonial modernity "emphasizes dynamism, multiple possibilities and causal connections, and various (often competing) contemporary ideas of nation, modernity, and colonialism…."[31] Simply put, colonial modernity offers a framework for exposing and considering a wide spectrum of pluralistic conditions beyond the binary scope of "oppressor" and "oppressed."[32] Most recently this model has been utilized for describing Taiwanese colonial visual culture.[33] In this thesis, colonial modernity is invoked to explore the complex relationship of nationalism, colonialism and artistic modernism.

Because this thesis ascribes to the construction of images within the context of modern nationalism, I selectively use terms such as "imagined," "invented," and "constructed" to comment on the conditions of Korean tradition and culture.[34] Strict

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[30] Gi-Wook Shin, *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* (Seattle and Washington: University of Washington Press, 1996). Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988).

[31] Shin and Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 2.

[32] The multiplicity of inter-related actions and reactions in colonial empires have been the focus of study by Ann Laura Stoler, an anthropologist of Southeast Asia and African historian Frederick Cooper who affirm colonial encounters were "mutually shaped in intimate engagement, attraction, and opposition." They emphasize colonial histories are inextricably "bound up in each individual encounter – with the way particular groups resisted, appropriated, refashioned or adapted the social categories of colonizers – and the extent to which the colonizing projects of different states at different times influenced each other, giving rise to common colonial structures with distinct but related sequences of change." Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World,* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), viii.

[33] Yuko Kikuchi, ed. *Refracted Modernity: Visual Culture and Identity in Colonial Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

[34] Studies of modern nation based upon the constructionist paradigm are Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991 revised edition), and Eric Hobsbawm

adherence of the Western definition cannot be sustained since colonial nationalism also had to reconcile the dual domains of Western "materialism" and Eastern "spiritualism.[35] Since expressions of Korean nationalism in visual traces are complicit with plurality of meanings, terms and concepts thus appropriated will take on a broader scope.

Chapter Overview

A discussion of modern art cannot take place without examining the historical and artistic context in which it had developed. Chapter One opens with a general overview of Korean history and its long-standing artistic relations with China. As the highest form of visual culture in Korea, ink painting was historically associated with the artistic practice and aesthetic concepts derived from China. The establishment of the Choson dynasty in 1392 further strengthened social and cultural ties with China. Adoption of neo-Confucianism as the Korean state ideology brought about a shift in artistic production from Buddhist sculptures to portraiture as observances for social rituals increased. The images thus gained great prominence and further perpetuated class divisions in Korean society since the genre privileged those belonging in the highest order of upper class *yangban*.[36]

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and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[35] Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 214-225.

[36] According to Martina Deuchler, scholar of East Asian Studies: "*Yangban* originally was not a status term, but designated the two ranks (*yangban*) of officials, the "east rank" (*tongban*), i.e., the civil officials, and the "west rank" (*sŏban*), i.e., the military officials. At the beginning of the Choson dynasty, the term *yangba*n was used, in continuation of Koryo tradition, in the specialized meaning of "those in office." At the same time, in a broader sense, *yangban* also denoted the officeholders and their immediate families, i.e.

Chapter Two introduces the political events that disrupted the traditional East Asian world order in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The encroachment of Japanese imperialism into Korea was promptly met by resistance from the intellectuals who endeavored to incite and mobilize the masses. By moving away from the static binary interpretation of colonizer and colonized, this chapter examines how the forces of Japanese colonialism operated as a catalyst for the emergence of Korean modern nationalism. Japanese authorities sought to compensate loss of personal liberties with cultural policies of assimilation which included opportunities for Korean students to study in Japan. As Korean students engaged in the artistic education and production of oil painting, their heightened consciousness of the national and modern ethos crystallized as multiple and even conflicting forms of expression and became manifest in the construct of self-portraiture.

Chapter Three examines the self-portraits by the artists Ko Hui-dong, Lee Chong-wu, Chang Ik, and Park Kun-ho who individually appropriated the tropes of national attire as a signifier of resistance. In Chapter Four, the tensions inherent in negotiating modernism were articulated in self-portraits by Kim Chan-young, Kim Kwan-ho, and Do Sang-bong. Each artist, through his unique subjective exploration, selectively adopts and adapts the artistic styles and techniques of Western art. By synthesizing global elements of the foreign into the local realm of the familiar, the artists visually projected their personal ambivalence about the realities of modernism and colonialism.

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the ruling elite. This definition comes from Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1992), 309-310.

CHAPTER ONE

Boundaries of the Korean Portraiture Tradition

Historical Overview

The broad Chinese imprint on the culture of Korea reaches back to 108 BCE when the Han dynasty of China occupied the northern region of the Korean peninsula which was divided into the Three Kingdoms of Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla.[37] In 313, the kingdom of Koguryo gained military strength to drive out the Chinese forces and dominated the large landmass in northern Korea until 668. Paekche, which lasted from 18 BCE to 660, occupied the southwest peninsula, while Silla took command of the southeast domain from 57 BCE until it unified the central and southern region in 668.[38] Strategically, rulers of each kingdom sought to maintain a symbiotic relationship with the great "Central Kingdom" of China. Rulers of each kingdom recognized the need to secure amendable relations with China in order to maintain its sovereignty and to attempt circumventing Chinese military attacks for expansion.

Koguryo and Paekche entered an unequal but friendly tributary relationship with China in the fourth century. The relative geographical isolation of Silla prevented it from

[37] Periodization of Korean history is categorically divided into Old Choson (ca. 2333 BCE - 108); Three Kingdoms (ca. 50 BCE - 668); Unified Silla (668 - 936); Koryo (918 - 1392); Choson (1392 - 1910); and Japanese Colonialism (1910-45). Recent revision marks Choson dynasty as coming to a close in 1897 and the inclusion of the so-called Hanmal Period (loosely translated as "turbulent era before occupation") lasting from1876 to 1910.

[38] Situated between Paekche and Silla was a federation of twelve small "states" known as Kaya. By 562, Kaya was overtaken by the Kingdom of Silla. Ki-baek Yi, *A New History of Korea*, translated by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz (Cambridge, MA: Published for the Harvard-Yenching Institute by Harvard University Press, 1984), 19.

entering into a regular diplomatic relations with China until the late sixth century.[39] By acceding to a tributary system, the Korean court "paid tribute" by sending gift-bearing envoys to the Chinese court throughout the year in exchange for royal investitures and military support.[40] Traveling with large retinues of officials and attendants, Korean monks and students transmitted sacred texts, philosophical and religious treatises, and material objects from the "high" culture of imperial China to Korea. While there are no extant Korean paintings from this period, historical accounts in *Samguk yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms)* indicates painted scrolls were exchanged as tributary gifts between the Korean and Chinese courts.[41]

Military successes in 668 allowed the kingdom of Silla to unify the fragmented Korean kingdoms under a central rule and engendered a prolonged reign of peace from 675 to 765. During the rule of Unified Silla (668-935), Korean relations with the Tang dynasty (618-907) in China remained amenable despite military border frictions caused by Chinese advances. The small foothold Japan had established on the southern Korean

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[39] Jonathan W. Best, "Profile of the Korean Past," in *Arts of Korea*, ed. Chung Yang-mo et al (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 20.

[40] Korean tributary system mostly served to benefit China. Chinese military assistance was oftentimes a pretext for its own territorial expansion and concession rather than provisions for Korean support. For a brief account of these instances, see Jonathan W. Best, "Profile of the Korean Past," in *Arts of Korea*, 25-26.

[41] A noted account concerns Korean Queen Sondok (reigned 632-647) who received a painting of peonies from the Chinese Emperor T'ai-tsung (reigned 626-649) of Tang dynasty. For an English translation of the 13th century compilation, see Ilyon, *Samguk Yusa: Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, trans. Ha Tae-Hung and Grafton K. Mintz (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972), 73.

peninsula at Kimhae was dispelled by Silla forces thus bringing to a halt the favorable relations that had taken place between the Kingdom of Paekche and Japan.[42]

After the fall of Unified Silla, the Koryo dynasty (935-1392) embarked on a propitious diplomatic relationship through artistic exchanges with China. In 1074, King Munjong (r. 1046-83) sent his envoy Kim Yang-gam on a diplomatic mission to the Northern Song court with specific instructions to purchase Chinese paintings.[43] To sustain auspicious relations, Northern Song emperor Huizong (reign 1100-25) sent numerous Chinese books, calligraphy, paintings and art objects, all of which came to be part of the Korean royal collection.[44]

The collapse of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) and emergence of the Choson dynasty (1392-1910) further solidified Korea's Sino-centric relations. Yi Song-gey, a former Koryo general and the founder of the Choson dynasty, cultivated favorable diplomatic relations with China during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). To strengthen his rule, Yi sought to abate the influence of Buddhism that had dominated the Koryo dynasty by adopting Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology. The moral injunction for obedience to one's parents, teachers and elders was expected to inculcate loyalty within the private sphere of the family, and hence radiate out to the public sectors of society and state.

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[42] Of critical importance is the transmission of Buddhism from Paekche to Japan in 552 which is noted in the *Nihon* Shoki (Chronicle of Japan). Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan 500-1600* (New York and Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15-17.

[43] Ahn Hwi-joon, "The Origin and Development of Landscape Painting in Korea," in *Arts of Korea*, 305.

[44] Ibid., 305. During the Choson dynasty, King Chongjo established the Kyjanggak in the Ch'angdok Palace in 1783. It was modeled after the Chinese royal libraries from the Song era and held large collection of Korean and foreign books as well as writings by former Korean kings. A special group of artists known as Chabi taeryong hwawon were selected to produce royal commissions. Chung Saehyuang, "Portrayals of Human Emotion in Late Choson-Dynasty Genre Painting and their Possible Visual Precedents," *Acta Koreana* 6, no. 1 (January, 2003): 44

Consequently, neo-Confucianism led to an increased patronage of secular art. Religious patronage of Buddhist sculptures and votive images of deities gave way to portraits of kings and eminent officials which gained prominence as objects of veneration for enforcing social hierarchy.

<u>Conventions of the Korean Portraiture</u>

The classification of Korean portraiture is defined by the following six categories: 1) kings, 2) meritorious subjects, 3) elderly officials who had surpassed the venerable age of sixty and demonstrated high honor at court, 4) scholars and sages whose portraits were commissioned for Confucian academies, 5) Buddhist monks, and 6) women. Due to their low status in Korean society during the Choson dynasty, only queens are portrayed in portraits. Allegorical depictions of youthful anonymous females were created as "ideal" images of beauty produced for male consumption. Towards the late Choson dynasty, images of "Beauty" were deemed capable of corrupting public morals that their production was prohibited by a royal decree during the reign of King Chŏngjo (1776-1800).[45] While images of commoners were captured in genre scenes and usually in group settings by notable Korean artists Kim Hong-do (1745-1806) and Sin Yun-bok (ca.

[45] Ho-Am Art Museum, *Special Millennium Exhibition, Koreans by Koreans: Portraits from Prehistory to Modern Times* (Seoul: Ho-Am Art Museum and Samsung Art Museum Artistic Research Institute, 1999), 238.

1758-after 1813), there is no visual evidence in which members of the lower class are portrayed as the central subject of a painting.[46]

The genre of portraiture in Korea was traditionally reserved for kings, elderly sages and members of the court who had been bestowed the title of *kongsin* (meritorious subject) by the king.[47] According to the Korean art historian Sunmie Cho, the practice of commemorating meritorious subjects dates back to 940 when the Koryo dynasty King Taejo ordered the construction of Kongsindang (Hall of Meritorious Subjects) at Sinhung Temple to house portraits of the worthy officials who served him.[48] Scholars of traditional Korean art Synpyo Hong and Chin-sung Chang concur, "the primary function of portraits… was to celebrate [the sitter's] contributions to the state and to emphasize the Confucian value of loyalty to the king."[49]

As effective means for enforcing social hierarchy, Choson dynasty rulers promulgated public rituals of ancestor worship to concretize abstract ideals into perfunctory acts.[50] Elaborate courtly rituals enforced social customs of subordination

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[46] For a brief survey of Korean genre painters see Huh Young-hwan, "Chosŏn Landscape and Genre Painting "in *Korean Cultural Heritage*, *Vol. 1, Fine Arts: Painting/Handicrafts/Architecture* (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994), 58-60.

[47] Hongnam Kim, "Exploring Eighteenth-Century Court Arts," in *Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century: Splendor and Simplicity*, ed. Hongnam Kim (New York: Weatherhill: Asia Society Galleries, 1993), 35-57.

[48] Sunmie Cho, "Faces from the Past: Portrait Paintings," in *Korean Cultural Heritage*, *Vol. 1, Fine Arts: Painting/Handicrafts/Architecture* (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994), 77.

[49] Sonpyo Hong and Chin-sung Chang, "Peace Under Heaven: Confucianism and Painting in Early Joseon Korea," in *Art of the Renaissance, 1400-1600*, ed. Soyoung Lee (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 65-90.

[50] For a detailed account as well as the legal debates which ensued regarding the proper codes for ancestor worship, see Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, 129-178.

which assisted in supporting the political agenda of the state. As public displays of royal commemoration became increasingly visible at ancestral burial grounds and portrait shrines, demands for and production of portraiture also increased.

