

Korean Modern Reactions to Western Aesthetics

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Preface

This paper commits itself to examining the process in which the early 20th century modern Western learning came to be introduced and established in Korea. Especially, it focuses on what kind of Western learning it was that Park Jonghong 朴鍾鴻 (1903–1976) and Ko Yuseop 高裕燮 (1905–1944), two modern Korean intellectuals, received, what they made of it, and, further, how they dealt with it, insofar as it is concerned with aesthetics and art history.

The period from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century was called ‘the Eastern Penetration of Western Powers (西勢東漸).’ Reeling from the effects of Western culture on the North-East Asian countries, intellectuals in Korea, China and Japan could not but ponder over how to receive such heterogeneous Western culture. Its reception-methodologies were referred as to ‘Japanese Soul and Western Skill (和魂洋才)’ in Japan, ‘Chinese Body and Western Utility (中體西用)’ in China, and ‘Eastern Tao and Western Means (東道西器)’ in Korea respectively. Those three expressions were slightly different but their meanings were the same, to the effect that they had no choice but to receive the Skill, Utility, Means of the West, while maintaining the Soul, Body, Tao of the East. What those three countries intended to receive was the Western learning. What would Soul, Body, Tao, then, be that they wanted to preserve? They are no other than identity, seen from today’s perspective. That is to say, they thought they had to receive Western culture while keeping their identities. They share the common denominator in that, although their experiences of modernization may be different, they pursue their national identities in conflicting situations between tradition and revolution, between conservation and renovation. In such situations, Korea also had to push for modernization, especially under the Japanese colony.

It has been nearly 100 years since Korea started receiving Western learning. In doing so, Korea has witnessed a great quantitative expansion of the reception of Western learning but merely a meager research outcome with respect to spontaneous and creative Korean aesthetics. Recently, researches on the reception of Western learning are underway from diverse angles but still fall short of providing a comprehensive survey of it and a penetrating insight into the context of intellectual history.

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I. Park Jonghong's Unfinished Research on the History of Korean Art

1. The Interest in National Consciousness and Aesthetics



Fig. 1 Park Jonghong

Yeoram 洙巖 Park Jonghong (Fig. 1) was one of the foremost scholars in the area of Korean modern philosophy. In his youth, he showed his interest in traditional art and philosophy by studying the history of Korean art and the educational thought of Lee Hwang 李滉, the most eminent Confucian scholar. Meanwhile, he also had much interest in national culture and reality by studying at once a broad area of Western philosophy including Heidegger and Hegel, and Korean traditional philosophy at length. He was further recognized as a model of master-teacher by his followers. He was deeply involved in the enactment of the National Education Charter, later becoming a special deputy of the Department of Education and Culture under the regime of President Park Junghee 朴正熙 (1917–1979), and thereby invoked an issue as to whether intellectuals should participate in real government.²

His life and scholarship are of great significance in the research-field of the history of Korean contemporary philosophy and the history of Korean intelligence.³ (Fig. 2, Fig. 3)

His biggest task was to bring Korean traditional thought and Western philosophy into consilience, with his interest in aesthetics and art history being limited to his earlier career. Nevertheless, his unfinished research on the history of Korean art remains to be a good resource whereby to examine the formative stage of his early thought and the manner in which to receive Western learning.

Park Jonghong was born in 1903 in Pyongyang. He started learning Chinese writing at home in his childhood and went to a village schoolhouse to study *Brief History* 史略 and *Zizhi Tongjian* 资治通鉴, as well as calligraphy. He was sent to a labor camp by Japanese police for three weeks due to his involvement in the March First Independence Movement in 1919 in his senior year at Pyongyang High School. He began to be aware of national consciousness through this experience, and read Korean history books such as *Thematic History of Korea* 海東繹史 and *History of the Three States* 三國史記. He also read the Bible and *Great Book of Eastern Learning* 東經大全, the text of the religion of the *Heavenly Way* 天道教 among many others.

Park Jonghong gradually became more conscious of nationality problems through this diverse reading, and wanted to know more about national characteristics as a whole.⁴ At this time, he was engrossed

2 Kim Jaehyun, "A Study of the Philosophical Thought of Yeoram Park Jonghong", in *Journal of Humanities Studies*, vol. 11, The Institute of Humanities of Gyongnam University, 1998, p. 168.

3 The seven volumes of the first edition of *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong* were published in 1982 by Hyongseol Press, and the seven volumes of the enlarged edition of *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong* were published in 1998 by Minum Press. The latter edition comprises writings not contained in the first edition and a chronology as well.

4 Park Jonghong, "Recollection of Reading—Until I Philosophize" in *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 6, Minum Press, 1998, p. 264.

in “Aesthetics and Art History” by Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902), and read through the latter part in particular. This art history was a Japanese one, and he was excited at knowing that the origin of Japanese art was Korean art; for instance, the general supervisor for the casting of the large Buddha at the Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺 in Japan was a Korean from the Kingdom of Beckje 百濟. On the basis of this experience he attempted to constitute a history of thought in order to comprehend and reveal characteristics of our national culture as spiritual. He tried to seek for this through art. Thus, he got to be aware of ‘our’ or ‘my’ national consciousness through the March First Independence Movement and was motivated to open up his eye on philosophy.

