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Kyunghee Pyun and Jung-Ah Woo, ed. *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art: Fluidity and Fragmentation*. New York: Routledge, 2022. 236 pp. (ISBN: 9780367367435). doi:10.18399/acta.2023.26.2.010

In the last thirty years, scholars in Korean art history have paid increasing attention to the so-called dark era under Japanese colonialism (1910–45) and the Korean War (1950–53). Their work has shed critical light on the period, reinterpreting colonial time and space as the most creative incubator in the formulation of modern Korean art. Research on modern Korean art is no longer based solely on a national trauma of suppression, censorship, conformity, and failed institutionalization. Instead, the narrative has become more colorful, powerful, and unpredictable, with exciting stories of daily individual survival and artistic transformation in colonial modernity.

Korean modernism is not equivalent to Westernization or Japanese colonialism. In Korea, modernization, Westernization, and colonization are conceptually and historically intertwined. In this complex triangle, simplistic dichotomies cannot fully explain the holistic narrative of microphenomena in modern Korea. Binary oppositions are often found in perspectives of Korean modernism: in colonial exploitation and beneficial modernization, in classifications of pro-Japanese and anti-Japanese activities, in distinctions between propagandistic and aesthetic purposes, in the conflict between tradition and avant-gardism, and in tensions between imitation and creation. Likewise, for Korean artists, their work is not just about adopting Western trends under Occidentalism or defending their cultural identity and independence through self-Orientalism.

Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art: Fluidity and Fragmentation tries to overcome such

dichotomies in the discourse of Korean art of colonial time and space. The editors' profound insight into modern Korean art gives life to critical studies by fifteen scholars (including the editors). The anthology is framed by an elaborate introduction (Chapter 1) on modernity (*keŋndaesŏng*) and an epilogue (Chapter 16) on contemporaneity (*tongsidaesŏng*). Subsequent chapters deal with modern Korea's visual culture in a variety of media. These include oil paintings, ink paintings, photography, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, posters, postcards, architecture, and performances. Also featured are dynamically urbanizing spaces like royal palaces, schools, exhibition spaces, and coffeehouses, as well as the wartime home front in Seoul and Tokyo. The chapters built around these stories are arranged in a thematic and chronological order. However, they also describe peculiar modernist concepts and practices in an organic way, which is not linear but appears to be fragmented yet inconsistently present in various genres and fields, as the book's title suggests.

Part I, "Korean Modernity and Modernism," begins with Kyunghee Pyun's reconsideration of modern Korean art in Northeast Asia in terms of a comparative historiography of global modernisms in Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa, against Eurocentric perspectives. In the following chapter, Youngna Kim defines Korean modernity by introducing modernist trends in Korean art, by penetrating from the emergence of Western-style oil painting during the 1910s to avant-garde paintings by *Art Informel* artists during the 1970s.

In contrast, Part II, "Inventing a Modern Nation: Visual Culture at the Turn of the Century," begins with Mingi Kang introducing the search for modernity in traditional Korean ink painting in the early twentieth century. Kang discusses the separation of ink painting from calligraphy, the modern painters' observation of Korean landscape, and their interactions with the public through modern art education and exhibitions. Chapter 5 by Heangga Kwon investigates Emperor Kojong's (1852–1919) portrait photography as royal propaganda promoting a modern nation during the opening of Korea's ports (1897–1910). Similarly, in Chapter 6, Soohyun Mok analyzes how Korean national symbols under colonial rule were transmitted through textbooks and postcards and how patriotic instruments became commercialized with the rise of modern capitalism.

In Part III, "Visualizing Colonial Modernities," Hye-ri Oh begins by explaining modern pictorialism in Jeong Hae-chang's (Chŏng Haech'ang, 鄭海昌, 1907–68) art photography. This derived from Kim Jun-geun's (Kim Chun'gŭn, 金俊根) genre painting tradition, whose concepts and representations of *p'ungsok* or Korean customs have been influential to domestic and international views of Korea. In Chapter 8, Yeon Shim Chung redefines "vernacular modernism" through Lee Quede's (Yi K'waedae, 李快大, 1913–65) "local color" painting and Yanagi Muneyoshi's (1889–1961) folk art movement under Japanese colonialism. In the final chapter of this section, Toshiharu Omuka discusses Japanese modernist Murayama Tomoyoshi's (1901–77) wartime activities in Korea.