The purpose of royal portraiture of kings, and occasional queen, was to visually assert the authority of the reigning administration. A temporary office was established to supervise the production of royal portraits to mark significant political events such as the enthronement of a new ruler, suppression of internal uprisings or conquest over foreign invasions. The royal portraits were produced by artists who were carefully selected from the Tohwasŏ (Bureau of Painting), a branch under government control which employed professional artists.[51] According to Korean art historian Hongnam Kim, one such royal portraiture project initiated in 1900 lasted for over four months and entailed twenty-four supervisory officials, sixty painters and eight portrait-mounters.[52]

Portraits of meritorious officials were also produced by professional artists in the Tohwasŏ. Entry to the bureau was attainable through a state examination. Because the exams were opened to *chung-in* (a class of technical specialists) and *yangmin* (commoners), the status of professional court artists was held in low regard by the literati artists. Literati artists were scholar-officials from the upper class of *yangban* (aristocrats)

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[51] In 1405, the Tohwawon (Academy of Painting) which had been established and attached to the Ministry of Works was reorganized under the Ministry of Rites. Around 1471, the name was changed to Towhawon (Bureau of Painting) around 1471 which resulted in the degradation of the office by one rank in the official hierarchy. The bureau was located in the Kyun-pyong district outside the vicinity of Kyongbok Palace in present day Insadong area. See Hongnam Kim, "Exploring Eighteenth-Century Court Arts," in *Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century: Splendor and Simplicity*, 54.

[52] For information regarding the 1900 royal portrait project, see Hongnam Kim, "Exploring Eighteenth-Century Court Arts," in *Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century: Splendor and Simplicity*, 43.

nobility. Unencumbered by the financial need for patronage, they painted at leisure for moral contemplation.[53] Due to their independent status, paintings by literati artists were held in higher esteem than those produced by professional painters. This is attested by the recording of names of literati artists on state projects while the identity of the professional artists remains anonymous. Talented professional artists received the opportunity for advancement through monthly tests that entailed replicating paintings by Chinese masters. Original paintings from China were held in the royal collection within palace grounds which were available for selective viewing. A court painter who achieved artistic success could raise his status to that of a literati artist, as notably exemplified by Kim Hongdo.

Korean portraiture painted by professional artists follows the tradition of Chinese commemorative portraiture. From the early Northern Song Period (960-1279) and thereafter, one of the most symbolic functions of image production in China was to project the political authority and social standing of the sitter. Richard Vinograd, noted scholar of Chinese art, indicates that emphasis on conventions and types was "part of an explicitly public rhetoric of presentation."[54] In the East Asian pictorial tradition, presentation of the self was inextricably tied to the cultural milieu that blurred the

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[53] Literati artists, for reasons of finance, sought to enter the *Tohwasŏ* were required to take the same exams taken by the professional artists. The examination consisted of painting the following four subjects: bamboo, landscape, figures and animals, and finally floral motifs. See Sonpyo Hong and Chin-sung Chang, "Peace Under Heaven: Confucianism and Painting in Early Joseon Korea," in *Art of the Renaissance, 1400-1600*, 66.

[54] Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

boundaries between the self as an individual and as the embodiment of a societal collective.[55]

Maintaining the Chinese format for strict formality in poses and demeanor, the purpose of Korean portraiture was also to proclaim the sitter's elevated social status in life. By emphasizing the iconographic symbols of the attire and accoutrements, and the progressed age of the sitter indicating worldly wisdom, Korean portraiture was used as a sacred object of commemoration for ancestor worship. An album of portraits of elderly officials by the court artist Kim Chin-hyo and others exemplify the conventional artistic standard in the *Portraits from Album Commemorating the Gathering of the Elder Statesmen*, 1720.[56]

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[55] Ibid., 2.

[56] This album is part of a larger documentation which visually recorded the various banquets and events held from April 17 to 18, 1719 in honor of King Sukchong's sixtieth birthday. The senior officials had assembled for the *kiro* gathering to receive their greatest honor from their king. *Ki* translates as "the age of sixty" and *ro* as "the age of seventy." This event marked the gathering of senior officials who were honored by the Choson court. Ho-Am Art Museum, *Special Millennium Exhibition, Koreans by Koreans: Portraits from Prehistory to Modern Times*, 234.

Figure 1
Kim Chin-yo, Chung Duk-man and Pak Dong-bo
Portraits from Album Commemorating the Gathering of the Elder Statesmen, 1720
Album leaf, color and ink on silk, each 43.7 X 32.5 cm
(Reprinted with permission from The Samsung Museum of Art, Leeum, Seoul)

The high status of the elderly officials is uniformly represented by the dark blue royal robe called *tamrŏng* emblazoned with the embroidered insignia of the flying crane. Adorning the head of each is the official winged-headdress called the *samo* made of black silk. As a "coronet" of Korea, the headpiece was worn only by the nobility on official

occasions or when summoned to an audience with the king.[57] The composition of each portrait is represented by the three-quarter pose. With both hands clasped and tucked within the loose sleeves of his robe, each man gazes off into the distance to the left of the picture plane. Following the artistic tradition of conjoining text with image, the title, the name, and the venerable age of each sitter are inscribed across the top of the painting. While individual facial features are differentiated, the pose, attire, and the averted gaze of the sitters are marked by indistinguishable congruity: the three-quarter pose, dark blue *tamrŏng*, and black silk *samo*.

Many full-length portraits were painted with solemn formality like three-quarter portraits. Since full-length portraits offer a complete view, the paintings tend to be larger and thus present a greater aura of dignity and authority. The imposing demeanor is reinforced in portraits with a direct frontal gaze as exemplified in the *Portrait of Oh Chae-sun*, 1791, attributed to professional court artist Lee Myoung-ki.

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[57] According to the foreign observer Foster H. Jenings (1876?-1900) who was employed at Korean court, the two "wings [protruding from the sides of the hat] are said to have been made to resemble ears bent forward in the act of listening to catch every word of command the King may utter." For an informative survey of Korean headdresses, see Foster H. Jenings, "Korean Headdresses in the National Museum," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 45 (January 1904): 149-167.

Figure 2
Attributed to Lee Myoung-ki (active late 18th – early 19th century)
Portrait of Oh Chae-sun, 1791
Hanging scroll, color on silk, 151.7 X 89 cm
(Reprinted with permission from The Samsung Museum of Art, Leeum, Seoul)

The function of the gaze in traditional Korean portraiture was not to engage the viewer but rather to heighten the foreboding quality of the sitter.[58] Following the proper protocols for social decorum, the living descendants had to lower their gaze and bow before ancestor portraits as a sign of respect and were discouraged from looking directly upon the image.

[58] Hongnam Kim, "Exploring Eighteenth-Century Court Arts," in *Korean Arts of the Eighteen Century: Splendor and Simplicity*, 43.

Korean portraits thus served as objects of ritual and as such they were produced to honor the dead who served as ideal models of virtue, loyalty and courage. Veneration was also accorded to sages and Buddhist monks who had their images enshrined in private academies and temples respectively. The practice of paying homage to an eminent teacher was to inculcate the master's virtues to the students as well as to lend a spiritual aura to the authority of the institution. In the category of portraits depicting exemplars, the attire is iconic referencing his avocation as a teacher or a monk. Following the conventions of portraiture production, the pose and composition, as well as the theme of dignified reserve, remain consistent with images of the court officials as in the eighteenth-century *Portrait of Yi Chae* by an unidentified artist.

Figure 3
Unknown artist
Portrait of Yi Chae (1680-1746), 18th century
Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 97.2 X 56.3 cm
(Reprinted with permission from The National Museum of Korea, Seoul)

In my research, I have only been able to locate three extant self-portraits by Korean artists produced before the twentieth century. The two surviving self-portraits painted in the late eighteenth century by the eminent literati artist Kang Se-hwang follow the standard seated format of "sage" portraiture.[59] Kang likely produced his own self-portraits for the posthumous purpose of ancestor worship since both belong in the collection of the artist's family. The unusual self-portrait by Yun Du-so exists as the lone self-portrait from the Choson dynasty that expressively captures and dramatically highlights the features of the sitter's face.[60] As a professional court artist, Yun boldly departed from every conceivable standard dictating style, format and composition of formal portraiture to depict a unique vision. Thus we can conclusively infer Yun Du-so's self-portrait was an artistic act of experimentation and was produced strictly for personal use. This supposition is ascertained by the fact that Yun's self-portrait has remained in the private collection of his family.

Portraiture as Sacred Text of "Classical Communities"

During the five-hundred year reign of the Choson dynasty, members of Korean society likely had a conception of borders and boundaries as Korea maintained its historical associations with China through tributary relations and nominal affiliations

[59] A colored image of Kang Se-hwang, *Self-portrait* (1789; Private collection of Kang Hui-dong and Kang Yong-son) can be viewed in Cho Sunmie, "Faces from the Past: Portrait Paintings," in *Korean Cultural Heritage*, *vol. 1: Fine Arts*, 83. The other is a small *Self-portrait (in roundel)* (late 18the century; Private collection of Kang Chu-Chin, Korea).

[60] Yun Du-so, Self-portrait (early 18th century; Private collection of Yun Yong-son). Full page colored image can be seen in Chung Yang-mo, "The Art of Everyday Life," in *Korean Arts of the Eighteen Century: Splendor and Simplicity*, 58.

with Japan incurred through mercantile trade and military conflicts. However, I submit, Korean's perception of their country was as "Choson" in relation to the dynasty and not as the nation of Korea. Accordingly this viewpoint falls under the conditions of what Benedict Anderson claims are "classical communities." Anderson affirms:

> Such classical communities linked by sacred languages had a character distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations. One crucial difference was the older communities confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages, and thus their ideas about admission to membership.[61]

With Korea's prolonged symbiotic relationship with China, the borders differentiating Korean and Chinese culture which even included the language of the written script were effaced. Politically and artistically, Korea conceived and maintained its territorial and diplomatic link with China through the "medium of a sacred language."[62] This sacred language was the Sino-script, the highest form of Korean intellectual and literary expression until the rise of the Korean script *han'gul* in the twentieth century. As in China, the art of calligraphy in Korea served as the foundation for ink painting. Whether as inscriptions or poems to elucidate the image, Asian art historian Wen C. Fong posits, "The key to Chinese painting is its calligraphic brushwork."[63] He explains:

> In the fourteenth century, poetry, calligraphy, and painting had reached a new stage in their relation to one another, one in which they were not only mutually

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[61] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 13.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy 8th-14th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 5.

> reinforcing but came to be interwoven as a form of creative expression, their verbal and graphic elements bringing mutual extension and fulfillment.[64]

Consequently, Korean veneration of the "sacred language" of the Sino-script and its accompanying visual idiom defined not only the culture at court but also influenced the artistic preferences of the *yangban* and *chung-in* classes of Korean society.[65] While Korean literati artists were at liberty to pursue painting in leisure without regard for patronage, their artistic practice and aesthetics were nonetheless heavily grounded in the tradition of Chinese paintings. As respected artists who were above the status of professional court painters, literati artists constituted the very members of the elite circle that upheld and maintained the sacred language of calligraphy and the sophisticated realm of ink painting.

Therefore, Korean ink painting served as the critical cultural link and a sacred shared language that linked the peripheral country of Korea to the "Central Kingdom" of China. With this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated that Korean traditional painting of portraiture produced by the literati belongs within the context of classical communities because the visual language of the ink painting was accessible and understood mostly by the restricted sphere of Korean society. Access to artistic patronage, acquisition and appreciation was selectively reserved mostly for the discerning company of affluent, educated and discriminating members of the court and the elite male *yangban* society.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Recent scholarships have shed important light on the role of Korean artists from the *chung-in* or middle class. See Jiyeon Kim, "Gathering Paintings of *Chungin* in Late Choson (1392-1910), Korea " (PhD diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 2009) and Sung Lim Kim, "From Middlemen to Center Stage: The *Chungin* Contribution to 19th-Century Korean Painting," (PhD diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2009).

The tradition of Korean painting thus legitimated and consolidated the power of the royal and aristocratic class. Membership into this small circle of patrons and the viewing audience was resolutely selective, and thus the general public was excluded. The masses were alienated from the central sphere of “sacred” painting that was only privileged to members of court and *yangban* who dictated and perpetuated the official art of Korea derived from Chinese precedents.

Throughout the Choson dynasty, the role and function of Korean portraiture as commemorative objects thus remained constant, bound by fixed and static conventions that visually emphasized Confucian precepts of decorum and restraint. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the walls supporting the Korean classical community began to deteriorate due to socio-political shifts in the East Asia. The following chapter will examine the historic contingencies that led Korean students to Japan in search of a new artistic paradigm.

CHAPTER TWO

Encountering Modernism

Modern Nationalism in Korea

The longstanding artistic gaze toward China abided until the socio-political forces in East Asia began to shift in the late nineteenth century. After failed attempts by Western powers, Japan forcibly opened Korean ports in 1876 with a gunboat diplomacy that secured the unequal commercial Treaty of Kanghwa.[66] According to historian Michael Robinson, modern nationalism in Korea emerged during this time of transition in response to the injustices of the corrupt Choson political administration and to counter the increasing demands for Korean concession by foreign powers.[67]

The mass uprising by peasants in the Tonghak Rebellion of 1894 further confirmed that the ideals of social equality advocated by Korean intellectuals had been diffused to the masses in Korean society. Historian Kim Yong-sop observes, "Before the opening of the ports, the objective of reform was only to resolve the social contradictions of the time. Afterwards, reform was seen as necessary to achieve social reform, build a modern state, and develop agricultural commerce and trade through capitalist production."[68] Efforts to modernize the sphere of politics and society were essential for

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[66] The historian Louise Young points out that even as Japan cornered Korea under a "gunboat" diplomacy in1876, the Japanese administration was lobbying European diplomats for the revision of their own unequal treaties. According to Young, Japan began its career as a modern imperial power of Asia by "escaping its aggressors in order to become an aggressor itself," Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 23.