After high school, he was dedicated to studying aesthetics and art history. He set out to learn about aesthetics after reading “History of Modern Aesthetics” by Takayama and to get a glimpse of Western philosophers and their aesthetic thoughts. Then he read the collection of Takayama and other books on aesthetics and art history whenever he got hold of them. He was most interested in the aesthetic thought of Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), and was fascinated with the philosophy of unconsciousness. He studied aesthetics, oriental painting, sculpture, architecture theory, Buddhism, and collected roofing tiles, pottery debris, and paintings while traveling around the country and temples.⁵ Let us take a look at his retrospection:

I decided to write our history of art. Once I did so, I began to feel pressured as if I carried such a big responsibility. I went on a field trip for our relics as far as the situations allowed. I visited Hōryūji Temple 法隆寺 in Nara, Japan twice. I also frequently visited those museums in Gyongju and Seoul. As a result, I got off the ground to write our history of art.⁶

He started writing a history of art, and got the twelve pieces of “A Historical Investigation of Korean

5 Lee Hongwoo, “History of Korean Art and Yeoram Master,” in *Way to Master*, Cheonji Press, 1991, p. 92.

6 Park Jonghong, “Recollection of Reading—Until I Philosophize,” in *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 6, p. 266.



Fig. 2 *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, 7 volumes, Hyongseol Press, 1982



Fig. 3 *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, 7 volumes, Minum Press, 1998

Art (朝鮮美術史の考察)” published in the journal of *Gebyok* (開闢) or *Beginning of the World* from April 1922 to May 1923.⁷ While in the midst of writing manuscripts, he came to realize that writing a history of art was a difficult task and that he was in need of comprehensive knowledge.

I thought that, insofar as it is concerned with art history, it should be possible to make value judgments from an aesthetic point of view. But there are plenty of things in our oriental art that we cannot explain by means of Western aesthetics. It should be noted that there are sui generis techniques of brushwork and theory of painting with respect to pictures. Oriental architecture differs in style from Western one. Since our climate condition and life style are different, we cannot pursue just our aesthetic consciousness apart from that condition and style. We can figure out whether it is a proper expression for a Buddhist sculpture, provided that we know what kind of Buddha or Bodhisattva it is. Therefore, a legitimate appreciation would be possible in the case of the sculptures of Seokguram 石窟庵, provided that we know the position, posture, and spirit of each sculpture as a whole. If so, it is assumed to require the comprehensive knowledge of Buddhism. I have spent a whole summer in a hermit near the Seokguram in 1929 where I visited with an aesthetics book by Theodor Lipps in my trunk. ... I tried to explain the Seokguram in terms of the norms of Lipps' theory of sculpture, but did not dare to do it. When I felt I came short of explaining the Seokguram, I lost my confidence in keeping doing it. I came to realize that I had to restart from elementary learning.⁸

Thus he stopped investigating and writing Korean art history at this juncture.⁹ Although his collection of resources and ideas reached up to the period of Joseon, his writing of “A Historical Investigation of Korean Art” came to an end at Volume 35 of the journal of *Beginning of the World* (the title was ‘Sculpture of the Period of the Unified Silla’).¹⁰ When he later read articles on the Seokguram written by Yanagi Muneyoshi 柳宗悦 (1899–1961), he thought he was right when he stopped writing it.

Park Jonghong embarked on studying philosophy and other disciplines much harder as he hit the limit while writing a history of art. He engaged in psychology and logic, and perused a survey of philosophy and history of philosophy. And he did not miss reading Nishida Kitarō's 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) books such as *The Question of Consciousness, Art and Morality, A Study of Goodness, Intuition in Perception and Reflection*, etc. He also read *The Problems of Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, and *The Reality of Life* by Rabindranath

7 The journal of *Beginning of the World*, inaugurated in June 25, 1920 by Cheondoism, was a general magazine, and introduced lots of very liberal and new trends of thought. The journal was monthly, introducing philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kant, Rousseau, James, Russell, Thomas Moore, and was said to have inspired many young scholars who were interested in philosophy. See Jin Kyohoon, “The Reception and Development of Western Philosophy: from 1903 to 1945”, in *History of Korean Philosophy* (II), Dongmyong Press, 1987, p. 399.

8 Jonghong Park, “Recollection of Reading—Until I Philosophize,” in *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 6, p. 267.

9 *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 6, p. 295.

10 Lee Hongwoo, “History of Korean Art and Yeoram Master,” in *Way to Master*, p. 93.

Tagor partly for the purpose of learning foreign languages. He sent letters to teachers specializing in aesthetics at Tokyo University and Kyoto University for the sake of meeting with them. Then he had a long dialogue with Taki Seiichi 滝精一 (1875–1945), professor of History of Japanese Art at Tokyo University, who encouraged him to read the Avatamska Sutra 華嚴經 of Buddhism since Park's thought was similar to it. He later confessed that it was not easy to understand it even though he read the Chinese text and the Japanese translation of it side by side.

In 1925, at the age of 23, Park Jonghong came to know about Johann H. Pestalozzi and had an interest in Jean-Jaques Rousseau and read his books such as *Emil, Confessions, Reverie of a Solitary Walker*, while studying the science of education, the history of education, and the history of educational thought for the preparation of the examination for middle school teachers qualification. He passed this exam and was appointed as a teacher at Daegu 大邱 public high school next year. Then, after perusing Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, he thought that the second part of it contained profound meanings, and had a lengthy essay on it published in a colleague journal.¹¹

He continued to read most newly published books on aesthetics since he could not give up his interest in it. Grounded on this reading, he finished his Japanese essay, "The Superiority of Aesthetic Sentiment Seen from the Point of View of Psychology" in November 1925, and got it published in Volume 3 of *Education Joseon* by the Society of Joseon Education in the following year. Thereafter, he dedicated himself to the way of life as a scholar and educator, and finally passed the exam for professional education to become a college student studying at the department of philosophy of Kyongseong 京城 Imperial University.¹²

2. The Manner of Thought in His Research on the History of Korean Art

We are unable to, and do not feel it necessary to examine in detail the content of "A Historical Investigation of Korean Art." For we do not know what kinds of books he made reference to at the level of that time, and a concrete and positivist investigation has no relevance to the purpose of this paper. What we here look for is just a clue to the subject-matter and thinking-manner of the young Park Jonghong.

