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Brush, Ink, and Props: The Birth of Korean Painting

Frank Hoffmann

It definitely felt like there were props around the university. You get the feeling that it is sort of like a time capsule society—hair styles even that are kind of stuck in the 1960s.¹

Esther Han, a student from Texas, about a study trip to North Korea (January 2011)

Introduction

The name is program: the term Chosŏnhwa literally means “Korean painting” and is used only in North Korea, not in the South. Chosŏnhwa is a modernized form of traditional East Asian brush-and-ink painting. North Korean publications point out that the rules for Chosŏnhwa were developed between 1954 and 1966.² Although the term itself was used earlier, it was really only in 1966 that it got its specific meaning as a North Korean, modernized version of traditional painting observing certain technical and aesthetic rules as well as regulations in regard to subject matter and style. The earliest work identified as Chosŏnhwa in accordance with this updated meaning was by Kim Yongjun (1904–67) and dates to 1957. There is a handful of paintings from 1959 and 1961, but only in 1966 do we see more works in this style. Judged by its own set of rules, it is those artworks from that time onwards that are fully classified as Chosŏnhwa, while the earlier ones all lack some of the criteria. Chosŏnhwa is the prototype for North Korea's Juche (*chuch'e*, self-re-

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¹ Esther Han, quoted in a BBC News report by Matt Danzico, “Educational Programme Brings Foreigners to North Korea,” 3 January 2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12096490>.

² See Cho In'gyu et al., *Chosŏn misulsa* (History of Korean Art), vol. 2 (P'yŏngyang: Kwahak Paekkwasaajŏn Ch'ulp'ansa, 1990), 53.



Fig. 1
Honored Pak Ch'angsik,
by Kim Kwanho, 35 x 25 cm,
oil on canvas, 1955.



Fig. 2
Comrade Miner Kil Unch'an, by
fourth-year student Pak Chinsu,
gouache, published in the October
1959 issue of *Chosŏn misul*.

liance) aesthetics. It serves as a model for most other fine art genres,³ and it is representative of the formation of the new North Korean national culture during the later 1950s and the 1960s.

After more than six decades of continuous control over all aspects of the country's intellectual and political life by the regimes of Kim Il Sung (Kim Ilŏng, 1912–94) and his son Kim Jong Il (Kim Chŏngil, b. 1941)—the presentation and dissemination of arts to the public is done entirely by state authorities—the toolset of terms and phrases available to an educated North Korean public only enables a local individual to describe an artwork by establishing a circular relationship between a work and its viewer to party and leader. Certainly not devoid of emotions or lacking opinions, but without a pool of real alternative aesthetic choices and bound to a singular self-referential interpretative framework, the ritualistic perceptions of North

³ See, for example, Kim Chaehong, *Chuch'eŭi miron* (Theory of Juche Aesthetics) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Chonghap Ch'ulp'ansa, 1993); Kim Kyo'ryŏn, *Chuch'e misul kŏnsŏl* (Constructing Juche Art) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Chonghap Ch'ulp'ansa, 1995); Sŏng Tuwŏn, *Chuch'eŭi misul hyŏngsang riron* (Aesthetic Form Theory of Juche) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Chonghap Ch'ulp'ansa, 2001); Hong Ŭijŏng and Kim Sunyŏng, *Chuch'e misurŭi chŏnmyŏnjŏk kaehwa* (The Full Blossoming of Juche Art) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Chonghap Ch'ulp'ansa, 2001). The most descriptive and explanatory works about Chosŏnhwa, the only ones providing an actual art-historical discussion, however limited, are still Ha Kyŏnggho, *Chosŏnhwa hyŏngsang riron* (Theory of Form in Chosŏnhwa) (P'yŏngyang: Chosŏn Misul Ch'ulp'ansa, 1986), as well as Ri Chaehyŏn and Cho In'gyu, *Chosŏnhwaŭi chŏnmyŏnjŏk kaehwa* (The Full Blossoming of Chosŏnhwa) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Ch'ulp'ansa, 2002). Ri Chaehyŏn is also the compiler of an extensive biographical lexicon with entries on several hundred Korean artists: *Chosŏn ryŏktae misulga p'yŏllam* (Historical Lexicon of Korean Artists), 2nd ed. (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Chonghap Ch'ulp'ansa, 1999).



Fig. 3
A large Chosŏnhwa painting,
Early Morning, by Ri Tonggŏn
(b. 1954), from 1998, at a 2010
North Korean art exhibition at the
MAK in Vienna (center painting).

Korean viewers are destined to clash with our own aesthetic paradigms.⁴ How such spectators receive the art they view is therefore not even touched on here.