[67] For discourse that examines the two courses of "moderate" and "radical" nationalism in modern Korea, see Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*.

transforming and constructing Korea into a modern sovereign state. As such, Korean intellectuals recognized that strengthening a nation involved more than importation of Western technology; adoption of social and political institutions was also necessary.[69]

Voices arose amongst advocates who appealed for reform. In order to achieve the dual objectives of enlightenment and modernization, a growing number of Korean thinkers were no longer interested in emulating China. Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936), the foremost figure in the intellectual reform movement, stressed that key to fostering a *minjok* (Korean ethnic nationalism) consciousness was for Korea to reject its subordinate relation with China.[70] Sin criticized the Korean ruling elite's privileging of Chinese culture, which in serving the self-interests of the upper class had incapacitated indigenous culture.[71]

The integral factor that capitulated Korea's long-standing stance of *sadaejuŭi* (veneration of the Great) toward China was the unprecedented victory by Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1895-1895. Already exploring its imperial expansionist agenda, Japan mandated in the first clause of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that China terminate its age-old tributary ties with Korea. The Japanese strategy of attenuating

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[68] Kim Yong-sop, "The Two Courses of Agrarian Reform in Korea's Modernization," in *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, 40.

[69] Korean intellectuals who supported a gradualist policy of enlightenment included Kim Koeng-jip [Hong-jip], Kim Yun-sik, O Yun-jung, and Min Yong-ik. Those who advocated progressive measures were Kim Ok-kyun, Pak Yong-hyo, So Kwang-bom, and Hong Yong-sik. Initiatives for socio-political reform were not met with unified consent; Neo-Confucian members such as Yi Hang-no and Choe Ik-hyon, opposed system of thought that were derived from the West as well as Japan. See Yi Ki-baek, *A New History of Korea*, 275-299.

[70] For a full discussion of minjok, see Henry Em, "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," 336-361.

[71] James B. Palais, *Views on Korean Social History* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1998), 2-3.

Chinese involvement in Korean political affairs was to curtail Chinese military support. Without a strong militia, Japan recognized Korean court was mired in internal factionalism and was wide open for Japanese incursion.[72]

With the Eulsa Treaty of November 1905, Japan assumed a "protectorate" position over Korea. The reaction of Korean intellectuals, such as the newspaper publisher Chang Chiyŏn (1864-1921), was to incite the masses for collective mobilization. In the April 2, 1906 issue of *Hwangsong shinmun (The Imperial Capital News)*, Chang and his colleagues issued a "Manifesto of the Korean Association for Self-Strengthening." They proclaimed, "If we strengthen ourselves, become organized and united, we may look forward to our nation's prosperity and strength and also to the restoration of our sovereign powers."[73] Chang stressed the need for industry, education and especially knowledge of the world. He emphasized, "Development of the national spirit within and absorption of learning from without are today's urgent tasks."[74] The views expressed by Chang Chiyŏn and colleagues became the ideological basis for moderates seeking to gain national strength through a gradual process of reform. They

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[72] For an account of policies and forces that eventually led to the failure and demise of Choson dynasty, see James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 23-201.

[73] Chang Chiyŏn et al, "Manifesto of the Korean Association for Self-Strengthening" from *Hwangsong shinmun* (*The Imperial Capital News)*, April 2, 1906, trans. Han Kyo-Kim in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period, vol. 2*, ed. Peter H. Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). 415.

[74] Ibid., 416.

understood that an alternate agenda of program was required to supplant the former political system which had profoundly failed them.[75]

Colonial Convergence

On August 22, 1910, Japan formally occupied Korea as one of its colonies. Historian Mark R. Peattie notes Japan was able to annex Korea "due to the absence of effective power to resist it."[76] Divisions between the Korean moderates and radicals undermined attempts to produce a strong leadership as well as a coherent agenda for achieving national unity. With Japanese takeover, a vast majority of the Korean ruling elites were replaced with Japanese officials. General Terauchi Masatake was appointed as the first governor-general of Korea and a decade of *budan seiji* or Japanese "military rule" ensued.

Competing tensions in the political and social spheres notwithstanding, Japan strove to integrate Korea into its sphere of influence through political and social measures which also included cultural efforts.[77] Under the colonial education policy, Korean students were encouraged to study in Japan. Doing away with the need for visas or

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[75] The solution for gradual reform in Korea favored by the moderate nationalist group was challenged by the radical nationalists who advocated social revolution and overt resistance to Japanese imperialism. The radical nationalists were to set the foundations for Korean communism. For a fuller discussion of the rise of Communism in Korea, see Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972).

[76] Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 13.

[77] Taking a neo-nationalist stance, anthropologist and historian Hyung Il Pai presents the precedence established in colonial Korea of preservation and classification of Korean cultural material heritage in "The Colonial Origins of Korea's Collected Past," in *Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity*, ed. Hyung Il Pai and Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1998), 13-32.

passports encouraged the ease of travel between the colonies and Japan and attributed to the steady increase in Korean students studying in Tokyo.[78] For many young Korean men and a few young Korean women, access to higher education in Japan was more practical and realistic than the expensive, lengthy sojourn to Europe or the United States. Japan was conveniently proximate in distance and Koreans tended to face less restrictive language barriers there.[79] Moreover, prior to 1940, Korean students found they had greater liberty and faced less discrimination in the liberal atmosphere of Japan's Taishō Era (1912-1926) and early Showa Period (1926-1989) than in their oppressed homeland of colonial Korea which was under constant Japanese military surveillance.[80]

Accordingly, the number of Korean art students seeking to study in Japan also increased.[81] From 1924 to 1931, Korean as well as Taiwanese students were granted

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[78] In 1907, there were about five hundred Korean students studying in Tokyo. By 1920, the number had risen to seven hundred students, a 40 percent increase. Moreover, despite the racial tensions between the Japanese and immigrant Koreans following the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, the population of Korean students in Japan in 1931 rose to over three thousand and sixty students marking an increase of over 500 percent since 1920. Schmid, *Korea Between Empires,* 109.

[79] In the aftermath of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty, the Ordinary School Rescript of 1906 promoted incorporation of the Japanese language in Korean public and private schools. See E. Patricia Tsurumi, "Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 299. Thus, throughout the period of colonial rule, many educated Koreans were bilingual in Japanese. It was only in the 1930s with Japan's growing sense of national crisis and militancy that the mandate of Japanese-only language in Korean schools was enforced in 1938 and the imposition of the Korean name change to Japanese names was put into effect in 1939.

[80] According to personal accounts in Richard M. Mitchell study, Korean students were met with better reception in Japan than the lower class Korean migrant workers. See Mitchell, *The Korean Minority in Japan*, 1-58. For a discussion of Japanese surveillance in its colonial empires, see Ching'chih Chen, "Police and Community Control Systems in the Empire," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 213-239.

[81] In the 1920s, the number of Korean students who graduated from the department of *yōga* (Western-style or oil painting) at the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts) numbered sixteen. The 1930s figures estimated about fifty students and by end of the colonial rule in 1945 there were forty-six Korean students who graduated from the department of *yōga*. Numbers are taken from Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 177.

special admission over Japanese candidates based on liberal requirements to the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, the most prestigious state-run art institution in Japan.[82] Such educational support by the Japanese government exemplifies one aspect of the diverse range of policies devised for assimilating colonial subjects.[83]

As Stefan Tanaka the specialist of Modern Japanese History effectively demonstrates, with the rise of Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), Japan justified its ascension as the "Orient's West" to avoid the fate that befell South Asia and Southeast Asian countries as European colonies at the hands of Western imperial powers.[84] To establish Japan's hegemonic position, policy makers appropriated the imperialist vocabularies of the West as its own to secure political "survival" for Japan and also to "protect" China, Korea and eventually the Southeast Asian and South Pacific islands.[85] In order for

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[82] The special admissions policy granted that colonial students were not in direct competition Japanese candidates. According to Wang Hsiu-hsung, Taiwanese art historian, this policy was later cancelled because it lowered the institution's standards. Wang Hsiu-hsiung, "Development of Official Art Exhibition in Taiwan," in *War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia 1920-1960*, ed. Marlene J. Mayo, J. Thomas Rimer with H. Eleanor Kerkham (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 99. See also Yen Chuan-ying, "The Art Movement in the 1930s in Taiwan," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, University of Sydney East Asian Studies Number 7 (Broadway, NSW, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 51.

[83] According to the historian Louise Young, Japan's empire building included both formal and informal methods for control. Formal control was through colonial institutions such as the position of the Governor-General while informal consisted of military threat, market dominance and the cultivation of collaborative elites. Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 11.

[84] Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1993).

[85] Darwin's Origin of Species was introduced to Japan about twenty years after its publication in 1859 and according to the eminent Japanese historian Irokawa Daikichi, "overwhelmed political liberalism." Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, translation edited by Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 68-69. A more detailed study by the Korean historian Chu Chin-Oh reveals that it was the American Edward Morse who introduced (Herbert) Spencerian notion of Social Darwinism to Japanese intellectuals in the late nineteenth century which greatly influenced Japanese policy makers in their endeavors for socio-political advancement. See Chu Chin-Oh, "The Independence Club's Conception of Nationalism and the Modern State," in *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, 57-67.

administrators to achieve their goal, Japanese expansionism had to be articulated as beneficial. To justify Japan's seizure of Korea, colonial authorities promoted the ideals of *Nissen dōchi* (Japanese-Korean joint rule), *Nissen yūwa* (Japanese-Korean harmonization) and *kyōson kyōei* (co-existence and co-prosperity).[86]

Many influential Japanese thinkers believed education was the apt trajectory for the gradual molding of obedient and loyal colonial populace who would voluntarily participate and partake in Japanese identity through language, custom, attire, and eventually thought.[87] Education as the key means of assimilation seemed attainable due to the belief that Koreans were akin to Japanese in race and language.[88] The Japanese state's monolithic top-down approach had been met with considerable success by the designers of the Meiji Restoration. Yet, the Japanese model that more or less operated according to Eric Hobsbawm's interpretation of "invented" or imposed nationalism failed to be workable in Korea as the Korean majority rejected the belief that they were akin to the Japanese in race and language.[89]

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[86] There is much debate and criticism regarding Japanese policies of assimilation. Historian Michael Schneider has described them as "hallow language" while historian Mark R. Peattie notes the original purpose of *iishi dōjin* (impartiality and equal favor) was not construed as empty rhetoric but as a political conception of morality and justice derived from Chinese Confucian teaching. See Michael A. Schneider, "Limits of Cultural Rule: Internationalism and Identity in Japanese Response to Korean Rice," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea* and Mark R. Peattie, "Japanese Attitudes Toward Colonialism, 1895-1945," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 97.

[87] Included also were prominent Japanese intellectuals Tōgō Minoru, Mochiji Rokusaburō and Nagai Ryūtarō, ibid., 82, 100.

[88] Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 413-423.

[89] See Eric Hobsbawm, "The Nation as Invented Tradition," in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 76-83.

The paradoxical limitations and opportunities brought about by the onset of Japanese colonialism invariably produced varying degrees of accommodation and resistance. It is in this socio-political context that innovative Korean artists emerged. The first group of Korean art students to attend Tokyo School of Fine Arts to study Western-style painting was comprised of Ko Hui-dong, Kim Kwan-ho, Kim Chang-young and Lee Chong-wu. These students came from families of means that had the financial resources to support artistic studies in Japan. Moreover, Ko Hui-dong and Kim Kwan-ho were additionally assisted by government sponsorship that provided grants and scholarships to aspiring students. For many Korean students, Tokyo served as the portal to the world of Western art and its accompanying academic instruction since artistic education in oil painting was not yet available in Korea.

Encountering Western-style Painting in Korea

Drawings and woodblock prints encompassing Western-style elements of shading, modeling and single point perspective had been introduced to Korea since the seventeenth century through religious imageries accompanied in Jesuit texts. From Beijing, traveling Korean envoys and emissaries had brought back tracts written in Chinese by Catholic missionaries in Beijing.[90] It was from these images Korean art critic Lee Kyung-sung has argued that Western elements of perspective were appropriated as

[90] For a full account of Korean encounter with Catholicism, see Donald Baker, "Confucians Confront Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century Korea" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1983) and Jai-Keun Choi, *Early Catholicism in Korea* (Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005). See also Inshil Choe Yoon, "Martyrdom and Social Activism: The Korean Practice of Catholicism," in *Religions of Korea in Practice,* ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 355-362.

early as the eighteenth century by Korean ink painter Yi Hui-yong.[91] Likewise, Korean art historian Ahn Hwi-joon claims Western techniques are also noticeable in eighteenth-century paintings by Korean artists Kim Tu-ryang and Kang Se-hwang.[92] Nonetheless, I would argue comprehensive transfer of format as well as widespread acceptance of Western artistic techniques in images was hindered by its adverse association with the proselytizing faith of Catholicism. The egalitarian teaching of Catholicism ran counter to the Confucian precepts of social hierarchy. Therefore, Western images accompanying the text were associated with the religion of the West and were perceived by many Korean artists as antithetical to Asian culture and in violation of the long-standing tradition of ink painting.

As such it was not until the 1890's, with the opening of Korea in the waning years of the Choson dynasty, that Koreans were able to witness the naturalistic representations of the observed world produced through oil and watercolor paintings by traveling European and American artists who arrived in Seoul, the capitol of Korea.[93] English explorer and artist Arnold H. Savage-Landor (1865-1924) was the first known European to have arrived Korea in 1891 to paint scenes of Korean people in their rural setting. His watercolor plates were later published as accompanying images for his book *Corea or*

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[91] Lee Kyung-sung, "Influence of Western Painting Styles on Korean Art during the Late Yi Dynasty Period: On the Introduction of Western Painting," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 26 (June 1967): 56-66. Chung Saehyuang, "New Findings on Some Possible Artistic Sources of Kim Hongdo's 'Lunch,'" Acta Koreana 2 (July 1999): 67-90.