"A Historical Investigation of Korean Art" begins with the sentence that "We, Koreans, inherit aesthetic nature and artist technique, and have the so-called merit of creation. We lay claim to, and take pride in the country of art." Although his investigation still falls short and his compilation remains incomplete, writing such an art history by laying out what he collected "just because of wanting to know about it" is an announcement "for the sake of the resurrection of nationality in the Peninsula and the contribution to the scholarship of the world." He encourages his readers to think about there being expressions of the crystals of the contemporary national sentiment and character in every single picture and sculpture.¹³

We here can see Park Jonghong's thorough national consciousness, his interest in the universal level of

11 Park Jonghong, "Recollection of Reading—Until I Philosophize" vol.6, p. 271.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

13 Park Jonghong, "A Historical Investigation of Korean Art," in *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 1, pp. 3–4.

the world culture, and his voices from the position of Enlightenment.

In the first section of chapter one, he deals with where Korean art stands in the history of world art. He argues that Korean art is a proper one whereby to compare Western art with Eastern art, inasmuch as European art flourished along with the influence of Christianity and in combination with the Arian culture, and Oriental art originated in India under the influence of Buddhism but bore fruits in the Korean Peninsula via Central Asia and China.

That is to say, what he emphasized there is that Korean art for the most part adopted Greek, Indian, and Chinese art, turned them into the crystal of Oriental art and eventually had an influence on Japanese art. Park Jonghong sees the features of Korean art as a sort of synthesis, and thereby contends that Greek culture as the origin of Western culture came into full blossom in Korea by way of Indian and China. Although such an ambitious argument about the position of Korean art in the history of world art lacks concrete evidence and persuasiveness, we could think that full credit should be given to the fact that he set up such a bold hypothesis in his youth and attempted to uphold it. Such kind of his consciousness of the problem, it can be seen, developed into his interest in the position of where Korean philosophy stands in the history of world-wide philosophical ideas.

Park Jonghong's collection of resources and his overall idea relate to "A Historical Investigation of Korean Art" covering the ancient to the Joseon period, but this essay turns out to be mostly Buddhist art; as we shall see, it ends at the Kingdom of Shilla, i.e., at the Age of the Three Countries, and thus underestimates both Taoist and Confucian art. In this essay Park Jonghong showed his intention to contrast Korean art and culture with those of Japan. Such an intention was well manifested in his consistent argument that Japanese art originated from that of the Age of the Three Countries of Korea.

In Park Jonghong's first academic essay, we can already recognize his comprehensive interest, perspective, and thorough nationalistic consciousness. Although his attempt stopped short and was somewhat amateurish, this essay should not be underestimated with respect to his thoroughness.¹⁴ That Park Jonghong's starting point in his philosophical research was associated with aesthetics and art history, we can confirm as follows:

My starting point of philosophy was aesthetics, and I attended all of the aesthetics courses offered at the University. But aesthetics at that time was dealt with as mainly psychological, and what drew my attention was Nishita's *Art and Morality*, Takayama Chogyu's writings, and so on. Afterwards I came to lose my interest when Nishita brought out a panacea of the self-confinement of absolute nothingness. ... Nevertheless, aesthetics ought to be once again addressed anyway at the end of my philosophical career. The beautiful that I think of is not something excluding the ugly. I think of

14 Lee Namyong, "Yeoram Philosophy—Korean Philosophy as a Conjunction of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Philosophies," in *The Korean Philosophy of the 50 Years of Liberation*, Philosophy and Reality Press, 1996, p. 14.

beauty as something that contains contradiction but still looks beautiful.¹⁵

3. The Aesthetic Feeling as the Ultimate Motive of Life

Park Jonghong set out to investigate more fundamental questions through his further reading of philosophy and aesthetics. While exploring where feeling and affect occupy in the various operations of consciousness, he happened to investigate fundamental features of 'aesthetic feeling'. He states that "he came to the conclusion that aesthetic feeling should have the upper hand, as a result of daring to have a clumsy enquiry into questions as to what is the most fundamental in the unifying operation of consciousness, and what is the most representative of it", and tried to make a description of it in such a way as to ascertain it.

He was critical of Western research trends in that they take the phenomenology of spirit as staying within the bound of consciousness. He observed that "in the process of sub-consciousness rising up to our consciousness, feeling as the fundamental element of consciousness, say, as something prior to knowledge, is in its wonderful operation"¹⁶, and supposed that to play a role in bridging the spatiotemporally restricted reality and the world of freedom beyond the former is the world of feeling.

According to him, feeling ought to be self-consciousness in a unity of various mental operations, and self-consciousness in the unity of the manifold has an active creativity. Such self-consciousness is called aesthetic feeling. Therefore, he thought that "aesthetic feeling has a right to claim a fair superiority in the unifying operation of consciousness from the sense of the active self-consciousness of a unifying operation comprising both cognition and behavior." And he observed that aesthetic feeling as the unity of the manifold of consciousness is akin to a discussion as to what James called "the stream of consciousness" and what Bergson called "the creative evolution." Thus, this aesthetic feeling, he contended, should be a self-consciousness of creative evolution and become a motive for such a self-consciousness.

He also conceived of dialectic development in thesis-antithesis-synthesis as one of formal interpretations of this infinite unifying operation. That is, he argued that "a contradiction among concrete/synthetic things prevents its opposition, keeps itself as an integral element therein, and elevates itself beyond the opposition. In short, everything incessantly enters into self-contradiction by itself, and, as this evolves by sublimation (*Aufheben*), the self-consciousness of this sublimation should be called aesthetic feeling."