How, why, and when was Chosŏnhwa developed, and how does it relate to other two-dimensional art genres like oil painting? How do we get from the crude Soviet-style socialist realist works of the late 1940s and the 1950s, such as these two portraits on the left, one an oil painting (fig. 1), the other a gouache (fig. 2), to a soothing work like *Early Morning* from 1998 (fig. 3)? (In the North Korean understanding, this painting is still considered a socialist realist work, a Korean version of socialist realism, Juche realism, in this case in Chosŏnhwa style.)

Colonial legacies

A look at the period preceding the founding of sovereign states in the north and the south of Korea, the colonial period, and the immediate post-Liberation period, when Soviet and American forces occupied the peninsula, might shed some light on the roots of artistic development. The South under US military rule and later its authoritarian president Syngman Rhee (1875–1965) experienced basically a continuation of colonial period artistic styles and groupings. For many years the South kept the institutional structure of art institutions, government-organized national art exhibitions and their system of judging for determining awards, the generic classifications of genres, the ways art criticism and cultural heritage conservation and museums worked, as well as the terminology that had been introduced by the Japanese from the era of the Chŏsen Art Exhibition sponsored by the colonial Government-General from 1922 to 1944. We see the same divisions into

⁴ This self-referential model has been widely utilized and expounded upon for works of North Korean literature and can equally well be applied to the visual arts; see, e.g., the publications by anthropologist Sonia Ryang and by Korean studies specialist Stephen Epstein.

so-called Oriental painting (*tongyanghwa*), Western-style painting mostly oil painting), calligraphy, sculpture, and Four Gentlemen painting (*sa'gunja*). This division, this genrefication as I like to call it, is important as it clashes with Euramerican genrefication concepts of the modern and contemporary arts. Up until the 1970s, *tongyanghwa* continued to be used as a term. It signifies “East Asian painting,” a term the Japanese had basically used to indicate that Koreans only copied Chinese painting styles and paintings. The style was then involuntarily contrasted with Nihonga (Japanese-style painting), the modernized brush-and-ink painting of Japan.⁵ Han'gukhwa was later—and still is—used in the South, but this term has been a halfhearted reaction to the North Korean term Chosŏnhwa. (*Han'guk* and *chosŏn* are the two contested names for Korea, but *han'guk* is used only in the South.) It has remained an apathetic and incomplete replacement of terminology. A specific national “Korean” (or South Korean) style of brush-and-ink painting has not been developed in the South. In structural terms, modernity in the arts was still either a continuation of cultural colonial policies or a reaction against them, but hardly an alternative.

From August 1945 to September 1948 we seem to have only one influential player in North Korea: the Soviet Union.⁶ Russian socialist realism was completely foreign to Koreans at the time. Japanese art policies and practices in Korea constituted the only familiar model of twentieth-century arts at the time of liberation. It comes as no surprise that attempts to introduce Soviet-style socialist realism could only be received in a dialectic process of reaction to and continuation of colonial Japanese structures, often enough as a hodgepodge of both, and all at the same time. These, again, are patterns that are not peculiar to North Korea but are very familiar to many former colonies: historians writing about modern intellectual history have rightfully pointed out that even the most ardent and capable anti-Japanese intellectual Korean leaders of the colonial period would fall back to Japanese models in order to fight the Japanese: Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936), for example, took

⁵ An excellent overview of Nihonga is provided in the exhibition catalog by Ellen P. Conant, in collaboration with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer, *Nihonga, Transcending the Past: Japanese-style Painting, 1868–1968* (St. Louis and Tokyo: Saint Louis Art Museum and Japan Foundation, 1995).

⁶ In recent years several scholars have argued that North Koreans were far more “in charge” than previously acknowledged, more so than in Eastern European satellite states of the Soviet Union, and also that China had an important influence on the North. See, e.g., Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Adam Cathcart and Charles Kraus, “Internationalist Culture in North Korea, 1945–1950,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 2008): 123–48. Such views are not supported by sufficient evidence. Furthermore, this position seems like a double bind: an alternative view of early North Korean development is being offered, alternative to what is presented as semi-official conservative American and South Korean historiography, but the image conveyed by the international reference points that North Korea is being compared to is still the exact same old Cold War-era image as it was largely propagated by the US—making those states appear like grey, cultureless no-name states somewhere behind the Iron curtain (the MacGyver view). The diplomatic and cultural manoeuvring and search for independence of many of those so-called East Bloc satellite states that are referred to in such generalizing terms is therefore much underestimated. Most of the evidence presented points in fact to the very same patterns of North Korean state-formation under Soviet rule as seen in other Soviet satellite states, and the localization developments in the arts are no exception.