[92] Ahn Hwi-joon, "Korean Painting: Influences and Traditions," in *Korean Cultural Heritage*, *Vol. 1: Fine Arts,* 45.

[93] For a list of Western artists who arrived in Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Kim Yoon-su, ed., *Han'guk miseul 100 nyon = 100 Years of Korean Art* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 2005), 111.

Cho-sen, the Land of the Morning Calm (1895).[94] In 1894, the Scottish artist Constance J.D. Tayler also arrived to capture the daily lives of Koreans through paintings and photographs which forms the basis of her 1904 memoire *Koreans at Home: Impressions of a Scotswoman*.[95] The Dutch-American artist Hubert Vos (1855-1935) arrived in Seoul in 1898 and made a favorable impression with Min Sang-ho, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, who brought Vos to the attention of the Korean court. A year later, Vos attained a royal commission to paint a full length portrait of Korea's last emperor King Kojong (1852-1919) and a three-quarter portrait of Min.[96]

In March 1919, the English artist Elizabeth Keith (1887-1956) came to Seoul "to make a study of the Korean people."[97] Keith rendered scenes of local life and people through her use of watercolor to capture her "earliest impressions of the country" invoking everyday dress, customs and culture.[98] Unlike Korean ink painters who painted scrolls seated on the floors within the confined walls of private academies, many foreign artists such as Keith followed the modern European practice of sketching or painting *en plein-air*. Elspet Keith Robertson Scott, the sister of Elizabeth Keith recalled, "It was

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[94] Arnold Henry Savage-Landor, *Corea or Cho-sen, the Land of the Morning Calm* (London: W. Heinemann, 1895).

[95] Constance J. D. Tayler, *Koreans at Home: Impressions of a Scotswoman* (London, Paris, New York and Melbourne: Cassell and Company, 1904).

[96] Hubert Vos, *Emperor Kojong*, 1899, oil on canvas, private collection of the family. Image can be located in Kim Yoon-su, ed., *Han'guk miseul 100 nyon = 100 Years of Korean Art*, 45 and on the internet http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gojong-King_of_Korea-by.Hubert_Vos-1898-detail.jpg (accessed October 13, 2010).

[97] Elizabeth Keith and Elspet Keith Robertson Scott, *Old Korea: The Land of the Morning Calm* (London, New York: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1946), 18.

[98] Ibid., 7.

taken for granted….that my artist sister, accompanied by a native youth who helped to carry the sketching materials and held a big Korean parasol to shield the artist from the sun, should start off early every morning to find subjects."[99]

Crowds gathered to watch with curiosity the unusual sight of not just a foreigner, but a foreigner surrounded by odd objects who painted out of doors in an open public space. Keith notes such a serendipitous moment:

> Sketching in the open is often embarrassing….A servant appeared and I became the object of their talk. Now almost magically a crowd gathered and its persistent curiosity soon drove me off, but not before I had got a sketch of the shining lady, though I had to forgo any sketch of the attractive courtyard.[100]

Despite local fascination, however, transfer of artistic formats still failed to take place. Factors include lack of basic materials such as paint, canvas, palette and easel which were not yet available in Korea. Importantly, there was the absence of artistic instruction which provided training in oil painting. Foreign artists tended to be visitors, and due to the obstacle of language barrier, did not engage in teaching in Korea.

The influx of visiting Western artists to Seoul provided the next generation of emerging artists, especially those who held little or no artistic allegiance to traditional ink painting, opportunities to witness Western-style paintings first-hand. A portrait produced by the visiting foreign artist Léopold Remion from Sèvres, France inspired a young Korean student by the name of Ko Hui-dong.[101] Ko had begun his studies in French and

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[99] Ibid., 19.

[100] Ibid., 38.

[101] Léopold Remion was invited by the Korean government for the purpose of instituting a craft school but as the plan never materialized, he returned to France. Youngna Kim, *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea*, 8.

Western Culture in 1899 at the elite Hansŏng Language School. During his time at school, Ko observed Remion produce a watercolor portrait Ko's French teacher, Emile Martel.[102] Ko became intrigued with the high degree of naturalism represented in Western art and spent his spare time studying illustrations in his French textbooks.[103]

After graduation, Ko Hui-dong gained employment in the service of the court as a government administrator, yet his interest in art induced him to study ink painting in 1905 with the leading Korean masters Ahn Jung-shik and Cho Suk-jin. The requirements Ko was forced to follow in ink painting did not fulfill his need for artistic creativity. In a personal account written later on in his life, Ko expressed his disappointment with Korean painting which, according to his sentiments, merely mimicked Chinese prototypes:

> In order to draw a portrait….one only need to copy the paintings which the Chinese have executed and brought over [to Korea]. So it is with landscape paintings, architecture and even other miscellaneous such as still life in vase or fruit which can readily be duplicated from Chinese pictorial manuals. [Korean artists] do not know the meaning of the word creation, for they only praise Chinese paintings as skillful and excellent without any consideration of extending their efforts beyond codified standards.[104]

This passage reveals Ko's desire to seek out different ways to capture a world in flux, and here Korean painting proved conventional and limiting. Ko's need to locate a personal artistic expression and the educational policies to promote Japanese assimilation

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102 Hansŏng is the former name of present day Seoul. Biographical information of Ko Hui-dong is taken from Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 166.

103 Yi Ku-yŏl, "Kuk-gwon sangsil sok ui saroeun miseul taedong [Pulse of New Art Amidst National Loss]," in Kim Yoon-su, ed., *Han'guk miseul 100 nyon = 100 Years of Korean Art*, 143.

104 Ko Hui-dong. "Na *wa Choson Sŏhwa Hyophoe sidae [The Society of Calligraphers and Painters and Me]*," *Sin Cheonji* (New World), Feb. 1954, 181, excerpt reproduced in Yi, Ku-yŏl, *Kundae hangukhwa ui huerum [The Trajectory of Korean Eastern-style Modern Painting],*" 47.

created the context for Ko Hui-dong to embark for Japan on February 1909 at the age of twenty-four. In 1910, he was admitted to the department of *yōga* (Western-style painting) at Tokyo School of Fine Arts to begin the process of establishing his artistic voice.

Encountering Western-style Painting in Japan

Upon entry, Ko Hui-dong was to follow the European-derived academic format of artistic education. The curriculum was established by the department's influential director Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) who had studied oil painting for ten years in Europe. Japanese artists had a longer relationship with Western-style painting since the Meiji Era (1868-1912). In 1876, Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō (Technical Art School) was established as a branch of the Ministry of Industry and Technology with the utilitarian mission that "Western art was a requisite skill for the development of industry and science."[105] The Italian landscape painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882) from Turin Academy in Italy was invited to teach oil painting at the Technical Art School and was primarily responsible for introducing the French Barbizon style of painting to Japan. Since 1878 a flow of Japanese artists who had the financial means found their way to Paris to study under French academic painters.

Similar to his Japanese predecessors Goseda Yoshimatsu (1855-1915) and Fuji Masazō (1853-1916), Kuroda Seiki received the artistic honor of having his painting

[105] Minoru Harada, *Meiji Western Painting*, trans. Akiko Murakata (Tokyo: Shibundo; New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 29-33.

accepted at the 1891 Salon de la Société des Artists Français and the 1893 Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts.[106] Upon his return to Tokyo in 1893, Kuroda effectively mediated to Japan the late-nineteenth century European Naturalism and Impressionism as taught to him by the French academic painter Raphaël Collin (1850-1916).[107] Kuroda's light-infused *plein-air* technique with its distinctive bright colors and informal composition came to be known in Japan as "Academic Impressionism."[108] In 1896, the department of Western-style painting was established at Tokyo School of Fine Arts to focus on the medium and techniques of oil painting. As the department's foremost director, Kuroda advocated his eclectically adapted Western artistic style in the construction of Japanese images. "Academic Impressionism" thus became the protocol for *yōga* and immediately challenged the antithetical dark palette of the prevailing Barbizon-style paintings produced by the leading Japanese artists of the Meiji Fine Arts Society.[109]

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[106] Emiko Yamanashi, "Japanese Encounter with Western Painting in the Meiji and Taishō Eras," in *Japan and Paris: Impressionism, Post Impressionism, and the Modern Era*, 32.

[107] For a discussion on the rise of *yōga* and its challenges, see Mayu Tsuruya, "The Ascent of *Yōga* in Modern Japan and the Pacific War," in *Inexorable Modernity: Japan's Grappling with Modernity in the Arts*, ed. Hiroshi Nara (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2007), 69-78.

[108] For images of Kuroda's paintings which exemplify Academic Impressionism, see Kuroda Memorial Hall website:
Kuroda Seiki, *Kuroda Memorial Hall*, http://www.tobunken.go.jp/kuroda/index_e.html (accessed November 2, 2008).

[109] As the first oil painting organization in Japan, Meiji Fine Arts Society was founded in 1889 by a group of Japanese students after Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō (Technical Art School) was disbanded in 1883. Technical Art School was established in 1876 as a branch of the Ministry of Industry and Technology with the utilitarian mission that "Western art was a requisite skill for the development of industry and science." The Italian landscape painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882), who had trained at the Turin Academy, was invited to teach painting at the Technical Art School and is considered responsible for introducing the French Barbizon style of painting to Japan. See Minoru Harada, *Meiji Western Painting*, 29-33.

Whether students in the *yōga* department followed and adapted Kuroda's artistic style or later reacted against it, they nonetheless began their formal training by following the requirements of the artistic program.[110] In their first year of study, students sketched from plaster models. Their second year was dedicated to drawing from life using charcoal. They were not introduced to oil paint until their third year of study which was spent making copies of major works. In their fourth year, students were expected to submit a self-portrait and an original "graduation" to meet the department requirements for graduation. Of considerable artistic importance, the requisite assignment of producing a self-portrait continues to this day at the Tokyo University of the Arts (present name of Tokyo School of Fine Arts).

Although Kuroda had established department's program based upon traditional Western academicism, he encouraged technical and artistic innovations that went beyond direct observations of the physical world. As Japanese art historian Emiko Yamanashi notes, "[Kuroda] advocated that art should reflect the artist's thoughts and be a vehicle for self expression."[111] This enduring legacy of the visual autobiography that has been amassed for over a century remains firmly ensconced in the various repositories of the University Art Museum.[112] In search of renewed artistic expression, students were

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[110] Regarding the development of Tokyo School of Fine Arts in the late Meiji Era and its artistic curriculum as established by Kuroda Seiki, see Shūji Takashina et al, *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, 21-62.

[111] Emiko Yamanashi, "Japanese Encounter with Western Painting in the Meiji and Taishō Eras," 33.

[112] Self-portraits of Japanese students from early Taishō Era were presented at an exhibition entitled: "Graduation Works and Self-Portraits" from April 26 to June 30, 2002 at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, University Art Museum, See *Tokyo University of the Arts*, http://www.geidai.ac.jp/museum/exhibit/2002/selfportraits/portraits/portraits_en.htm (accessed November 2, 2008).

granted artistic liberties for individual creativity in the production of their self-portraits. Personal preference for artistic style, composition, palette, pose, attire, among others, was available as tools for individual self-expression.[113]

In his examination of self-portraiture by Japanese artists, art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki claims what had begun as "obligatory student exercise" came to be embraced as a mode of self-expression by Japanese artists in the 1910s and 1920s.[114] More than other genres produced in the medium of *yōga*, Winther-Tamaki indicates the tensions arising from the assertion of self in particular were more pronounced in self-portraiture: "The self-portrait – a representation generated through the artist's self-scrutiny in a mirror – entailed a most literal embodiment of otherness."[115]

In the following chapter I argue the artistic process of self-inquiry took on greater urgency for Korean artists because as colonial subjects they faced greater challenges in negotiating their tensions of otherness. The simultaneous act of envisioning one's self as "the other" authorized the Korean artists Ko Hui-dong, Lee Chong-wu, Chang Ik, and Park Kun-ho to assert their difference as a powerful visual reference to their national identity by upholding the very symbols that lent credence to their Korean identity.

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[113] With the exception of Ko Hui-dong's self-portrait which measures at 73 X 53 cm, self-portraits by Korean artists are painted on canvases measuring 60.8 X 45.7 cm, which seemed to have been the standard dimensions.

[114] Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Globalized Consciousness in Yōga Self-Portraiture," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*. The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art, ed. Jaynie Anderson. (The University of Melbourne, January 13-18, 2008): 847.

[115] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

Envisioning the National Self

Nationalism as a Signifier of Artistic Modernism

The mirror was a necessary aid for painting one's image. Artists in the West had traditionally relied on the mirror to capture their autobiographical image. Due to its close association, in sixteenth-century Venice, the genre of self-portrait was simply called a "portrait made in the mirror."[116] Likewise, it was through this reflecting device that Korean artists also began to explore their subjective selves in constructing their self-portraits.

The artistic experience of capturing one's own mirror-image opened the door for Korean students to engage with artistic modernism. In the following examination of self-portraits by the Korean artists Ko Hui-dong, Lee Chong-wu, Chang Ik, and Park Kun-ho, the heightened consciousness to merge one's self with nationalist ethos becomes evident. This subjective recognition proved to be fundamental in transforming the traditional Korean artistic practice of privileging the ruling elite into a modern expression of visually asserting the importance of the "common man."

Ko Hui-dong's 1915 *Self-Portrait (in ch'ungja kwan)* formally signals the release of artistic burdens regulating Korean Choson-era portraiture.

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[116] Improvements in glassmaking in early sixteenth century Renaissance had brought about the beginnings of self-portrait. For a brief account of the origins of Western self-portraiture tradition. Joanna Woodall, cites J. Fletcher, "Fatto al specchi": Venetian Renaissance Artists in Self-Portraiture," in *Fenway Court: Imagining the Self in Renaissance Italy* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1990-1), 45-61 in Joanna Woodall, "'Every Painter Paints Himself': Self-Portraiture and Creativity," in *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary* by Anthony Bond et al. (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), 18-19.