This argument is not simply a logical play, but can be said to be possible "because humanity per se is a moment whereby one had an activity with firing passion, is having such activity, and is being strained to have such activity in the future." In this vein, he criticizes Kant's theory of beauty as mere disinterestedness and Hartmann's doctrine of appearance feeling being unilateral.

According to Park Jonghong, our consciousness claims for a unity, and aesthetic feeling is a unity of human character as an operation of the whole personality. As this aesthetic feeling functions as a fundamental motive for life, he holds that "we can escape from the established outmoded religion; open up our eye for

15 *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 1, p. 105.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

the religion of beauty filled with new creative life, and thereby should come alive again along the example of clean belief".¹⁷

This essay by Park Jonghong is neither logically rigorous nor philosophically profound, but makes us see that his interest in aesthetics develops philosophically and that he at that time is already interested in and investigating diverse areas of philosophy. Such books to which he made reference while writing this essay are enumerated by Wilhelm Wundt's *Psychology* by Sudō Shinkichi 須藤新吉, *The Problem of Consciousness*, *The Study of Goodness*, *The Philosophy of Idealism at the Present Age* by Nishita, *Philosophical Pedagogy on the Basis of Criticism* by Natorp, *Aesthetics Lecture* by Ōnishi Yoshinori 大西克禮(1888–1959), *History of Modern Aesthetics* by Takayama Chogyū, *Philosophy of Doing* by Kihira Tadayoshi 紀平正美(1874–1949).

By showing that aesthetic feeling functions as a fundamental motive for life in this essay, Park Jonghong tried to philosophically elucidate his own interest in concrete life and aesthetic feeling. We could get a glimpse of a clue to his philosophizing in this short essay.

II. Ko Yuseop's Reception of Western Modern Aesthetics

1. The Aesthetician's Commitment

Woohyun 又玄 Ko Yuseop (Fig. 4) was a pioneering scholar who systematically studied aesthetics and

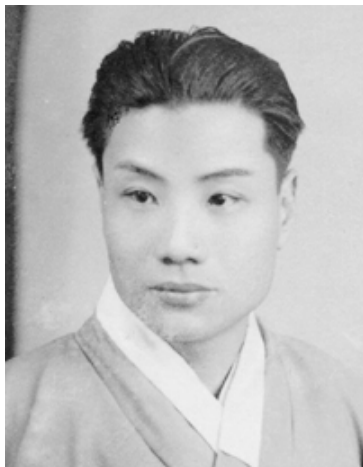


Fig. 4 Ko Yuseop

art history, as he realized that Korean beauty and Korean art were of importance even when modern learning was still unfamiliar. He had a passion for writing the history of Korean art while spending his lifetime during the period of the unfortunate occupation of Japan. At the March First Independence Movement he made Korean flags and handed them out to his neighborhood children. While joining in the protest and shouting independence around the district of Ryongdong in Inchon, he was arrested and was under detention for three days. He expressed in his literary works such as poems, lyrics, and essays those agonies and depressions that he had in his youth. Or he tried to get rid of such conflicts by taking a trip for sketching alone.

Yuseop Ko, who used to express his family-related depression and introversion in literature, turned his passion for literature into an interest in learning when enrolled as an undergraduate student (Fig. 5, Fig. 6). Gyeongseong Imperial University opened law/liberal art and medical schools at the undergraduate level since 1926, and when he finished preparatory school, Ko Yuseop applied for the major of aesthetics and art history at the department of philosophy at law/liberal art school. At that time Ko Yuseop was already determined to study Korean beauty and became the first student specializing in aesthetics and art history. He was the only student who majored in aesthetics at Gyeongseong Imperial

17 *The Complete Works of Park Jonghong*, vol. 1, pp. 112–113.



Fig. 5 A sketch drawn by Ko Yuseop



Fig. 6 Self-portrait drawing of Ko Yuseop

University until the Liberation of Korea. He was particularly interested in Korean aesthetics and Korean art history. We can recognize this fact in the following dialogue he had with his supervisor.

When I told my supervisor that I decided to study the history of Korean art an area of aesthetics at the university, he asked me if your family were rich enough. On hearing that I had barely enough to study, he told me that I was wrong; you can study this field of aesthetics only when you can afford financially but still think it all right even if you fail to find a job afterwards ... so think about your future. Nevertheless, I thought that this was what I truly wished to study. So I wanted to study it as much I wished.¹⁸

While enrolled in undergraduate course, he started to take courses such as archaeology, philosophy, psychology, and so on, not to mention aesthetics and art history courses which were fundamental for his Korean art history research project. Those professors who influenced Ko Yuseop at that time, for instance, were Ueno Naoteru 上野直昭(1882–1973) and Tanaka Toyozō 田中豊蔵(Fig. 7). Japan established Gyongseong Imperial University as part of the transitory policy from the military government to cultural government, and for this university sent honor graduates from Tokyo Imperial University to famous universities in Europe. Professor Ueno returned after studying at the University of Berlin after majoring in aesthetics at Tokyo Imperial University, and Professor Tanaka came back after studying oriental art in India and Europe after specializing in Chinese literature. Ko Yuseop learned from Professor Ueno about the methodology of the science of arts based on aesthetics which was prevalent in Europe at that time, and learned from Profes-

18 Ko Yuseop, *The Bottle of Farewell*, Tongmunkwan Press, 1958, p. 213.



Fig. 7 From left, Ko Yuseop, Professor Tanaka Toyozō, Mr. Nakakiri Isao and Professor Ueno Naoteru.