Japan as a blueprint for his own model of a modern militarized nation-state, basically reversing nationalist Japanese historiographic approaches devised for the benefit of Nippon's national legacies when writing about the ancient history of his own land. Most of his prominent contemporaries, including Pak Ŭnsik (1859–1925) and others, all applied essentially the same model in their nation-building attempts, mirroring the colonizer's vision of a modern state.⁷ It is this context of reaction and reversal within an otherwise unchallenged structural concept of a modern nation and its institutions that we need to consider in order to understand the North's post-liberation developments in the art. Forms of Western and Japanese superiority still came into play through a substitution process comprised of partial reversal, partial borrowing, and partially reacting against them.

The colonializing qualities of cultural and institutional transfer from Japan to Korea and Taiwan quickly become evident. The East/West and modern/backward dichotomy of Western-style vs. Oriental painting (to use a matching colonialist term in English) was in Japan itself pretty much overridden by the use of the term Nihonga, Japanese-style painting, which denotes painting in traditional East Asian techniques (on Japanese paper or silk, using brush and Chinese ink, etc.) but utilizing already modernized, Western-influenced illusionistic techniques such as linear perspective and shading. In later periods, Nihonga also dealt with subject matter that were clearly positioned within modern life—depictions of big city life, office girls, fashion models, trains, and so forth. In the colonies, of course, the term *tongyanghwa* prevailed. Chosŏnhwa, which at the time would have been the Korean match to Nihonga, would have been a reminder of dynastic Korean culture and Korean cultural identity. Some recent works have argued that the intellectual concept of this East/West divide between Nihonga and Western oil painting is just an idealistic and nationalistic concept, more of an illusion and ideology than actual artistic practice.⁸ Daily practice (this also applies to colonial Korea) shows that many artists worked simultaneously in Japanese and Western styles, and that Nihonga was not only the result of influences from Western painting, but Nihonga and its techniques and aesthetics did reversely influence oil painting done in Japan. Nihonga continued to develop into an avant-garde art, applying a more and more abstract pictorial language—even for rendering battle scenes during the Pacific War.⁹

Western-style painting had grown especially popular during the colonial period among young artists and the educated younger elite. It was Western, therefore considered modern and advanced. Brush-and-ink painting was thus in a pre-

⁷ For a lively discussion on the above mentioned dependency complex and what this means in practical terms, see Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 5–13, and elsewhere.

⁸ See especially Furuta Ryō et al., eds., *Yuragu kindai: Nihonga to yōga no hazama ni / Modern Art in Wanderings: In Between the Japanese- and Western-style Paintings* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 2006).

⁹ See, for example, works by Takashi Yamazaki (1916–2004) from 1938, 1940, and 1942 in Yamano Hidetsugu, *'Nihonga' no zen'ei 1938–1949* (The Avant-garde of 'Nihonga', 1938–1949) (Kyōto: Kyōto Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 2010).

determined losing position in the competition between the two genres. Its only chance was to modernize. To do so under colonial conditions, within the colonial power structure, though, meant following the Japanese model, Nihonga. That is exactly what happened. Brush painting would on the one hand always lag behind modernized Japanese brush painting and, on the other, would never be equal to Western-style painting either, but its proponents still needed to pursue both in order to exist—a perfect reflection of the workings of a colonial dialectic and the types of colonial domination under which colonial Korea was modernized.

The Janus-faced inheritance of pre-1945 modern art created a problem for post-liberation Koreans: firstly, the Nihonga-ized version of Korean brush-and-ink painting had also been used and abused in Japanese war propaganda campaigns and was unacceptable, and secondly, Western oil painting was still labelled as foreign, as non-Korean, as an art for the young cultural elite, and had also been pushed by the colonizer. Essential post-colonial dilemmas like this one cannot be overcome quickly. In the months following liberation, even before the two Korean states were founded in 1948, we see political campaigns and purges against collaborators that also encompassed many important cultural figures, including painters. It is also noteworthy that neither the North nor the South tried to reclaim and reconnect to their pre-colonial heritage right after liberation or during the immediate post-Korean War period. In a typical post-colonial scenario, both Koreas needed the specialists trained under Japanese rule, and both states thus made compromises. In the South it took until the 1980s when an entirely new generation started what we might call a nativist approach in the arts with the Minjung cultural movement and Minjung art, especially in painting, print-making and theatre. Right after liberation, however, there was no such formative national movement, and after a short witch-hunt for pro-Japanese collaborators, many artists nevertheless continued to work in Japanese styles. Only Japanese wartime propaganda themes and heroes were replaced by depictions of Korean national heroes. Among the few popular themes in the South were Christian themes in local Korean settings, possibly in search for a missing alternative to the dramatic social and political changes in the North.