Part IV is called "Cultural Consumption and Modernism." The first chapter in this section, by Yuri Seo, examines cultural politics as visualized in magazine covers during the Japanese colonial period. Younjung Oh then provides a detailed description of Nangnang Parlour, a coffeehouse in the 1930s, as a locus of cultural consumption and collaboration for

modern writers and painters. In the same vein, the final chapter by Inhye Kim extends the discussion of literary circles in Korea during the 1930s and 1940s to their practical networks and support for artists.

In Part V, “Modernism as Ideology: Revision and Appropriation,” the first chapter by Hyunjung Cho provides a historical overview of modern Korean architecture and the influential architects Kim Chung-up (Kim Chungöp, 金重業, 1922–88) and Kim Swoo Geun (Kim Sugün, 金壽根, 1931–86). Both embraced international modernism in a Korean context to establish modern Korean architecture. In the following chapter, Chunghoon Shin constructs the theoretical framework for postwar Korean art and details the tension between “imitation” and “necessity” in adopting international modernist trends in Korean art criticism from the 1950s. Finally, Sooran Choi redefines the interdisciplinary strategies of the avant-garde experimentalists known as the Fourth Group (1969–70) in the context of global modernism.

In the epilogue, Jung-Ah Woo elaborates on asynchronous contemporaneity in the postmodern era with examples from three contemporary artists: Bahc Mo (Pak Mo, 1957–2004), Choi Jeong-hwa (Choe Chöng-hwa, 崔正和, b. 1955) and Yang Haegye (Yang Hyegyü, 梁慧圭, b. 1971).

Among the book’s many compelling discussion points, the two invaluable main threads are the asynchronous temporality of Korean modernism and the lingering consciousness of a collective Korean identity. The non-synchronicity of modernity permeates each topic from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, resulting in a whole range of potential starting points for modernity in Korea. Each author rejects linear definitions of modern Korean art but without directly answering the controversial questions of originality and temporality. The introduction, for example, objectively explains how eminent art historian Yi Gyeong-Seong (Yi Kyöngsöng, 李慶成, 1919–2009) often changed his stance in defining and delineating Korea’s modern period, by which implies the complexity of the issues. In addition, by including the port-opening period of the 1890s and the Korean Empire (1897–1910) in the discussion, the book defies the temporal equating of modernization and colonization in modern Korean art. The book also illuminates that from their position at the center of modernism during the 1930s Korean modernists had already pondered the contemporaneity of modernity, which contemporary Korean artists, as discussed in the epilogue, still continuously consider and express.

Similar to the question of when modern art began in Korea, the question of the origins of contemporary or postmodern art in Korea is difficult to answer. Nevertheless, just as compressed modernism in Korea is related to encounters with the West between the late nineteenth century and the 1970s, postmodernism in Korea followed the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and the liberalization of overseas travel in 1989, and Korean participation in international exhibitions. This leads to the question of whether Koreans need an “other” to recognize their true selves and what, in fact, we mean by “consciousness of Koreanness.” Pyun’s discussion of multiple modernisms in other regions provides a means of understanding the vernacular modernism (also known as local color) of Korean art. It rejects the pigeonholing of Korean modernism as opposed to a singular Western modernism, an illusion created

by Pan-Asian intellectuals. In the postmodern international art world, concepts of global transnationalism and ethnocentric nationalism both coexist with and contradict each other in many areas of cultural policy and commerce. In fact, an awareness of Koreanness is a recurring phenomenon in the local color of the 1930s, in the 1960s *Art Informel* and *Tansaekhwá* movements, and in experimental art and performances up to and including the twenty-first century in contemporary Hallyu art.

Global recognition and promotion of Korean art is less sensational and slower than that of other cultural products and consumptions such as K-pop, K-drama, K-movies, K-food, K-fashion, K-beauty, and even K-classic music. Still, Korean visual art is as important as other genres and needs a stronger foundation for Korean culture to be sustainable on the global stage, in academia, and as a commercial product. The Korean art history field may not be a part of the discourse of popular mass culture in the same way as Hallyu. However, it is plausible to expect synergy, developing and deepening dialogue, and facilitating collaboration with other Hallyu content for the display and education of Korean art history.