sor Tanaka about oriental art. In addition, he attended an archaeology course by Fujita Ryōsaku 藤田亮策 (1892–1960) who was also head of the Museum of Government General. Jonghong Park, who serially published “A Historical Investigation of Korean Art” in the journal of *Beginning of the World*, also attended the reading course of *All-Time Masterpieces of Painting* 歷代名畫記 by Professor Tanaka.¹⁹

Ko Yuseop, the only student majoring in aesthetics and art history, came to remain a research assistant right after graduating in 1930. A segment of his diary dated December 5, 1929 shows that “Let me write a book on the history of Western art in a year of assistantship and investigate Bulkuksa Temple 佛國寺 in Gyongju and the history of Buddhist art within two years.” It informs us of what he planned to study during the assistantship when Professor Ueno, his supervisor told that he would be appointed as an assistant. As he wrote in his diary, he set out to collect more concrete resources perhaps in order to study the history of Buddhist art during the three years of his assistantship. One was to investigate our pagodas, and another was to draw resources relevant to art history from ancient documents. This task continued after he moved to the Museum of Gaeseong 開城.

Ko Yuseop was appointed as the head curator of the Gaeseong Public Museum that remained vacant for a long time. The area of Gaeseong, famous for Gaeseong Merchants, was a fairly intractable place for Japanese. All the chiefs of all the institutes under the umbrella of the then Government General were mostly

19 Kim Youngae, “The Learning World of Art Historian Ko Yuseop,” in *Journal of the History of Korean Modern and Contemporary Art*, vol. 7, 1999, pp. 65–67.

Japanese, but the area of Gaeseong was exceptional. In that situation, it was natural that Ko Yuseop, a Korean, was appointed as the head curator of the Museum of Gaeseong.

After moving to Gaeseong, Ko Yuseop was earnestly engaged in developing the study of Korean aesthetics and art history that he steadily worked on. He intended to elucidate the nature of Korean ancient art and set up the foundation of the history of Korean art while exploring historical sites across the country as well as Gaeseong. In addition to continuing to work on stone pagodas since his assistantship, he extended his research areas to include a collection of documents concerning the history of painting and a study of Goryeo pottery. It was worth noting that there were many young people who realized the importance of cherishing their own culture in the dark ages when they lost their country and came to visit Ko Yuseop for that reason. These young people, most of whom were born in Gaeseong, went to the Museum as they returned to their hometown on vacation, and took a field trip to Gyongju, Mt. Kungang, and many places across the country along with Ko Yuseop and thought about 'nationality' as intellectuals without their own country. Such student-teacher relationship made under the circumstances became the very way of their life throughout.

2. The Search for Methodology

The interest in Korean art at the threshold of the modern age began with Japanese Government scholars. In the early 1900s Japanese scholars embarked on exploring historical sites throughout the Korean territory. This exploration of historical sites was underway in 1902 by Sekino Tadashi 関野貞 (1868–1935). Sekino came to the Korean Peninsula in order to investigate Korean ancient architecture, his research area, with the commission from Tokyo Imperial University, and the result of his investigation was introduced in 1904 in the academic society of Japan. Sekino's 1909 reinvestigation by the request of the Residency General went on until December 1914. The 15 volumes of *The Illustrations of Korean Historical Sites* 朝鮮古蹟圖譜 were completed and published on the basis of this investigation. Some of the results of this investigation relevant to Korean art were individually collected for the eventual publication of *The History of Korean Art* (1932).

Apart from the Japanese one, there was also *Geschichte der koreanischen Kunst* (1929) that the German Andre Eckhardt (1884–1971) wrote. These writings turned out to be merely those at the level of a collection of resources arranged from their perspectives.²⁰ There was also Ahn Hwak 安廓 among Korean scholars who specialized in political science but emphasized in his essay of "Korean Art" in the journal of *Light of Learning* 學之光 in 1915 that we, Korean scholars, ought to launch a study of our original artworks with a view to bringing out our superiority inasmuch as we should feel sorry for the fact that researches on our artworks were conducted by Japanese. Afterwards, Park Jonghong made a survey of our Korean art chronologically through "A Historical Investigation of Korean Art." However, the aforesaid writings were hardly taken to be those approached by art historical methods insofar as they were concerned with stressing the originality and superiority of Korean art. The advent of Ko Yuseop, the first Korean who specialized in aesthetics and art his-

20 Kim Youngae, "The Life and Learning of Ko Yuseop", in *The Research of the Science of Art History*, 1991, p. 152

tory in 1930s, blazed a path for new change. He made efforts to describe the history of Korean art in terms of modern scientific methods in his state of the elevated nationalistic consciousness. That is, he adopted the science of modern European art history from his Japanese teachers Ueno and Tanaka, and thereby tried to systematically discuss the history of Korean art. In so doing, he strove to introduce an appropriate method for our Korean research situations.

His efforts to find a proper method for a description of the history of art, it can be seen, underwent a change in the process of his research articles. Namely, at the early stage he tried to describe Korean art on the basis of the science of 19th century European art history. But when he found that such theory did not fit into our discussion of Korean art, he sought to find a suitable method to account for our Korean art. Then, what would the orientation of the then early 20th century modern aesthetics or art-aesthetics be like? It was 1927 when an aesthetics course was opened at the department of law/liberal arts of Gyongseong Imperial University, nearly 30 years after the course had been established at Tokyo Imperial University. Meanwhile, the nomenclature of aesthetics was virtually established in the Japanese academic society when Ōtsuka Yasuji 大塚保治 took charge of aesthetics lecture in 1899 at the literature department of Tokyo Imperial University.