Socialist realism

In the North, of course, we have what at first sight seems like a radical break with these colonial art practices through Soviet involvement in cultural politics right after liberation. The aim was to replace both the institutional framework as well as the existing artistic styles, at least partially, by Soviet-style institutions led by the communists and by socialist realism as a style. This break is usually interpreted as a period of rupture and radical change that lasted until the end of the 1950s. Yet I would prefer to argue that, as in the South, the replacement of styles and techniques by no means occurred overnight, either. Up until the very late 1950s and a little less so still in the first half of the 1960s, we see many contradictory art practices. In oil painting, for example, we see in both Koreas a continuing influence of impressionist-

based realism that derived from late nineteenth-century French impressionism and academic painting, introduced during the colonial period.

The post-Liberation North Korean history of painting that we can reconstruct clearly reveals a jumble of Japanese colonial and Soviet administrative models serving as a frame where Soviet-style socialist realism met Japanized painting styles (as they were practised in late colonial Korea). Artworks from those early years, brush-and-ink painting as well as oil painting—no longer on display in North Korea and removed decades ago from official history—show a conservation of styles that had all been developed during the colonial period, techniques and styles that were mostly untouched by socialist realism. In local and international exhibitions, such works hung side-by-side with propagandistic works in socialist realist style.¹⁰

Both Korean states, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south, competed to reverse legitimacies in their own favor. Icons and symbolic values may have been replaced, partially or entirely, in the process, while structural frameworks and techniques often stayed on. As John Clark has observed, the leadership of post-colonial new nations “can be inclined to adopt the conservative taste of their predecessors” as an “imaginary extension”¹¹ of their pre-modern and colonial pasts. Their new political ideology was often a direct reaction, reversing legitimacies with no alternative structures yet in place, nor, simply, was there enough time to replace an established aesthetic value system. Aesthetic value systems are part of a person's socialization process, grow over time, and are far slower to replace or change than ideological belief systems. Kim Il Sung, however, proved to be a very malleable leader. Predetermined by

¹⁰ The majority of surviving works from this early period were kept in the depositories of the P'yŏngyang University of Fine Art and a few other regional art schools and artists' workshops, for example in Kaesŏng and Sinŭiju. Many smaller-scale works and sketches were also in the property of artists' families. The majority of all of these were sold to international collectors in Japan, South Korea and elsewhere during the mid-1990s and early 2000s. These works had not been on display for decades. Between 1961 and 1966 they were withdrawn from public display, usually graded on the picture back as “not for public display” (always removed before a sale), and put into storage. However, a good impression of the art production of that period can be gathered by looking through the various photos and descriptions in catalogs for, and reviews of, exhibitions in Warsaw, Sofia, East Berlin and Moscow from the late 1950s, the years before the major split between China and the USSR. As such, they give a good idea of art before and during the beginning of the Ch'ŏllima movement. M.W., “W kręgu sztuki koreańskiej (INFORMACJA WŁASNA),” *Trybuna Ludu* 292 (22 October 1957): 3; Kim Chŏngsu, “P'aran inmindŭrui yŏlgwangjŏk hwanyŏngŭl patnŭn chosŏn misul” (Korean Art Enthusiastically Received by Polish People), *Chosŏn misul* (January 1958): 44–45; Chang Hyŏkt'ae, “Oeguk sunhoe chosŏn misul chŏllamhoeŭi sŏnggwa” (Impact of Korean art exhibition's foreign tour), *Chosŏn misul* (September 1958): 54–57; Ursula Grabow, “Ein Bild ist viele Worte wert: Die koreanische Abteilung auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung der sozialistischen Länder,” *Bildende Kunst* (July 1959): 446–50; Gerhard Gossman, *Kunst der Demokratischen Volksrepublik Korea: Ausstellung Mai-Juli 1959, Pergamon-Museum Berlin* (Berlin: Gesellschaft für kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland, Staatliche Museen Berlin: 1959); Gerhard Gossman, “W ŏndongŭi kŭrimdŭl (Pictures from the Far East),” *Chosŏn misul* (July 1959): 14; Georg Kaufmann, “Chosŏnŭi yesul (Arts of Korea),” *Chosŏn misul* (July 1959): 13; Fritz Eggers, “Die traditionelle Technik folgt dem Leben: Gedanken zur Ausstellung koreanischer Kunst im Pergamon-Museum,” *Bildende Kunst* (September 1959): 609–13.

¹¹ John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 250.

his Soviet army background, and having been put into the driver's seat by the Russians, he was most inclined to adapt Stalinist cultural politics.