Figure 4
Ko Hui-dong (1886-1965)
Self-portrait (in ch'ungja-kwan), 1915
Oil on canvas, 73 x 53 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo
(Reprinted with permission from William Koh)

As a blank canvas presented itself as a platform for Korean artists to project their subjective identities, the fixed and immovable artistic codes that had dominated for over five hundred years throughout Choson dynasty were supplanted by new vocabularies in art. For Ko to depict his likeness was uniquely modern since it was historically uncommon for Korean artists to promote their visage, especially in youth, as the central subject of portraiture. Korean portraiture, as discussed in previous chapter, was strictly reserved for kings, prominent members of the court, and esteemed scholars and monks, many of whom had surpassed the venerable age of sixty. Rejection of earlier conventions

was fundamental in the development of modern painting for it signified a conscious search for a distinct Korean artistic identity. Freed from the requirements governing Korean professional painters using the medium of ink, Ko was at liberty to explore and represent his own image according solely to his personal imperatives.

The self-portrait reveals Ko's understanding of and engagement with *yōga* principles of "Academic Impressionism." Ko demonstrates this aspect through the techniques of modeling and shading to construct an image that closely reflected his likeness.[117] Ko's use of a bright palette and the effect of a single light source emanating from outside the upper right corner of the picture frame illuminate his form and thus negate the quality of flatness manifest in Korean portraiture.[118] By transforming the effect of two-dimensionality inherent in the tradition of ink painting to three-dimensional verism characteristic in Western oil painting, Ko has reconstructed the genre of Korean portraiture into a modern genre of self-portraiture.

This dramatic artistic shift is heightened by the visual underscoring of Ko's youthful countenance in which the neatly trimmed mustache has displaced the full beard conventionally worn by elderly officials and sages. In capturing his present form, Ko

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[117] Ko painted two additional self-portraits which are extant. The first undated piece is assumed by Korean art historians to have been painted by Ko in 1914 (National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul). This self-portrait was likely a practice for his 1915 self-portrait which was submitted to Tokyo School of Fine Arts. There is also a later self-portrait entitled *Self Portrait with a fan* by Ko which is signed and dated 1915. This was painted in Korea after Ko has returned home from his studies in Japan. Both self-portraits belong in the permanent collection of National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul although neither of them is on display. According to these two self-portraits as well as a photo taken of Ko at Tokyo School of Fine Arts, the 1915 *Self-portrait in ch'ungja-kwan* attests to a close physical likeness of Ko Hui-dong. A black and photograph of group portrait in which Ko is included can be located in Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi,* 159.

[118] While flattened forms in European paintings signaled modernist art, the very opposite was true in Japanese and Korean art where flatness was associated with traditional art and the depiction of verisimilitude was associated with modern science. Minoru Harada, *Meiji Western Painting*, 29.

Hui-dong has initiated another break in Korean artistic conventions. Accordingly, Ko's self-portrait is reinforced not as a commemorative object marking the deaths of ruling elites but as a modern visual expression that asserts the centrality of the artist as a subject worthy of depiction.

While Ko's portrait demonstrates the verisimilitude in keeping with the modern sensibility of Japanese *yōga*, his subjective portrayal distinctly references his nationalist self-construction. Ko's careful selection and prominent display of the *hanbok*, literally translated as "Korean clothes," vividly associates his modern identity with nationalist ethos. *Hanbok* differs from the *kimono* (indigenous Japanese robe) in its distinctive white *kit* (the stiff white collar) and long sash that securely closes the jacket in a frontal tie.[119] The consistent style of *hanbok* jacket extends to the blue *turumaki* (outer garment for men) Ko is wearing which indicates this self-portrait was likely produced during the colder months of late winter or early spring prior to his graduation in March.[120]

The emphasis of the Korean garment was deliberate and telling in the construction of Ko's artistic identity. Attire was and still is one of the most discernible ways East Asians are able to place one's provenance. Accordingly, national dress serves as a visible marker of one's national and cultural identity. Ko's synthesis of indigenous attire with his youthful countenance presents the visage of the sitter as a paragon of a Korean modern self. Ko's affirmation is confidently reiterated in the tiered *ch'ungja-kwan*

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[119] For a general history and information regarding elements of *hanbok*, see Aleasha McCallion, "Korean clothing" in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Clothing through World History*, ed. Jill Condra (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 221-227.

[120] The academic term in Japan and Korea usually begins from about March to early April and ends around February to March with most graduation ceremonies taking place in the month of March.

(banded house cap) which is placed boldly upon his head. Unlike the formal *samo* worn by the ruling nobility and discussed in the previous chapter, the *ch'ungja-kwan* did not serve an official purpose but rather a household cap worn indoors by the *yangban* class for propriety. An artist employed as a foreign official in Korean court, Foster H. Jenings accurately observed, "The Korean is never hatless" and even within his own house, his head was covered by a black mesh hat made from horsehair.[121] Ko Hui-dong's 1915 self-portrait thus elevates indigenous elements of the everyday attire into his distinctive expression of Korean identity.

It was crucial for Ko to assert his national status using the dialectics of the common and the everyday as signifying artistic modernism. The medium and techniques of oil painting, while altogether new for Korean artists, had been appropriated and assimilated in Japan as early as the 1870s for the pragmatic purpose of recording scientific and technical observations.[122] With his confident pictorial autobiography, Ko forthrightly takes his place as a modern artist alongside Japanese peers despite his subjugated status as a colonial minority. Similarly, as Ko studied and painted in the same classroom and studio with Japanese students, his finished self-portrait would have also been displayed in the "gallery of oil paintings" with the self-portraits by Japanese

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[121] Foster H. Jenings, "Korean Headdresses in the National Museum," in *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 162 and 169.

[122] For an introduction and development of oil painting in Japan, see Minoru Harada, *Meiji Western Painting*, and J. Thomas Rimer, "Tokyo in Paris/Paris in Tokyo," in *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting* by Shūji Takashina, J. Thomas Rimer with Gerald D. Bolas (Tokyo: Japan Foundation and St. Louis, Washington University, 1987, 33-43.

students of Tokyo School of Fine Arts.[123] As such, Ko's sense of distinction is displayed by his steady and direct gaze. Indeed, on the walls in which the self-portraits of the graduating students were displayed Ko's representation would have been a rare spectacle bearing the imprint of a lone Korean to the viewing audience who was primarily Japanese students and instructors.

The important identification of the *hanbok* as a signifier of modern consciousness of one's national identity was not limited to Ko. It appears repeatedly in self-portraits by later Korean artists who entered the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Among them was the Korean artist Lee Chong-wu. In 1918, at the age of nineteen, Lee left Hwanghae Province in northern Korea to study oil painting. Historical accounts of Lee Chong-wu are quick to emphasize his achievement as the "first" Korean artist to have traveled to Europe.[124] After graduating from Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1923, Lee went to Paris in 1925 to continue his artistic studies. During his years abroad, Lee gained unprecedented prestige as the first Korean to have his paintings selected for exhibition at the 1927 Salon d'Automne.[125] Despite the merits of Lee's paintings, we have to wonder if the young Korean artist's foothold into the venerable French establishment might not have been paved by earlier Japanese artists who also exhibited at the Salon d'Automne

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[123] American artist Blondelle Malone who spent time in Japan in 1903 recalls "the gallery of oil paintings" cited in Shūji Takashina et al., *Paris in Japan : The Japanese Encounter with European Paintin*g, 14-15.

[124] National Museum of Contemporary Art, *Kundae reul bonun nun = Glimpse into Korean Modern Painting* (Seoul: Sahm kwa kkum, 1997), 362.

[125] Ibid.

such as Kawashima Riichirō in 1913, Fujita Tsuguharu in 1920, and Saeki Yūzō in 1925.[126]

Before Lee Chong-wu left for Paris, he fulfilled the obligation of the *yōga* curriculum by constructing his *Self-portrait (in green chogori)* in 1923.[127]

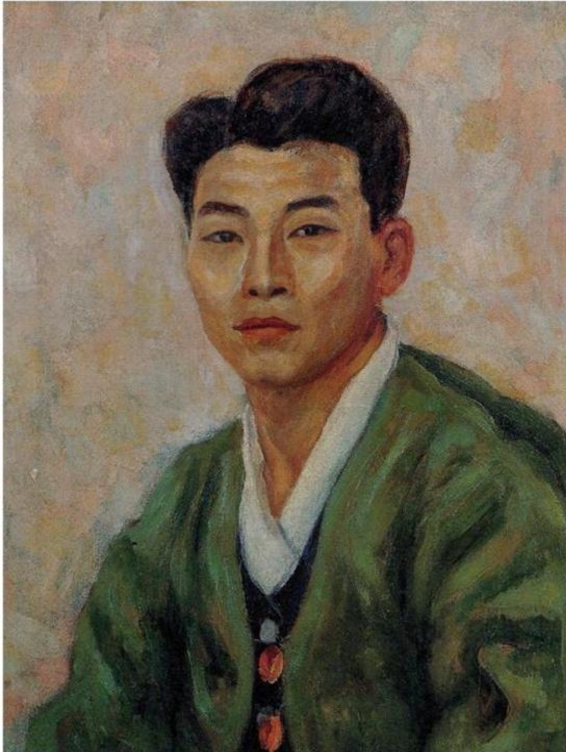

Figure 5
Lee Chong-wu (1899-1981)
Self-portrait (in green chogori), 1923
Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo
(Reprinted with permission from Lee Ju-hwa)

[126] References to Kawashima Riichirō and Fujita Tsuguhau are from Alicia Volk, "A Unified Rhythm: Past and Present in Japanese Modern Art," 50, 48 respectively and Saeki Yūzō is from Shūji Takashina et al., *Paris in Japan : The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, 110.

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Painted eight years after Ko Hui-dong had produced his 1915 self-portrait, Lee took the visual cue of *hanbok* from his Korean *sunbae* (one's senior) whose self-portrait the younger Korean would have witnessed on the walls of the school gallery. In comparing the two self-portraits by the Korean students, Lee's visual autobiography is marked by a bolder and dynamic palette of "Academic Impressionism" in which the vibrant colors of his silk brocade are prominently displayed. Moreover, the rigid bearing Ko holds in his pose has given over to a comfortable slouch in Lee's self-portrait in which the curves are echoed in the folds and creases of Lee's green *chogori* (jacket). The vibrant colors and the material of silk indicate that Lee's choice of *hanbok* was the Korean clothes reserved for holidays and special occasions.

Lee allows the undulating hue of the contrasting light and dark greens to slowly entice the viewer's vision into the picture frame. The expressive verdant color of his silk brocade jacket is heightened by the midnight-blue of his *chokki* (type of a vest) that is hinted underneath. The delicate detail of the two luminescent amber buttons on the center of the *chokki* serves to divide the picture into two equal planes. From the buttons, the eye is drawn upward by the white *kit* (collar) leading up to Lee's bare-faced countenance.

The absence of facial hair signifies Lee's modern self and is well echoed in the neatly shorn and jet-black hair which has been carefully groomed in the Western contemporary style. For Korean males, the act of cutting off one's hair had far greater consequences than was implied in the mere physical act. It exemplified a departure with

Confucian orthodoxy and acceptance of Western modernizing ideas. Historian Peter Duus notes:

> In nineteenth-century Korea, as in nineteenth-century Japan and China, hair was a matter of substantial cultural and political significance….Precisely for that reason the cutting of topknots had been advocated by reform-minded Koreans, especially those who had been refugees or students in Japan and the United States.[128]

For many opposition leaders, the topknot decree (1895 royal edict ordering all Korean men to cut off their hair) was one of the "two most concrete and vivid symbols of the assault on the old order."[129] The issue over men's hair became an ideological conflict well into the twentieth century resulting in rebellions and uprisings. Visual articulation of Lee Chong-wu's modern hair immediately demonstrated to the viewing audience the Korean artist's commitment to reform and modernization. Thus it may appear rather incongruent that in his self-portrait, Lee is depicted in a traditional *hanbok* rather than in Western contemporary attire which would have better represented his ideological endeavor for change. As such, Lee's self-portrait personifies the simultaneous tensions of embodying and disconnecting from a Korean past.

The artistic modernism embodied in Lee Chong-wu's self portrait is also exemplified by the vibrant colors of the background. Alternating in mottled colors of peach and sky-blue, the swirling design of the background that frame Lee's self-portrait are reminiscent of the dappled colors which was used by the Dutch Post-Impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh as backdrop in many of his self-portraits.

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[128] Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 115.

[129] Ibid.., 117. The assassination of King Kojong's wife Queen Min at the hands of Japanese and pro-Japanese Korean faction at court represented the second assault on the old order.

By 1923, Korean and Japanese artists would have been familiar with paintings by the European artists Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse and Vincent van Gogh. Beginning in the 1880s, Japanese artists had traveled to Paris to study Western art. By the Taishō Era, the artistic sphere of Japanese culture was deeply engaged with European art with special propensity for paintings by French artists. Artistic and literary journals such as *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art News) and *Mizue (Water)* abounded in Tokyo through which ideas about Western and Japanese art were disseminated.[130] The influential monthly magazine *Shirakaba (White Birch)* had been in circulation since 1910, formed by a group of Japanese writers and artists. The publication included reviews of French salon exhibitions and literary commentaries by notable Japanese writers of the era who were visiting or living in Paris. Photo reproductions of European paintings were included in *Shirakaba* as well as translations of essays by European artists including Vincent van Gogh's *Letters*, Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, and Henri Matisse's *Notes of a Painter*.[131]

The emphasis advocated by the Shirakaba group was on "self-expression," which according to art historian Alicia Volk was "grounded in the autonomous individual's subjective perception of nature" as opposed to the formal means employed by the

[130] *Mizue* was produced by ŌshitaTōjirō in 1905 in conjunction with the association Shunchōkai for the promotion of water-color painting. According to art historian Omuka Toshiharu, while the art journal *Bijutsu shinpō* provided "sophisticated contents" by famous Japanese writers and journalists, the popularity and longevity of Mizue rested on its "correspondence column" which was dedicated as the "The Readers' Domain" or "Readers' Discussions." For brief account of the emergence of *Mizue*, see Omuka Toshiharu, "The Formation of the Audiences for Modern Art in Japan," in *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*, ed. Elise K. Tipton and John Clark (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 50-60.