The kinds of aesthetics prevalent in Germany during that period of time were realistic formal aesthetics, aesthetics from below, empathy aesthetics, the science of art, Neo-Kantian aesthetics, aesthetics of life-philosophy, aesthetics as the science of expression, phenomenological aesthetics, existential aesthetics, all of which attempted to escape from idealism by Hegel, Schopenhauer, et al.²¹ Thus, Japanese aestheticians such as Ōtsuka, educated at that time, were supposed to have learned German idealism, and also to have taught their next generation by using educational materials including diverse aesthetic theories widespread through the European continent.

Ueno, who influenced the aesthetics and art-science of Ko Yuseop, learned aesthetics from Ōtsuka at Tokyo Imperial University (graduated in 1904). Ōtsuka was based on empirical psychology at the dawn of Western aesthetics. Ueno studied afterwards at the University of Berlin from 1924 to 1927. Accordingly it was assumed that Ueno studied aesthetics prevailing in Europe and established a school committed to introducing the method of comparative aesthetics, i.e., the method of the science of comparative arts into art history from the position of mental science, which was also assumed to have had no less influence on Ko Yuseop.

The early methodical disposition that Ko Yuseop showed can be evident in his BA thesis, "The Nature and Significance of Artistic Activity".²² This thesis comprises his own treatment of the theory of 'pure visibility' as the concept of artistic activity in which Konrad Fiedler (1841–95) was mainly interested. What it means is that one has to get rid of all demands and positions so as to see into the pure nature and sense of art per se in one's artistic activity, and artistic manner as a way of the form of representation demands that vari-

21 Kim Moonhwan, *Understanding of Aesthetics*, Moonyae, Press, 1989, pp. 11–12.

22 This thesis appears to consist of a discussion of, mainly, Fiedler's work, *Über den Ursprung der Künstlerischen Tätigkeit* (1887).

ous laws of cognition like visibility be subject to a certain condition. Ko Yuseop seems to have begun studying art history from such a pure artistic point of view. As Fiedler's theory of pure visibility was succeeded by Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921), Alois Riegl (1858–1905), Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), et al., Ko Yuseop's early thesis put to an aggressive use the methodologies of Wölfflin and Riegl.

There was an article of "Concerning Korean Ancient Art" (1932) among others in which he used Riegl's methodology. In this article he said that we could get a glimpse of the artist's will (*Kunstwollen*) such as the thought of the Five Elements, the thought of Zen Buddhism, and the Confucian precepts in the ancient relics in the process of having formed the artery of culture for thousands of years. In "The Art of Goguryo" (1932) he compared the Goguryo art of Korea with the Han dynasty art of China in terms of four concepts. That is, their plastic features are Gothic and Latin, their calligraphic features are tilted and tensible, their orographic features are plain-view and lofty-view, and their plastic forms are triangle and square respectively. This is associated with the comparison of national styles that Wölfflin made in terms of the contrast between Northern-Germanic-German and Southern-Latin-Italian.²³

Ko Yuseop, having studied Korean art in terms of the science of European art history, began to reexamine methodologies in the mid 1930s. Such efforts are well recognized in his *Historical Materials of Korean Art*.²⁴ As he pointed out, the then society of the science of art history leaned toward either the stylistic methodology centering on the history of styles or the mental methodology of relying on the artist's will, and thus had the limit of involving nihilism in the end. The way to deal with this limit was to dialectically unify the rigorous historical viewpoint of Plekhanov, the initiator of Marxist aesthetics, and the exact foundational resources. By unifying the visual form of Wölfflin and the artist's will of Riegl, and grafting it on the historical viewpoint of Vladimir Friche (1870–1929) who systemized the Marxist science of art, he moved toward establishing a totalistic viewpoint of art history. This consideration is also evident in his "What Shall We Get from the Ancient Art?" (1937).

It would be necessary to understand the art of each age concretely through its will, as the school of Wien did, and it would be also necessary to comprehend the visual form of the art of each age through its style, as Wölfflin did. But, in short, they would come together insofar as they were concerned understanding the spirit of culture through the study of art and thereby attaining an ultimate scrutiny.²⁵

His methodology ended in a theory of unifying the history of form and the history of spirit and reunifying them through the understanding of the spirit of the culture of its age. He received the science of European art history and set out to transform it with an eye to making it fit into the academic climate

23 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, London: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd, 1984.

24 Ko Yuseop, *Historical Materials of Korean Art*, Archaeological Research Resources, 1966, pp. 142–143.

25 Ko Yuseop, *The Bottle of Farewell*, Tongmunkwan Press, 1958, p. 4.

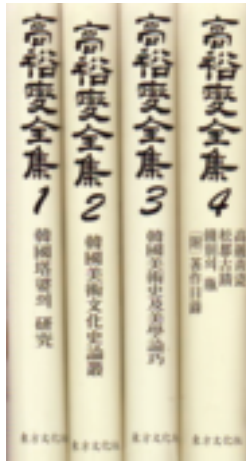


Fig. 8 *The Complete Works of Ko Yuseop*, 4 volumes, Tongmunkwan Press, 1993

of that age. Thus, he got to examine socialist figures such as the Russian art historian, Plekhanov and Friche, and the Japanese Kurahara Korehito 藏原惟人 (1902–1991), and once leaned toward the science of socio-economy.²⁶ The science of socio-economy in Korea was a socialist thought popular under the colonial system of 1920s, and especially Namwoon Paik's *The History of Joseon Socio-Economy* drew attention, which criticized the particular historical viewpoint such as the colonial viewpoint and the nationalistic viewpoint, and argued for the monistic law of historical development.