Socialist realism is the keyword for cultural life during the early years. While North Korea also had relations with China and other socialist countries and even provided aid for the Chinese revolution, the Soviet Union as liberator and as occupying force had the actual power. Modernism as well as the avant-garde were rejected in the Soviet Union. Modernism, of course, is more of a collective, summarizing term that encompasses the various authentic cultural responses to changes in industrialization, sciences and social life; Social Darwinism is certainly one of its underlying belief systems; and the avant-garde can in many ways be understood as the revolutionary arm of the modernist movement. But both were rejected as representations of "Western" capitalist countries. The 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress was the birthplace of socialist realism. It is interesting, firstly, that the main reasoning for the invention of socialist realism was clearly bound to geographic and cultural locality: the Soviet Union was declared to be a non-Western, non-European locality. Secondly, socialist realism was from the beginning designed to be a tool for mass manipulation. Marx himself had already worked with the presumption that art *creates* its audience: "The object of art ... creates an artistic and beauty-enjoying public. Production thus produces not only an object for the individual, but also an individual for the object."¹²

Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), in his speech about "Soviet literature" delivered at the 1934 congress, defined the essence of socialist realism:

Myth is invention. To invent means to extract from the sum of a given reality its cardinal idea and embody it in imagery—that is how we got realism. But if to the idea extracted from the given reality we add—completing the idea, by the logic of hypothesis—the desired, the possible, and thus supplement the image, we obtain that romanticism which is at the basis of myth and is highly beneficial in that it tends to provoke a revolutionary attitude to reality, an attitude that changes the world in a practical way.¹³

For him, "myth is invention," but it is, he says, "highly beneficial" as a means to manipulate people in developing a revolutionary attitude. We thus find the use of myth and manipulated depictions of reality at the very core of socialist realism right from the beginning, in Gorky's blueprint of socialist realism. In his speech Gorky went on to attack the early modernist movement.¹⁴ His main argument was that the freedom of the modernists would only signify the freedom of the bourgeoisie in the West, that is, Western Europe, in his definition. The Russian locality he was establishing

¹² Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), 280.

¹³ Maxim Gorky, "Soviet Literature," in *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*, ed. H. G. Scott (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), 44.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 48.

here was clearly separated from "the West" and was in an alternative locality, an outside-of-the-West locality, that had in the past referenced and imported the cultural ills of "the West" (he was referring to the 1907-to-1917 period), but in sum it was an alternative locality distinctively different from the West—geographically, culturally, historically, politically. This was an early and clear attempt at localizing existing theory (here Marxism) and an attempt to appropriate the arts for the needs of the particular local political system. North Korea would do precisely that and nothing else when developing Chosŏnhwa from the later 1950s. It would try to form a localized art the better to manipulate and motivate its people, an art that would reflect the regime and its needs. Towards the end of his speech Gorky demanded: "The Party leadership (...) must be thoroughly purged of all philistine influences."¹⁵ Just a few months later he himself was put under house arrest, while many other writers were imprisoned or killed. We see the same patterns in the North Korean case, with intellectuals and artists being purged during the years 1957 to 1959, after Juche ideology and the Ch'ŏllima campaign had been introduced.¹⁶ By 1961, Kim Il Sung had dramatically reduced the number of members of both the Soviet and the Yanan factions in the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee. Writers, artists, and other intellectuals who had come back from abroad in the years after liberation or had come over from the South during the Korean War also lost all positions of power.

In a June 1951 speech on literature and art, Kim quoted Stalin phrases such as "engineers of the human soul,"¹⁷ first used by Stalin in a speech at the home of Maxim Gorky in October 1932. The North Korean leader still pushed for socialist realism: "We should study that which is excellent and progressive in the literature and art of the Soviet Union, China and other People's Democracies, thereby enriching our national culture still further."¹⁸ Nine years later, in a speech of 27 November 1960 to "art workers," Kim is shifting the emphasis away from *Soviet-style* socialist realism to *Korean-style* arts that should provide a "vivid representation" of Korean Ch'ŏllima-age "sentiments" in line with the new socialist state.¹⁹ Some criticism and the demand for a more nationalized form of art are already present in this speech, but a clear vision and the formula on how to achieve it are not yet there. Let us keep in mind what Kim is up to: he wants to bring forth an aesthetic program with the explicit purpose of giving symbolic life to themes that

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ See Rüdiger Frank, "North Korea: Between Stagnation and Pressure to Change," in *Introduction to the Political Systems in East Asia*, eds. Claudia Derichs and Thomas Heberer (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), 271–325.