[131] Alicia Volk, "A Unified Rhythm: Past and Present in Japanese Modern Art," in *Japan and Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism, and the Modern Era*, 43.

artist.[132] Indeed, by the early decades of the twentieth century, an admixture of European artistic styles ranging from Impressionism, Postimpressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism had been introduced simultaneously, rather than in succession, to Japan that artists were at liberty to select and appropriate the styles which best suited their artistic visions. The very act of selectively reinterpreting a certain artistic style and synthesizing disparate elements was a distinct modern practice. For the benefit of the Korean artists, they had at their disposal the freedom to select artistic components from not only Western trends but also Japanese in order to achieve an eclectic style which became their own.

Asserting Rural Identity

Following the conventions of stratified class structure in Korea, royalty and *yangban* aristocrats had from 647 adopted the shifting styles of formal apparel from China. In contrast, commoners and lower members of Korean society remained draped in the unchanging style of the common everyday *hanbok* made from cotton and hemp.[133] During the early years of colonialism, the white *hanbok* was worn by over 80 percent of the Korean population who comprised the populace engaged in agriculture.[134] From rural landowners to tenant farmers, the white *hanbok* was a distinct signifier of rural identity

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[132] Ibid., 44.

[133] The origin of the hanbok is traced to the culture of the Chinese Manchurians who regularly wore white gowns or robes with large sleeves and pants. Aleasha McCallion, "Korean clothing" in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Clothing through World History*, 223.

[134] The percentage for Koreans involved in rural labor force is taken from Table 1 in Ramon H. Myers and Yamada Soburō, "Agricultural Development in the Empire," in The Japanese colonial Empire, 1895-1945, 424.

associated with the Korean soil and land. As such, the trope of the ubiquitous *hanbok* operates as an emblem of rural identity in Chang Ik's 1926 *Self-portrait (in white hanbok)* as well as Park Kun-ho's 1932 *Self-portrait (in white hanbok)*.

Figure 6
Chang Ik (?-?)
Self-portrait (in white hanbok), 1926
Oil on canvas, 60.8 X 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo

Figure 7
Park Kun-ho (1902-?)
Self-portrait (in white hanbok), 1932
Oil on canvas, 60.8 X 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo

(Both images are reprinted with limited permission by the Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo, solely for the purpose of this thesis.) [135]

While the vibrantly colorful *hanbok* as worn by Lee Chong-wu indicated occasions of special distinction, the sturdy and informal *hanbok* symbolized the quotidian essence of the common or the "every-man" in Korean society. In observing the

[135] All efforts have been made to contact the respective copyright holders. Please contact the publisher or the author of this thesis, Julie Chun, if you are the copyright holder.

ubiquitous native dress on the streets, the English artist Elizabeth Keith described it as the "white national costume."[136]

These two self-portraits produced by Chang and Park during their student years at Tokyo School of Fine Arts are the only extant artistic traces left behind by these marginalized artists. Grouped with a list of Korean artists who voluntarily departed or were forcibly taken to North Korea in the years prior to 1953, Chang and Park are summarily relegated as "artists lost in oblivion" in Koran art history due to the absence of their biographical information and lack of additional works of art. The dates of Chang Ik's birth and death remain unknown, as well as that of Park Kun-ho's death.[137]

An initial glance of the two self-portraits reveals that Chang Ik and Park Kun-ho eschewed the traditional practice of upholding social hierarchy and class differentiation which was the singular purpose in Korean portraiture. I contend these two self-portraits serve as antithetical images that counter and contest images of "meritorious" subjects. Traditional portraiture in ink depended heavily upon iconographic references for establishing the identity of the sitter. For Chang and Park, the single qualifying element attributed to their self-portraiture is the commonplace *hanbok* which resolutely displaces the identity of the small spectrum of elite Korean society with that of the masses. The prosaic garment thus takes on central significance as the embodiment of the subject and worthy of the viewer's independent regard.

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[136] Elizabeth Keith and Elspet Keith Robertson Scott, *Old Korea: The Land of the Morning Calm*, 7.
[137] For the barest of information regarding Chang Ik and Park Kun-ho, see National Museum of Contemporary Art, *Kundae reul bonun nun = Glimpse into Korean Modern Painting*, 356 and 364.

Although the color of white can assume a limiting palette, both artists were able to uniquely define his self-portrait with the one single color that succinctly described the visual characteristic of the Korean rural population. The ability of exploiting the expressive shades of white was possible with the medium of oil pigment in which Chang-Ik's self-portrait is rendered in loose painterly style, while Park Kun-ho's linear treatment is produced with a high degree of naturalism that the veneer radiating from the oil painting appears like a gloss from a photograph.

Both self-portraits are distinctly modern for employing unconventional compositions not found in traditional Korean portraiture. Chang Ik's visage looks down at the viewer from a higher vantage. Despite the elevated position, Chang's self-portrait distinctly opposes the principles of ancestor portraiture by engaging the viewer. The purpose of Chang's gaze is not to disregard or admonish the viewer, but rather to beckon and draw the viewer into a visual dialogue with the subject of the painting. The artist's gaze seems to be scrutinizing the viewer who is looking up at his portrait yet the look is hardly aloof or condescending. It is beckoning as if he is on the verge of asking a question for which he seeks the viewer's reply.

In contrast to the averted and foreboding gaze of Korean ancestral portraits, the returned gaze of the colonial artist in their self-portrait marks an integral aspect of the modernist viewing experience in which the gap between the object and subject is attenuated. As the art historian Wolfgang Kemp observes,

> … the beholder approaches the work of art, the work of art approaches him, responding to and recognizing the activity of his perception. What he will find first is a contemplating figure on the other side of the divide. This recognition, in other words, is

> the most felicitous pointer to the most important premise of reception aesthetics: namely, that the function of beholding has already been incorporated into the work itself.[138]

The gaze of the self-portraits by the colonial artists Ko, Lee, Chang and Park is distinctively modern for engaging the viewer. The dialectic viewing experience is critically important for shifting the viewing experience from didactic veneration to one of reciprocal engagement. The modern vocabulary of self-portrait moves beyond the exterior representation of appearance of the sitter by providing access to the interiority of the artist.

Park Kun-ho's 1932 self-portrait attests to this pictorial connection. The subject is situated on the same level as the beholder such that he seems to be on equal physical terms with the viewer. From this angle, the viewer's attention is immediately absorbed by the white expanse of the artist's garment in which Park's *hanbok* takes up majority of the picture frame indicating its visual and symbolic importance. Soft gradations of gray define the folds of the jacket as Park is literally embodied in the broad expanse of the white cloth. The essence of timelessness prevails because the unchanging style of the white *hanbok* is visible even today in rural provinces of Korea. In his self-portrait, Park Kun-ho symbolically unifies his physical body with his national self.

Traditionally, those in Korean society who had neither rank nor office, and especially the large sector of peasant populace, were not considered worthy of visual commemoration. No ancestral temples or portrait shrines were erected in their honor. Korean portraiture thus perpetuated not only Confucian precepts of social hierarchy and

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[138] Wolfgang Kemp, "The work of art and its beholder: the methodology of the aesthetic of Reception," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith. Moxey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 181.

stratification during life but also one's memory in death. With oil painting, Korean artists could suspend past restrictions and by self-fashioning their own portraits, they could subjectively concretize the abstract conditions of modernity.

Hanbok as an expression of national identity was a frequent trope embraced by Korean students who constructed their self-portrait at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Kang Pil-sang (1903-?) depicted himself in the *hanbok* in his 1928 *Self-portrait,* as did Im Hak-sun (1904-?) in his 1931 *Self-portrait*. There exists very little information regarding these two obscure artists. Kim Yong-joon (1904-1967) also clothed his image in indigenous clothes in his 1930 *Self-portrait*. Similar to many artists who went to North Korea during the Korean War, little is known about Kim Yong-joon except for the confirmation of his death in 1967. In addition to self-portraits, the national dress was also a central motif for artists such as Kim Chong-tae (1906-1935) who did not attend the Tokyo School of Fine Arts but studied oil painting in Japan with a Japanese instructor. Abundance of extant portraits by Korean artists evinces that the theme of the common Korean men, women and even children was recurrently evoked with the identifier of the national dress.

As an iconic representation of the general Korean populace, *hanbok* was asserted as a modern signifier for national identity to visually describe the rural peasants and the common man rather than the elite *yangban*. Such selective appropriation and re-assignment of visual symbols reveals the modernist intent achieved by the Korean artists working in their new-found medium of oil. Thus the paradigm of "classical civilization" rooted in the tradition of ink painting was able to give way to a modern "imagined

community" with the advent of oil painting adapted as a contemporary artistic practice for Korean students. According to Prasenjit Duara, nationalism is a phenomenon that "registers difference even as it claims a unitary or unifying identity."[139] With the inception of self-portraiture, the purpose of the indigenous attire was transformed from its former iconographic status of aristocratic distinction to a modern symbol of a shared Korean culture and identity of the masses.

[139] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* , 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

Negotiating the Tensions of Modernity

Tensions Within

The artistic commitment to express one's identity within a national context while transcending the boundaries of traditional Korean art was dramatically achieved by the young Korean artist Kim Chan-young in his 1917 *Self-portrait (in landscape)*.

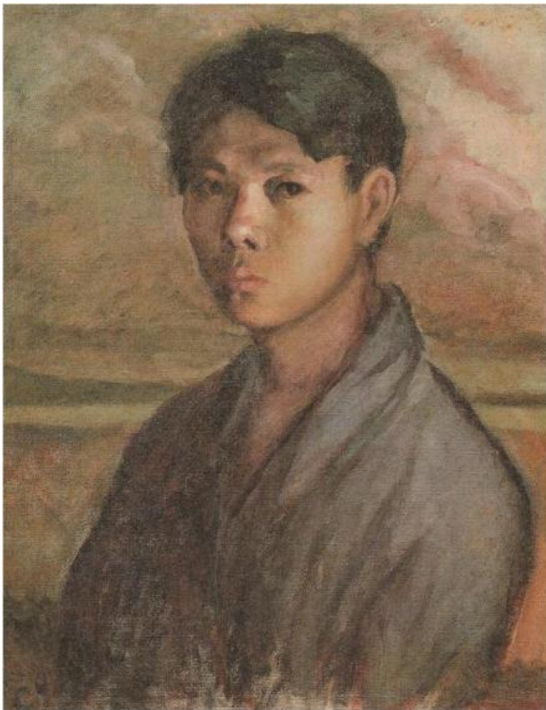

Figure 8
Kim Chan-young (1893-1960)
Self-portrait (in landscape), 1917
Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo
(Reprinted with permission from Byungki Kim)

Kim was born into an affluent family in P'yŏngyang in northern Korea and was able to receive his secondary education in Tokyo. Interest in Western art led Kim to

enter the department of *yōga* at Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1912 at the age of nineteen. While a prolific artist, Kim Chan-young's 1917 self-portrait and a graduation painting, also completed that same year, depicting two Asian female nudes by a well entitled *The Death of a Nymph* are the only extant traces of his work.[140]

Like many Korean students who were able to study at Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Kim Chan-young came from a prosperous landed family and had been noted as "the son of the wealthiest family in the community."[141] His family had amassed large land holdings in P'yŏngyang prior to colonialism and managed to hold onto their share during the Japanese occupation. The financial importance of Kim Chan-young's family estate may explain in part why he chose to render his self-portrait with the inclusion of a landscape in the background. Yet, the following reveal certain contradictory factors.

In contrast to the tradition of eighteenth-century English portraiture in landscape, Kim Chan-young's self-portrait does not represent the artist as a wealthy noble. Rather, Kim is devoid of attire and accoutrements which would proclaim his standing as part of the aristocratic *yangban* class. Kim is clad in a drab gray robe that resembles a laborer's jacket such as one would have worn in the studio as he worked on his paintings. The solitary ambience is visually reinforced by the somber and ominous background of the landscape. Despite the *yōga* criteria for a light and bright palette, the force of the foreboding clouds in the horizon seem only to be gaining greater momentum. The

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[140] A black and white photo reproduction of *The Death of a Nymph* can be found in Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 178.

[141] Kim Chul-ho, "Introduction of New Acquisitions: Introducing Photographs of Kim Chang-young," *Archives of Korean Art Journal,* vol. 4 (December 2005): 126-130.

collective artistic elements incorporated by Kim in his self-image produce an effect of discord and unease rather than a pictorial affirmation of landed aristocracy.

The self-portrait further evinces the focus of the painting is not solely the artist but rather he willingly shares the privileged space with the landscape. The natural elements representing the body of water, hills on the horizon and the immense expanse of the cloud-filled sky are important features the artist is bringing to the viewer's attention. While the viewer is addressing the image of the artist, our eyes are simultaneously drawn into the picture plane to a pool of still water that fills the lower half of the painted canvas. The silent river leads the viewer's eyes upward until it is interrupted by the strip of green ravine which slices the canvas horizontally at midpoint. The river wraps around the low hills before it picking up and winding out toward the horizon to engage with the brooding celestial space that dominates the upper half of the painting.