Soon after the publication of *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art*, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) held a major Korean art exhibition, *The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art* (Sept. 11, 2022–Feb. 20, 2023), which included a collection of modern art from the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea (MMCA). The exhibition displayed many of the photographs and paintings discussed in *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art*, including its cover image, a color painting by Chang Woo-sung (Chang Usŏng, 張遇聖, 1912–2005). In terms of the argument put forward in the book, this was an asynchronous display of modern Korean art on the postmodern global stage where viewers experienced Korean modernism for the first time. It was also a new means of contact with modern Korea for people in the United States. At the same time, in another building in LACMA, a second exhibition, *Park Dae Sung: Virtuous Ink and Contemporary Brush* (July 17, 2022–Feb. 5, 2023), presented monumental ink paintings by Park Dae Sung (Pak Taesŏng, 朴大成, b. 1945). In this exhibition, calligraphy, a tradition separated from ink painting at the Chosŏn Art Exhibition (1922–44) and neglected for more than a century, reemerged. The exhibition was an ideal supplement to *The Space Between*, as the asynchronistic nature of revised modernity and the awareness of Koreanness were evident in both.

As *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art: Fluidity and Fragmentation* does not provide a detailed account of modern Korean art history, it cannot deal with all the issues of the period in question. However, addressing the importance of sculpture, crafts, and design, which were strategically promoted during the colonial period and postcolonial nation-building process, would have strengthened the book's argument on the innate complexity and great diversity of modern Korean art. Nevertheless, *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art* showcases academic collaboration among scholars in Korea, Japan, and the US over more than a decade. It suggests that the transnational experiences of artists and intellectuals were crucial factors in the development of modern Korean art. As such, it is a groundbreaking textbook for teaching modern Korean art at the undergraduate and graduate levels and an inspiring base for further research.

The book is also relevant in the contemporary post-pandemic world. The individual and communal trauma wrought by Covid and the glimpse of dystopia that it provided have affected the direction of contemporary Korean art. In the epilogue, Woo argues that modernism is still a valid movement for artists in the post-1990s world, a contention that now needs to be discussed in light of recent events. The study of art history is not a static process of discovering, documenting, interpreting, evaluating, and presenting art for appreciation. Instead, it is the study of the direction of a movement, of its changing currents, and of its potential future. *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art* poses urgent questions at a critical point in a changing world, questions that may inspire new interpretations of modern Korean art and what lies ahead.

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Eugene Y. Park. *Korea: A History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022. xiv + 414 pp. (ISBN: 9781503629844). doi:10.18399/acta.2023.26.2.011

When I was invited to review this book, I was in the process of designing a new course on Korea's relations with empires from the thirteenth century to the present. As I had not taught a Korean history course in some time, I welcomed the opportunity to use this updated overview of Korean history in its entirety. It was also a fitting coincidence, since I first met Professor Park at the Korea with Empire Conference in 2016, hosted by the James Joo-Jin Kim Program in Korean Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. This interdisciplinary conference, meticulously organized by Sixiang Wang, opened my eyes to cutting-edge research on Korea in the world, inspiring me to engage with Korean history more broadly outside my focus on Qing-Chosŏn relations.

This interdisciplinary and global perspective is evident in the book's organization. In the introduction (pp. 1–15), Park situates Korean history within various academic fields. After a brief but insightful overview of Korean historiography (Confucian, Japanese colonial, Korean nationalist, positivist, Marxist, *minjung*, *chaeya*, and postmodern), Park is careful to note that these perspectives are “neither mutually exclusive nor unique to Korean historiography” (p. 6). This sets the stage for Park's informative summary of the archaeological, genetic, and linguistic findings that enrich our understanding of Korean history. The main part of the book consists of four parts, one each on the classical period (up to 918 CE), the post-classical period (918–1392), the early modern era (1392–1864), and the late modern era (1864–2020). As Park explains in the Preface, the book is an attempt to place Korean history in a global context and to highlight the centrality of patrilineal genealogies in the historical processes of literate, sedentary Afro-Eurasian societies. As an early modern historian of Asia, I was