¹⁷ Kim Il Sung, "On Some Questions of Our Literature and Art: Talk with Writers and Artists, June 30, 1951," in *Kim Il Sung: Selected Works*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (P'yŏngyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976), 305.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁹ See Kim Il Sung, "Let Us Create Literature and Art Suitable to the Chollima Age: Talk with Writers, Composers, and Film Workers, November 27, 1960," in *Kim Il Sung: Selected Works*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (P'yŏngyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976), 583.

can be considered Korean, by the creation of stylistic means that can be interpreted as a modern socialist extension of “national” techniques and styles. The viewer will thus end up finding himself in a “circular entrapment between classification of content and interpretation of intent”²⁰ that is not necessarily foreign to South Korean cultural super-agents of nationalism either (see e.g. the calendar-friendly depictions of Korean folk life by Pak Su’gün, 1914–65).

The experiences of individual painters help to illustrate the processes at work in these early years. The two images (figs. 1 and 2) are indeed perfect representations for the period before the “nationalization” of painting had advanced. The oil portrait of a political cadre and the watercolor portrait of a worker demonstrate the overly strict and formalistic transfer of Soviet-style socialist realism as well as the very first, rather helpless attempts to localize them by using inscriptions in the Korean alphabet. Figure 1 is a small oil portrait of politician Pak Ch’angsik (1905–early 1960s?). This painting was in storage not just because of its Soviet socialist-realist style. The man in the portrait was a Soviet Korean born as Illarion Dmitrievich Pak. He joined the Communist Party (KPSS) in the Soviet Far East and in 1937 was forced, like all Soviet Koreans, to relocate to Central Asia, but was still able to continue his political career there. In October 1945 he entered Korea for the first time in his life, as an officer of the Red Army. Since he was an ethnic Korean who spoke the language, the Russians placed him in important positions within the Korean communist party (later Korean Workers’ Party) and the new administration. Pak became deputy chairman of the P’yöngyang City People’s Committee, and when Seoul was under North Korean control he even was its vice-mayor. But with the purges of Soviet Koreans in the late 1950s he lost all positions, was sent to the countryside and was finally arrested as “American spy” in September 1960; after that every trace of him is lost.²¹

In its essentials, the painting is an impressionist painting, but it has interesting details peculiar to that period which qualify it, in a sort of way, as a work of socialist realism. The brush strokes are intentionally kept bold, almost as in expressionism, a style that was taboo in the Soviet Union and North Korea. This boldness is here an expression of simplicity, which is again seen as a way to create art that can be understood by everybody, art for workers. In the same line of dialectic we see that the title of the painting, *Honored Pak Ch’angsik*, and the year and the painter’s first name, “55 Kwanho,” are painted on the picture in overbold brush strokes, with no elegance whatsoever, almost as if written by a child. This is done in the Korean alphabet and not, as was customary before liberation, in the Latin alphabet in oils and in Chinese characters in traditional painting. The style of the Korean syllables and the vertical direction of the title inscription—and of course the surprising fact that an oil painting comes with a title inscription—can at the same time be understood as a Koreanization of Western-style oil painting, as it is a clear

²⁰ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 239.

²¹ Information based on a more detailed biographical sketch that Dr. Andrei N. Lankov kindly provided me with in 2001.

reminder of East Asian calligraphy, which is again nationalized through the use of the alphabet. Even the fact that part of the canvas at the bottom is left blank can be interpreted this way, as it is reminiscent of traditional brush-and-ink painting, where ink and colors did not cover the entire picture plane (paper or silk).

As we see in figure 2—a sketch in Western watercolor technique by a fourth-year art student, entitled *Comrade Miner Kil Unch’an* and published in an art magazine in October 1959 as an exemplary depiction of a worker—the very same archetype was being applied to portray people of all social strata and occupations (here a miner) and was used not just in oil painting but in other Western-imported techniques such as watercolors or pastels. The 1955 oil portrait is interesting in further ways: “Kwanho” stands for Kim Kwanho (1890–1959), the second Korean to have studied Western-style painting during the colonial period. Kim, a native of P’yöngyang, graduated in 1916 from the prestigious Tokyō Fine Arts School. His graduation work *Sunset*, the first nude in Korean oil painting, received a special prize at the Japanese National Art Exhibition (Bunten) and made him famous. Yet, after a few years he gave up on painting and only made a re-appearance in 1946, when he became head of the P’yöngyang city branch of the Standing Committee of the Korean Artists’ Union and started painting and teaching again. Like others with a bourgeois background and foreign training he lost all influence after the Korean War. Kim’s work demonstrates how simple the stylistic adjustments of this first generation of oil painters were at the time. What is more, these adjustments do not work too well and appealed neither to uneducated workers and peasants nor to Japanese-trained intellectuals and artists. The painters themselves were certainly the first to understand this, and Kim Il Sung saw it (or was told so). We see reflections of and reactions to this difficulty in the later speeches and also in the debates, staged or not, of painters in *Chosŏn misul* (Korean Art) and some other magazines all through the 1950s.