According to Kim Byung-ki, the eldest son of the artist, the calm water represents the famed Taedong River that flows near the artist's childhood home in North Korea.[142] As the Han River serves as an emblematic landmark of South Korea, Taedong River is also a resolute physical marker of northern peninsular identity. Like the visual signifier of the *hanbok*, Korean artists such as Kim Chan-young re-conceptualized and thus laid claim to indigenous local sites such as the Taedong River.

The brooding and omniscient clouds in the background exemplify the inner apprehension and anxiety that prevail in the visage of the artist. Kim's grim expression that gazes directly out at the viewer appears forlorn and underscores the reality of the

[142] Byungki Kim, interview by author, Pasadena, CA, September 19, 2009.

young artist who was displaced from his country and family. By 1917, the same year Kim Chan-young executed his self-portrait, Koreans were facing the harsh rule of martial suppression by Field Marshal Hasegawa Yoshimichi who replaced Terauchi Masatake in 1916 as the second Governor-General of Korea. Realizing he was leading a relatively normalized life in Tokyo while his country faced political and social turmoil, Kim Chan-young used his self-portrait as a platform to express his personal tensions.

He may also have been responding to the Japanese artist Takamura Kōtarō who emphasized the importance of artist's individual and authentic subjectivity as a crucial facet of artistic creation. As early as 1910, Kōtarō wrote essays in the *Shirakaba* stressing the need for internalization in art and literature.[143] Kim Chan-young's subjective self-portrait thus follows Takamura's dictum that creativity must spring from a unique and personal response to one's relationship with the physical world.

Kim's self-portrait may be his only extant painting, but it stands as the first self-portrait in landscape in the history of Korean art. This self-portrait is thus important as a pioneering work of art and also for revealing the subjectivity of the artist in the context of a landscape that exemplified Korea as his home and nation. Kim accepted the challenge of Western art, not merely because it was a prevalent contemporary artistic practice in Japan as well as abroad, but because the means and methods were suitable for following the artist's inner demands.

[143] Takamura Kōtarō's famous manifesto which describes the expressionistic nature of art is expounded in his essay "Green Sun" written in 1910. Cited and translated in J. Thomas Rimer, "Tokyo in Paris/Paris in Tokyo," 60.

Tensions of Ambivalence

Self-portraits which expressed national identity and artistic subjectivity were critical in the construction of a modern art. Accordingly, self-portraiture was a prime platform for Korean artists to record and articulate the economic changes accelerated by the socio-political conditions of modernity and colonialism. Japanese colonialism brought about an increase in the migration of Japanese people seeking opportunities in Korea in private and public Japanese ventures.[144] While Korea was not yet a capitalist society, modernization reforms in agriculture, land survey, taxation and the establishment of infrastructure for industrialism operated to accelerate the arrival of global commodities into Korean society. Similar to many emerging cities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, Seoul was experiencing a steady yet uneven transformation as an emerging urban center.[145]

With the rise of the small albeit expanding middle class and the sustained affluence of the *yangban* upper class, an increasing number of foreign items became available for Korean consumption. The use of images to cultivate desire was reinforced in the advertisements of *Maeil sinbo (Daily report)*. This Korean daily was the only newspaper to be granted a publishing license by the Japanese governor-general office in

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[144] For factors that led to Japanese economic enterprises in Korea, see Peter Duus, "Economic Dimensions of Meiji Imperialism: The Case of Korea, 1895-1910," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 128-171. Regarding economic development in Japanese colonies, see "Part III: The Economic dynamics of the Empire" in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 347-452.

[145] See Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire; the Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

1910 until publication restrictions were eased after 1920.[146] Visual enticement was effective in introducing alien material objects into the consciousness of the Korean masses whether they were literate or not since even the illiterate could visually engage with images. Illustrations and photographs of tennis rackets, phonographs, cigarettes, condensed milk, and other Western and Japanese products inundated the advertisement as objects of desire.

Many Western objects proliferating into Korean society possessed an aura of enchantment, and they were enticingly packaged and presented in order to capture a segment of the domestic market. Exemplified on page four of March 19, 1912 *Maeil sinbo*, a carton of American cigarettes is cleverly labeled as "Wealth Cigarettes." The name of the product is cleverly poised to pique the interests of the public who might be enticed to seek out the item upon putting the paper down. The association of the foreign product with affluence was a recurrent theme in many of the advertisements. Subsequently, the most ordinary and commonplace Western contemporary objects such as eyeglasses, pocket watches, wing-tip shoes and fedoras took on a larger-than-life material significance as status symbols of wealth and luxury for the urban Korean populace.[147]

A product that found favor with Korean males was a wide array of Western-style hats such as the bowler, fedora, derby, straw boater and other contemporary varieties. Headdress in Korean society historically functioned as more than a utilitarian cover; it

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[146] For an account of Korean newspaper history, see Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919*, 47-54. Regarding the revision of Taehan maeil sinbo to Maeil sinbo, see 136-138.

[147] *Maeil sinbo*, advertisement, April 21, 1918, 4 in *Maeil sinbo-sa*, vol. 12, 664.

served a specific purpose as a visual marker of upper-class distinction. As discussed in previous chapter, the Korean *yangban* such the artist Ko Hui-dong would have rarely left their heads uncovered even within their own homes. While the Korean headdress was differentiated by distinctive styles according to specific function and social status of the wearer, the Western hat mainly served the utilitarian purpose of covering one's head as an act of social decorum.[148] To the general Korean observer, the significance of the alien headpiece would have appeared ambiguous.

Constructing an identity based on the ever-evolving and pluralist conditions of modernity involved conflicting and competing tensions especially during colonialism. One such artist who sought to visually concretize the reality with illusions was Kim Kwan-ho who in 1911 was the second Korean artist to enter the Tokyo School of Fine Arts at the age of twenty-one. Kim was also from landed wealth in northern Korea. Due to his family's affluence, Kim was able to travel frequently between Tokyo and Seoul. In his 1916 *Self-portrait*, Kim's artistic identification with modernism involved a careful negotiation of foreign Western elements that were permeating into the realm of Korean daily life. By his deliberate choice of a Western fedora, Kim Kwan-ho's 1916 *Self-portrait* (*in Western attire)* attests to the tensions of ambiguous significations.

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[148] Foster H. Jenings, "Korean Headdresses in the National Museum," in *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, vol. 45 (January 1904): 149-167.

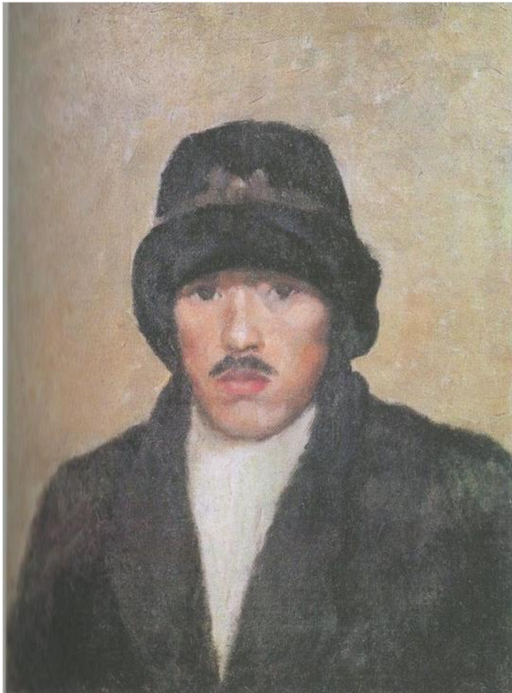

Figure 9
Kim Kwan-ho (1890-1959)
Self-portrait (in Western attire), 1916
Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo
(Reprinted with permission from Kim Young-min)

In contrast to the self-confident images projected by Korean artists in their *hanbok*, Kim's self-portrait is fraught with unease and anxiety. The intimidation of the bow on the fedora as well as the touch of pink blush on Kim's cheeks offers an unsettling juxtaposition to his iconically masculine mustache. A sense of ambivalence and confusion pervades Kim's self-portrait as the artist is engulfed in a black Western-style jacket that is too large for his body and appears to be weighing down upon his shoulders like a heavy burden. Kim's portrayal is a literal depiction of one who is uncomfortably displaced in his foreign attire, as if the clothes were borrowed and did not belong to him.

In Kim Kwan-ho's 1916 self-portrait, the subject is divided by the very forces which simultaneously liberate and repress him. While Western culture offered material resources such as oil painting which provided Kim the means to capture contemporary life, it also unleashed an array of consumer goods which were oftentimes unfamiliar and disconcertingly foreign. Kim's family affluence had exposed him to a wide array of Western consumer goods while in Korea. He dabbled in tennis and took a keen interest in shooting rifles at outdoor ranges.[149] Thus, Kim's 1916 self-portrait is revealing for expressing the self as ambivalent rather than empowered. The tension of negotiating the modern elements of the novel into the personal sphere of the familiar was a challenge for Kim as exemplified by the construction of his image based upon notions of incongruity.

The struggle which Kim faced was a necessary step. It led him to the next platform, which was a large canvas of two bathing women he submitted as his culminating graduation project. Kim's portrayal of two standing female nudes bathing by a stream entitled *Sunset* (1916) was singled out over works by Japanese artists to receive the prestigious Tokyo School of Fine Arts graduation prize.[150] It was also selected for the Bunten (the annual Japanese exhibition modeled after the French Salon d'Automne) where it took a special prize.[151] Kim was the first Korean artist to receive distinction in

[149] Byungki Kim, interview by author, Pasadena, CA, September 19, 2009.

[150] A full page colored image of Kim Kwan-ho's *Sunset*, 1916 can be found in Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 174.

[151] Bunten is the shortened name for *Monbusho Bijutsu Tenrankai* (Ministry of Education Art Exhibition) which was inaugurated in 1907 in Tokyo by the Japanese state. The juried section consisted of Western-style painting (*yōga*), Japanese-style painting (*nihonga*) and sculpture. See Minoru Harada, *Meiji Western Painting*, 114-134.

the sphere of official Japanese art. The reasons for his success had much to do with his selective subject matter of the nude as well his innovative composition. In his graduation painting, Kim had finally worked out the vexing questions he was struggling with in his self-portrait. By selective adaptation of the foreign, whether it was Western or Japanese, Kim had tailored to his needs that which once seemed borrowed and ill-fitting.

Tensions of Dual Identity

The theme of ambiguity and discord was to resurface in the self-portrait by Do Sang-bong (1902-1977).

Figure 10
Do Sang-bong (1902-1977)
Self-portrait, 1927
Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 45.7 cm
Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo
(Reprinted with permission from Toh Yun-hee)

While attending high school in Korea, Do had taken an active part in the historical anti-Japanese mass resistant movement on March 1, 1919. For his involvement in the demonstration, Do was arrested and cited for "breach of public order" and fomenting anti-Japanese sentiments and thereby sentenced to six months in prison.[152] On April 1, 1920, Do Sang-bong completed his four year high school education and left for Japan to study oil painting at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Do completed his self-portrait in 1927, which indicates that he was in Japan for about seven years which is longer than the average span of four to five years spent by most Korean students at Tokyo School of Fine Arts.

The slightly foreshortened composition in which the subject looms largely over the viewer indicates Do's familiarity with photography and alternate angles employed by Western artists such as Edgar Degas.[153] During his extended tenure in Tokyo, Do was exposed to original and reproduced paintings by European artists. Previously mentioned in Chapter Three, as early as 1910, the influential monthly magazine *Shirakaba (White Birch)* was established by a group of Japanese writers and artists. Concurrently, *Shirakaba-ha* (White Birch Society) held public exhibitions of original and photographically reproduced works of art that introduced European modern and classical paintings to wide audiences in Japanese society. Original European works of art were provided by the emerging group of wealthy *zaibatsu* (Japanese financial conglomerates)

[152] Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 133-135.

[153] There are inadequate critical studies on the topic of early photography in Japan or Korea. For a general survey with accompanying prints by early Western photographers who practiced in Japan and Korea, see Terry Bennett, *Photography in Japan, 1853-1912* (Tokyo; Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 2006) and by the same author, *Korea Caught in Time* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 1997).

leaders. Amongst many, notable men included Ōkura Kihachirō (1837-1928) who established the first private Japanese private museum in Tokyo in 1917 and Matsukata Kōjirō (1865-1950), the president of the Kawasaki Shipping Company, who had amassed a collection of more than 1,700 European paintings including works by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne, and Edgar Degas, to name but a few.[154]

Do Sang-bong's self-portrait is a clear execution of *yōga* Academic Impressionism. The single light source projecting from the right illuminates the work's bright palette and bold colors. The backdrop of the beech-colored door with handles depicted as stylized circles further enhances the ambience of lightness in the self-portrait. Yet the play of light background and colorful stripes on the sitter's sweater is juxtaposed by the heaviness and solemnity of the artist's physical form as well as his gaze. While seemingly confident in his spiral three-quarter pose, Do's upper body emerges disproportionately large in relation to his head. The massive rendering of the left arm and shoulder hints as well as the misshapen torso suggests a body that appears physically unnatural. The split elements of horizontal and vertical lines, warm and cool colors as well as casual and formal attire lines also lend themselves to the dichotomy of tensions embodied in the self-portrait. The vibrantly warm colors of yellow and orange on Do Sang-bong's casual sweater draws the viewer's eyes into the painting where they are punctuated by the cool blue horizontal stripes that lead the eye to the vertical blue pin-

[154] An account of European art collecting can be located in Christine M. E. Guth "Modernist Painting in Japan's Cultures of Collecting," in *Japan and Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism, and the Modern Era*, 13-27.

striped dress shirt. The stark black cravat echoes the lines on the shirt and is further reiterated in the axis of the line dividing the door panels.