A survey essay that he wrote about Korean art on the basis of the science of socio-economy is “Our Art and Craft.” Art-craft is part of the art filled with the feeling of synthetic life, and plastic art is something in which the feeling of life is expressed in the artistic unity of shape, line, and color. The revelation of collective consciousness and social consciousness leads to a consciousness of decoration, class, and religion, and the more complex the feeling of life becomes, the richer the content of aesthetic feeling becomes, and the truer the development of art becomes.

In addition, Ko Yuseop also applied a philological methodology to the theory of art. This application seems to reflect on the academic climate of that time, and may be accounted for in two respects. One is to reconsider the objectivity of the science by excluding the subjectivity of researchers through a solid philological study, and the other is to take into account the effect of traditional philology. The effect of traditional philology can be found in the task to look for calligraphy-painting materials among ancient documents in the Gyujanggak 奎章閣 around 1933. According to the diary of Ko Yuseop, it could be related to his close relationship with Oh Saechang 吳世昌. Seen from the association of Oh Saechang's compilation of *The Collection of Korean Calligraphy-Painting* 權域書畫徵, the task to arrange data by excerpting calligraphy-painting materials in the philology could be motivated by such effect. The calligraphy-painting materials that Ko Yuseop arranged were later rearranged and compiled by his students, and were posthumously published under the title *The Total Collection of the Theory of Korean Painting* 朝鮮畫論集成.

Ko Yuseop, having described art history on the basis of the science of the 19th century European art history in his early career, gradually came to recognize the limits of the theory and thus attempted to seek for a methodology suitable for the scholarly climate of Korea and for a description of Korean art history. After unifying the two modern European methodologies of the history of spirit and the history of style in the first place, he intended to set up the total science of art history by receiving the materialistic methodology of the history of socio-economy and the philological methodology of the science of positivistic history. With this total perspective, he tried to describe Korean art, specifically, in terms of a methodology appropriate to the

26 See Moon Myongdae, “Ko Yuseop's Science of Art History”, in *The Method and Theory of the Science of Korean Art History*, Yeolhwadang Press, 1978, and Mok Soohyun, “A Study of Ko Yuseop's View of Art Shown in His Research on the Korean Ancient Art”, MA thesis of Seoul National University, 1991.

feature of each genre in the history of art. (Fig. 8)

3. The Aesthetic Consciousness of Korean Traditional Art

In his later career Ko Yuseop showed an interest in explaining the ‘aesthetic consciousness of Korean traditional art’.²⁷ It implies that he embarked on elucidating the aesthetic consciousness totalizing and running through the whole task, stepping aside from the stage of accounting for Korean art from a historical perspective.²⁸ We can gain a penetrating insight into his perspective only when we trace his entire scholarly trajectory, insofar as we are concerned with his analysis of the Korean aesthetic consciousness.

The essay in which he advanced his opinion on aesthetic consciousness is “Our Art and Craft” (1934), a survey essay of his earlier career. In the opening part of the essay, he analyzed beauty as its two aspects; beauty relates to the appearance of things that is changing and discriminating (Beauty’s reality and appearance), on the one hand, and beauty relates to the value of things that is unchanging and universal (Beauty’s principle and quality), on the other hand. He placed emphasis on the latter, and thereby understood beauty as the perceiving operation of synthetic life-feeling, but also thought that since this changes as the times do, beauty does have a changing appearance and accordingly a historical investigation of beauty is justified. He comprehended beauty as its two aspects, i.e., both universal and historical aspects. This is the dual measure of beauty that he dedicated himself to theorizing in his lifetime.

He explained both aspects of beauty more concretely in analogy with Buddhist concepts in “The Historicity of Beauty and the Task of the Artist of the New Generation” (1935). That is to say, the body of essence, the ultimate nature of the Buddha, corresponds to universal beauty, while the body of transformation, the earthly appearance of the Buddha, corresponds to epochal beauty. Beauty is divided into the body-of-essence beauty and the body-of-transformation beauty. This essay is focused on the historicity of beauty, as the title suggests. In his earlier career he concentrated on the historicity of beauty among the two characteristics of beauty.

In “The Appreciation of Celadon” Ko Yuseop saw the world of Goryo 高麗 celadon as an outcome of ‘nothingness’.²⁹ What he recognized here was that the difficult and tumultuous historicity of the Age of Goryo was reflected in the celadon, and that Zen Buddhism came to be prevalent in such historical situations, one which longs for eternal calmness and doesn’t believe in the secular world, and the world of nothingness or nihilism was revealed in the color, shape, and design of the celadon, a device of the tea ceremony. The total life-feeling brought about in the historical situations was integrated in the celadon of Goryo.

27 See Kwon Youngpil, “The Aesthetic Nature of Korean Art,” in *Art and Criticism*, vol. 7, 1985.

28 This is controversial among the following scholars. Their criticisms of Ko Yuseop’s analysis of the Korean aesthetic consciousness may be divided into three categories; first, the colonial historical perspective, second, the monistic and synchronic viewpoint, and, third, the viewpoint of Yanagi. It strikes me, however, that these criticisms dealt with only part of the writings of Ko Yuseop.

29 Ko Yuseop published *Celadon of Chosun* (Hounsya, Tokyo; 1939) by compiling his writings on celadon, and this book was translated by Jin Hongseop and was published as *Goryo Celadon* (Ulyoumunhwa Press, 1954).



Fig. 9 Manuscript of Ko Yuseop

and small good taste, and ascribed suavity and grace to the former and the latter respectively. Meanwhile, when the former failed to be artistically sublimated, it would become muddy, dull, and bleary, and when the latter failed to be so, it would become modest, thick, and trite. Accordingly, he concluded that the feature of Korean art could be described as the integrity of large taste such coarseness and thickness and small taste such loneliness and humor. It can be seen, thus, that Ko Yuseop’s aesthetic consciousness brought out the specificity of Korean beauty by stressing the historicity of beauty, but turned into its emphasis on the conventionality of universal beauty running through the whole ages.