Gradual adjustments of artists

For most of the oil painters who had been trained during the colonial period in Korea or abroad, it took years to adjust their styles from a system that had advertised modernism and various modern painting styles to socialist realism. Some never managed to. Yi Chungšöp (1916–56) for example, one of the most talented post-war experimental painters, stayed with his Japanese wife in the Wönsan area, his home region, after liberation. But Yi was not too happy there, his work was censored, and he regularly referred to the Misulga Tongmaeng, the Artists’ League, as Maengmul Tongmaeng, Dishwater League.²² Like many others, he and his family fled to the South during the Korean War.

The censorship situation in the South, of course, was not rosy either. Kim Chu’gyöng (1902–81), another well-established oil painter and Tokyo graduate, left

²² Interview with Yi Yöngjin, 9 July 1988.

the South as early as October 1946 and became one of the most influential artists in the North. He was even delegated to design the DPRK national flag and the national emblem. While it might at first sound ironic or an overstatement, in comparing Kim Chu'gyōng's earlier and later work we can see that even those emblem designs closely followed his personal style, a special kind of post-impressionist mode: landscapes depicting the sky and clouds with heavy and vibrant colors, and flowers, trees and people in strong bright greens or violet tones. He favored desolate landscapes that often seem almost geometrically calculated, all done with a very limited variation of colors. While his works done in the North still show this reduced number of colors, his later works are done in a more realistic scheme (e.g., the sky would be azure blue and the rice field at harvest time yellow instead of violet). But apart from the reduction in experimentation there are more similarities than differences in style between his 1940s works and those done up to the 1970s.

Another group of painters, maybe around seventy, such as the Tokyo-trained oil painter Yi K'waedae (1913–65) or the Berlin-trained woodcut artist and painter Pae Unsōng (1900–78), fled or tried to flee north during the Korean War. These were all made welcome and played their role, but by the end of the 1950s or soon after, they were purged and/or their authority dwindled. Yi K'waedae, for example, seems to have largely got himself into trouble in the South because his elder brother was a communist activist who had gone north. He himself quickly became disappointed with the communists' preoccupation with socialist realism and tried to distance himself from pro-communist groups, but with the occupation of Seoul by northern forces in June 1950 and after his decision to stay on instead of fleeing to Pusan, he would not have had a chance to remain when the city was retaken. The well-known Four Gentlemen painter Kim Chinu (1883?–1950) was one of those who were caught and imprisoned by the South Korean police when trying to flee north. As a hardliner among the artists who had cooperated with the communists he was given a life sentence and later died in Sōdaemun prison in Seoul. Yi K'waedae was in that same so-called *mido'gangp'a* group, the people who did not leave Seoul or were not fast enough to do so when the Northern troops withdrew again. He was also imprisoned. But since Yi ended up in a POW camp he got a chance to leave for the North in a prisoner-of-war exchange. Comparing Yi's now well-known large-scale series of group images (*Kunsang I–III*) (1944–48), where he freely borrowed from Italian and French painters like Botticelli and Delacroix, with his *March First Movement* painting done in 1957 in the North, it becomes evident that these are stylistically not too far apart. From the 1960s onwards, however, the situation changed dramatically. Yi's personal style, his insolent use and quoting of European Renaissance, Baroque and Romantic works, was lost from then on.²³

With Pae Unsōng we have yet another pattern of development. Like Yi, Pae was originally not a politically active person, rather someone mostly preoccupied

²³ For reproductions of the paintings mentioned, see Kim Chinsong, *Yi K'waedae* (Yi K'waedae), Yōrhwadang misul mun'go 210 (Seoul: Yōrhwadang, 1996), 131–47 and 160. See also *Chosōn misul* (September 1958): 57.

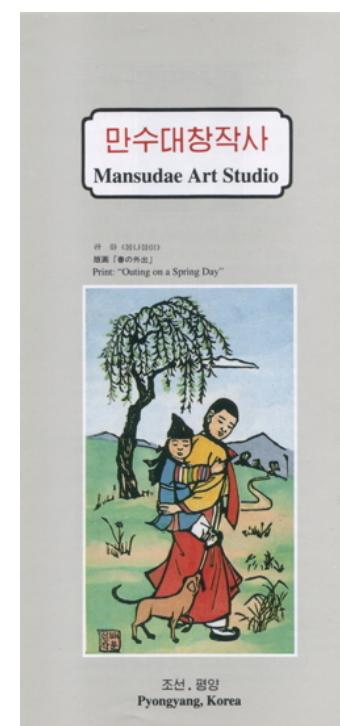
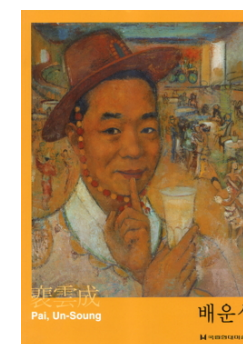


Fig. 4
North Korea, leaflet about Pae Unsōng for a special show by the Mansudae Art Studio in P'yōngyang, mid-1990s. The cover shows Pae's 1955 wood-print *Outing on a Spring Day*.