The juxtaposing elements in Do's self-portrait hint at the tensions arising from dual identity. For Korean students, there was the tension of accommodating dual cultures. As a Korean, Do was living and studying in Japan where the language, food and custom were distinctly different from those of Korea. In order to study and live alongside Japanese students, Korean students had to behave like Japanese students yet regardless of years spent in Japan, Korean students realized they could not nor did they desire to become Japanese. Despite policies of assimilation to ease young Koreans to Japanese education and culture, the divisions which legally and culturally separated the Koreans and the Japanese were, nonetheless, real and concrete.

The Japanese colonial administration's strictures for assimilation had prompted the state-sponsored Tokyo School of Fine Arts to reduce its entrance requirement for foreign students until 1929. This policy, according to Youngna Kim, however, did not grant Korean students teaching certificates upon graduation to work in Japan.[155] Without the certificate, Korean artists could not find employment in Japan but were forced to return to colonial Korea. According to Chungmoo Choi, a specialist in East Asian Studies, the colonial policy of assimilation was a "double discourse" which simultaneously fostered alliance and separatism.[156] As Choi contends, assimilation

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[155] Youngna Kim, *20th Century Korean Art*, 129.

[156] Chungmoo Choi, "Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, 353.

constructed the illusion of *ittai* (one body) which under *naisan ittai* (Korea and Japan as a single body) purported to subsume the periphery into the center. However, ideological contradictions and discriminatory practices ensued due to the inability to enforce such assimilative policies. The result was perpetuation of social inequality which only served to underscore the politics of hierarchy and differences. Such realities operated to foster disjunction for Korean students who were impeded by the tensions of physical displacement.

The canvases of Korean self-portraits by Kim Kwan-ho and Do Sang-bong emerge as a personal confession of each artist's desire to take part in the large scope of global modernity which also had to negotiate the realities of what Duara terms colonial "boundedness." While on the façade Korean students could not be differentiated from their Japanese colleagues especially in Western attire, the limitations established by the colonial rule could not readily blur their difference of "otherness."

The conditions and contradictions of colonial rule provided not only the means but also the space for the Korean artist to paint according to the demands of their inner necessity. The implication of colonial rule attests to the ambivalence experienced by Korean students for whom the elite education in Tokyo was both a privilege and a responsibility. Kim Kwan-ho's self-portrait corresponds to Duara's claim that "the self is constituted neither primordially nor monolithically but within a network of changing and often conflicting representations."[157] The conflicting representations found their visual voice in the medium of oil painting with the construction of self-portraits. While each

[157] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 7.

painting is a unique expression created by the hand of an individual artist, we as viewers can witness the artist's sense of loss and gain, as well as aspirations and discouragement which are carefully inscribed on the canvas of the self-portrait.

Negotiating Artistic Modernism

Regrettably, the Korean artists focused in this study did not leave written accounts in the form of diaries or journals of their time in Tokyo. Their silence may be attributed to the public perception that wealthy and elite Koreans during colonialism operated as Japanese collaborators. Thus as they returned to Korea and many took up teaching positions at private art academies, they went about their daily lives without reference to their experience in Japan. Their memories in Tokyo likely became overshadowed by anti-colonial sentiments during Japanese occupation and buried under nationalist sentiments with the liberation of Korea in 1945. Yet despite politicized tension during colonialism, visual traces left by Koreans artists attests to the integrative exchanges that occurred in the sphere of the arts. The artistic education and encounters experienced by Korean artists in the metropole of Tokyo came to play a critical role upon their return to Korea. With their newfound knowledge, Korean artists trained in Japan engaged in pivotal roles to establish the structural basis for Korean modern art by informing and mobilizing public consciousness.

In their desire to construct to locate a new form of art which diverged from stagnant artistic conventions that had mostly served the needs of the upper class society, Korean artists trained in Japan mediated to their indigenous country the techniques and

practice of European oil painting as a visual signifier of artistic modernism. Oil painting, as a new visual construct, provided the space for Korean artists to discover and define their self-identity within the framework of colonialism.

After graduating from Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Kim Kwan-ho held a solo exhibition on December 1916, marking the first of many one-person oil painting exhibitions that were to follow by Korean artists. In 1925, Kim Kwan-ho, with fellow graduate of Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Kim Chan-young (and later joined by Lee Chong-wu in 1928) established the Saksŏng Art Institute in P'yŏngyang where they provided Western-style artistic education in oil painting.

Upon his return to Korea in 1915, Ko Hui-dong was one of the organizing members who formed Sŏhwha hyŏphoe (Society of Painters and Calligraphers) in 1918. This unique consolidation of artists working in the traditional and contemporary mode marked the inception of a truly modern artistic society in Korea. In 1921, the society instituted an annual public fine arts exhibition called Hyŏpchon held at Joong-ang School in Seoul.[158] The inception of the Hyŏpchon was unprecedented because it provided the first democratic space for cultural consumption of art in Korean history. Since literati paintings had exclusively been confined for private viewing by the upper class, the exhibition opened the forum for public displays of art. Situated alongside ink paintings and calligraphic works on paper and silk scrolls were oil paintings on canvas by Korean artists who had returned from Japan. The formation of a cohesive site for Eastern and

[158] The following year in 1922, Hyopchon was challenged by the Choson Art Exhibition which was established by the Japanese colonial government and lasted until 1944. Hyopchon came to an end in 1936 after fifteen exhibitions. Kim Yoon-su, ed., *Hanguk misul 100 nyon = 100 Years of Korean Art,* 280-81.

Western-styles of art also provided a challenge to Korean ink painters who, while adhering to the traditional medium, engaged in the use of wider ranges of color as well as single point perspective to create depth and realism in their works. The following year in 1922, Ko and his colleagues published the first Korean art journal entitled the *Sŏhwa Hyophwa Hŏebo (Bulletin of the Society of Painters and Calligraphy)*. Although short lived, this publication served as a significant endeavor in the promotion and exchange of artistic discourse among Korean artists.

Published accounts by Taiwanese scholars, notably Wang Hsiu-hsiung and Yen Chuan-ying, claim benefaction of Japanese and Taiwanese artistic interaction during Formosa's colonialism which took place from 1894 to 1945.[159] They contend that Japanese faculty from Tokyo School of Fine Arts were supportive in instructing and assisting Taiwanese students in Japan as well as those on the island. While the implication and impact between what took place in the two major colonies can be subject to debate, we cannot dismiss that Japan was the portal for colonial students, especially during the early years of the twentieth century, to attain a Western-modeled artistic education. This process of negotiation attests that in spite of ensuing political tensions

[159] Although colonial rule varied between Korea and Taiwan, I believe that comparative art historical studies will endorse that beneficial aesthetic interaction was possible under colonialism. For a discourse on Taiwan artists' interaction with Japan, see Hsiu-hsiung Wang, "The Development of Official Exhibitions in Taiwan during the Japanese Occupation," in *War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia 1920-1960*, 92-120 and Yen Chuan-ying, "The Art Movement in the 1930s Taiwan," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, 45-59. See also Edward I-te Chen, "Japan: Oppressor or Modernizer? A Comparison of the Effects of Colonial Control in Korea and Formosa," in *Korea Under Japanese Rule: Studies of the Policy and Techniques of Japanese Colonialism*, ed. Andrew C. Nahm (Kalamazoo, MI: The Center for Korean Studies, Institute of International and Area Studies, Western Michigan University, 1973), 251-260.

between the colonial government and colonized Korean subjects, the number of Korean students studying Western-style art in Tokyo continued to increase annually.[160]

[160] During the 1920s, there were sixteen Korean art students enrolled at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. By 1944, there were forty-five Korean students in the Department of Western-style painting. Yi Ku-yŏl, *Uri kŭndae miseul dwhit yiyagi*, 177. Further study is required in assessing the presence of Korean students in other artistic institutions in Japan.

CONCLUSION

Re-claiming Colonial Traces in Korean Modern Art History

Since the 1980s, expanding public and academic interests in the art of Korea have steadily led to increased English-language publications centering on the legacy of traditional Korean arts as well as the vibrant culture of the contemporary arts in Korea. Yet scant attention has been paid to the period of the early twentieth century when Korean painting witnessed an historic transformation. With the opening of the Korean ports in 1896 and Japanese annexation of Korea in 1905, the wheels were set in motion for monumental shifts which would reverberate throughout the Korean peninsula. Despite the ensuing public and academic debate as to whether the 1910-1945 Japanese colonial rule of Korea was constructive or destructive, no objective study can deny that colonial rule was a catalyst for engendering positive and negative, slight and significant, short and long term changes for Korean state and society.

The artistic shift engendered by a generation of young Korean artists from emulating Chinese ink paintings that centralized metaphysical signification to the naturalistic depiction of the present world, through the medium of oil, parallel the trajectory of the reformist endeavors for modernization by the educated Korean intelligentsia. As noted by the historian Henry Em:

> The historical juncture for this epistemological break came after Korea was forcibly incorporated into a nation-state system dominated by Western imperial powers, after the Korean monarchy proved itself incapable of keeping these

> powers at bay, and after Korean intellectuals were forced to acknowledge the strength of Meiji (Westernizing) Japan.[161]

The benefit of postmodern hindsight reveals that personal narratives of Korean colonialism was not only about subjugation and oppression but encompassed a wider scope of collaboration, resistance and even neutrality. While the injustice of colonialism cannot and should not be dismissed, it nonetheless created the space and a visual platform for exchanges of cultural transfer within one of the most contentious socio-political period in Korean history. Within this milieu, talented artists emerged as innovators and dramatically redefined the stagnant visual culture of Korea which had languished under Chinese conventions for over eight hundred years. Through individual and loosely collective endeavors, these Korean artists recognized the need for altering the way their contemporary world was envisioned and presented. These artistic intellectuals re-imagined Korea's collective identity in terms of a 'deep, horizontal comradeship' regardless of, or because of, the actual divisions and inequalities that prevailed in Korean society.

In his discourse on the formation of modern nations, Benedict Anderson inquires, "If nationalism was, as I supposed it, the expression of a radically changed form of consciousness, should not awareness of that break, and the necessary forgetting of the older consciousness, create its own narrative?"[162] With Japanese colonialism, Korean artists as cultural nationalists did experience "a radically changed form of

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[161] Henry Em, ""Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 339.

[162] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, xiv.

consciousness." It was also precisely in the "awareness of that break," that they turned to the place of their birth and hometowns in order to create their "own narrative."

To visually articulate the multiplicity of meanings produced by the tensions of colonialism, nationalism and modernism, they had to locate a clearer construct. For many Korean artists, the tool they were provided toward envisioning the modern world was a palette filled with oil paint accompanied by a blank stretched canvas upon an easel. By subverting the conventional practice of ink painting, they took leave of the standard practice of sitting on the floor and literally arose to face the process of their artistic creation. Access to this platform was not to be found in Korea yet. It was through Japan in the cultural space of artistic modernism at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. The visual language that prompted the Korean artists to construct a modern culture of self-identity in Tokyo was through the genre of self-portraiture.

For young emerging Korean artists, self-portraiture visually achieved two critical aspects of modernity. One, it concretized national sentiments. Colonialism and its policies of assimilation had the adverse effect of heightening national consciousness. In their images of self-representation, young Korean artists re-interpreted the indigenous *hanbok* or Korean clothes from its status aggrandizing iconography to a proud emblem of national identity which paid tribute to the common man and rural peasants who comprised the majority of Korean populace. As such the process of constructing a modern notion of a Korean "imagined community" provided the contingencies for a shift in the artistic practice of ink painting that had heretofore upheld the conventions of "classical community." The ideals of incorporating all, rather than select, members into

the borders of a modern nation was reflected in the construction of contemporary art in which the medium and the techniques of oil painting created the liberties for supplanting traditional codes and locating a modern and relevant pictorial vocabulary.

Two, it expressed the ambivalent symptoms of Korean colonial modernity. Self-portraiture served as a visual platform for expressing subjective formations, privileging the self and revealing the interiority of sitter, all the while engaging directly with the viewer. This dialectic relationship of the gaze was thoroughly modern in the genre of Korean portraiture. The very private and subjective process of creating self-portrait was critical in opening the floodgates of Korean modern art. The self-portraits were immediately followed by the graduation paintings or a final submission which all students of *yōga* had to produce prior to graduation. The artistic narratives which they created were for the purpose of a wider public reception at the annual Japanese exhibition Monbushō Bijutsu Tenrankai (known also as Bunten) and the annual Hyŏpchon in Seoul. Depictions of nudes, the re-constructed space of landscape painting and portraits were created as the Korean artist's own unique voice to exemplify and to express the conditions of modernity.

When European techniques and concepts crossed cultural boundaries into Japan, they were articulated as a different discourse that diverged from their original meaning and culture. Likewise, this process was replicated when it crossed within Asia from Japan to Korea, creating an additional layer of divergence from its originating intent. Exposure to European art introduced but did not bring about modernism in Korean art in the late 1800s; rather the transformation of traditional Korean artistic production was

ultimately achieved, albeit under the politicized circumstances of colonialism, by the Korean graduates of Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Being subsumed in the urban culture of Tokyo allowed exposure to art exhibitions, artistic societies and art instructions, all of which provided the young Korean artists the means to syncretize their national sentiments with Western modalities to construct Korea's own paradigm of modern aesthetics. Adapting and appropriating European artistic concepts mediated through Japan, Korean artists envisioned and paved the path for Korean painting to merge into the assured sphere of global modern art.

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Personal Interview:

Kim Byung-ki (son of Kim Chan-young), interviewed by Julie Chun, Pasadena, California, September 19, 2009.