Therefore, instead of asserting that aesthetic consciousness was simply monistic and synchronic as the previous scholars argued, he emphasized the current phases of beauty at the beginning. He considered that aesthetic consciousness is further relevant to seeking for features of beauty shaped in the internal consciousness, while flowing from its epochal vicissitude. He was concerned with not only describing each beauty in accordance with its corresponding age, but also illuminating several constants according to the change of the times and the exchange of cultures. For him, consequently, Korean aesthetic consciousness presented itself as a combination of large pleasant taste and small elegant taste, or loneness and humor. His exploration of the consciousness of beauty as well as the methodologies of the science of art history was to comprehend Korean art in its organic linkage with the above detailed arguments. (Fig. 9)

However, in his later career, Ko Yuseop came to emphasize the unchanging beauty, i.e., conventional-ity. In “The Feature of Korean Ancient Art and the Problem of Its Succession” (1941), he manifested his viewpoint on aesthetic consciousness that he pursued later. The feature of ancient art in Korea that he attempted to explicate in this essay was no other than the aesthetic consciousness as a whole that comprises the change of the time, and the traditional feature of Korean art. On the basis of the historicity of beauty that he intensively investigated, he set out to explore what it would look like, the universal feature of Ko-rean art, especially seen from the whole framework of Korea with a history of 5000 years.

He discussed more concretely such a feature in “Some Characteristics of the Culture of Korean Art” (1940). He divided Korean art into large good taste

Conclusion

Judging from our discussions thus far, we can find that there are some important moments and thoughts in Park Jonghong's early research achievements. First, the most important moment of his research project was the March First Independence Movement, and both nationalistic self-consciousness and humanistic self-consciousness in that process became the original experience or starting-point of his learning.³⁰ Second, Park Jonghong made up his mind to engage in the study of philosophy when hitting the limit in the midst of describing the history of Korean art, and in that respect his interest in aesthetics paved a path for his study of philosophy. He was considered to have been much influenced by the Japanese aesthetician of Takayama Chogyu and the philosopher Nishida Kitaro. Third, we observed that Park Jonghong conceived of aesthetic feeling as the fundamental motive of life, and on that account took the position of the science of humanity according to which he found its ground in humanity per se. His interest in this, it is supposed, later developed in his study of Heidegger and existential philosophy.

Park Jonghong learned Chinese characters since his childhood, and thereafter extensively read Buddhist texts such as the Lotus Sutra and the Avatamska Sutra, and classical texts concerning Korean history and Confucianism, especially *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸). The ideas of *The Doctrine of the Mean* took a central position in his life and philosophy. He also wrote a short essay "The Doctrine of the Mean and Dialectics" which implies that he had an intention to synthesize traditional philosophy and Western philosophy. In addition, he came to realize, while writing an essay about Toegye (退溪) Lee Hwang (李滉), that the methods of learning would ultimately come through together beyond the conditions of the East and the West, the Old and the New, although they might differ in style.

In this light, we can see that Park Jonghong realized that the particular thought of our race could meet with the universal dimension of the world philosophy.

On the other hand, Woohyun Ko Yuseop's scholarly interest in Korean ancient art and aesthetics consciousness was inherent in his burning desire to investigate something national. This spirit was succeeded by his followers and became the basis on which to build up the system of Korean aesthetics and the science of art history. Not just his scholarly achievement but also his character and thought had such a great effect on many ambitious youths of that time that he indeed became the pillar of the scholarly world.

Ko Yuseop's lifetime task was to write a survey book on the history of Korean art in a methodically systematic manner. As he recognized that the history of Korean art had been written by foreign scholars at the level of laying out the source materials, he strived to apply a legitimate method to describe the history of Korean art. Thus, he attempted to apply the history of style and the history of spirit in his early stage by reading through the 19th century German idealism and art-history science adopted by his Japanese teachers, and sought to establish a total science of art history by unifying the two trends and by combining this with the sciences of socio-economy and philology from the 1930s. His own science of art history consisted in

30 Han Jeonsook, "'Reality' in the Early Work of Yeoram," in *Reality and Creation—An Investigation of the Philosophy of Yeoram Park Jonghong*, Cheonji Press, 1998, pp. 145–146.

associating these methodologies with concrete facts organically. All the above suggests that his achievement certainly goes beyond the mere originator of art history.

Ko Yuseop died untimely early on the verge of blossoming scholarly, which prevented him from enacting his lifetime project to writing the history of Korean art. However, he produced no less achievement in diverse areas in the period when terms such as aesthetics and art history were still strange, and his attempt to approach Korean aesthetics and art history systematically and logically should be highly esteemed. Park Jonghong and Ko Yuseop came to realize national consciousness by experiencing the March First Independence Movement directly in their childhood, and were passionately engrossed in the modern learning of that time in their youth. On that ground, they were committed to discovering and exploring Korean traditional thought and unique art. While confronting Western values, they recognized the particularity of Korean culture and art, brought diverse methods into convergence so as to deal with that particularity, comprised historicity and systematic, and sought for a synthesis of the East and the West.³¹ In addition, they did not eschew responsibility to cultivate young scholars in educationalist attitude.

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31 Professor Otabe Tanehisa from Tokyo University commented on my original paper and suggested that there were some similarity of thoughts between Park Jonghong and Watsuji Tetsurō, and between Ko Yuseop and Ōnishi Yoshinori.

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2010. 12. 30