Fig. 5
South Korea, catalog of an exhibition of work by Pae Unsōng, National Museum of Contemporary Art, 7 September to 21 October 2001. The cover depicts Pae's oil painting *Self-portrait with Hat* from the 1930s.



with his personal success and fame.²⁴ Looking through Pae's many short articles and statements in *Chosōn misul* it is hard not to grin: while all the other artists were busy praising their colleagues' works or explaining what had to be done and what the national aims for the arts in the new socialist society should be, many of Pae's sentences start with *nanūn*, "as far as I am concerned." Like many others, Pae had collaborated with the Japanese. He seems to have left the South for the North only because of his second wife Ri Chōngsu (b. 1917), a Northerner. During the immediate post-liberation period she ended up in jail because of her left-wing activism, and it was Pae Unsōng who helped her out of that situation. In 1950, the couple cooperated with the northern administration, and when the northern forces were driven back, Pae and his wife had therefore no other option than fleeing with them. Today the woodcut artist and painter is exhibited in both parts of Korea (figs. 4 and 5).

Yet, both parts are having a hard time appreciating his art. In the South, Pae and his art are discussed within the pro-Japanese collaboration discourse that has been overwhelmingly strong there since the late 1980s. Technical sub-categories of this debate are "local colors," "war propaganda art" and "Nihonga-esque style," the very same categories that were already being discussed during the immediate post-liberation months. The secondary theme he is usually classified under is the *pungnyōk hwaga* leitmotif, the "painters gone north" topic. In the North he

²⁴ Interview with Kurt Runge, 6 December 1990.



Fig. 6
Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi posing in her
dress for the *Bodhisattva*
Dance, 1939.



Fig. 7
Dance with Changgo,
Pae Unsŏng, 30 x 20 cm,
woodcut, 1955.

was later also not fully trusted as a painter from the South, and he did not adjust his artistic style either.

Once in the North, the artist basically continued what he had been doing before. Instead of his first wife Madlonka posing as a Spanish flamenco dancer with castanets, it was now the world-famous Korean dancer and choreographer Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi (1911–69) whom he depicted. Ch'oe had also been marked as a pro-Japanese collaborator in the South and had also gone North. In Pae's woodcut, Ch'oe no longer looks like an Asian version of Josephine Baker (see fig. 6), but appears properly dressed as a player of the Korean *changgo* drum (fig. 7). There is no experimentation, but otherwise there was no change in his personal style as he had developed it in the 1920s and 1930s.

For Pae and many other artists, things only started to get difficult with the Ch'ŏllima campaign and the Fourth Party Congress in 1961. This congress set up the First Seven-Year Plan and decided on strict principles in the arts, which from then on would be guided like factories—any sort of artistic freedom and personal style was strongly discouraged in the following years. Concurrent developments in Mao's China further encouraged these trends. As a special gesture, Pae and other painters issued an "Artists' Resolution for the Fourth Party Congress,"²⁵ indicating their agreement to these new directives, reporting on their own work and offering their assistance. They were probably also fearful of developments as they saw them in China, where professional artists were being sent to the countryside for re-education. Pae, however, declared in his usual self-preoccupied manner that he would

²⁵ Ri Sŏkho, Pae Unsŏng et al., "Che-4-cha tang taehoerŭl mannŭn misulgadŭrŭi kyŏrŭi" (Artists' Resolution for the Fourth Party Congress), *Chosŏn misul* (May 1961): 20–21.



Fig. 8
Bumper Harvest of Reeds,
Pae Kyŏngun, 59 x 91 cm,
woodcut, 1977?

greet the congress with his own one-man show. Step by step, Pae and most others who had come from the South lost their influence in these years. Pae was finally accused of being an "American spy," was briefly imprisoned, soon after rehabilitated, but still expelled from the capital and sent to Sinŭiju. In sum, this first generation hardly ever changed their techniques and styles, just abandoned their modernist experiments and from time to time added some red flags, steel mills, construction sites or other socialist subject matter. It took a new generation to practice a new style. Pae's oldest son Pae Kyŏngun, born in 1948, shows us the look of this new art (fig. 8).

Although a woodcut and not a brush-and-ink painting, the son's work is already heavily influenced by the development of Chosŏnhwa and its technical and aesthetic rules. The father's prints always incorporated and utilized the specific material used in the aesthetic concept of the print he created (wood and its material and surface characteristics, and paper). The son's work now looks very similar to a post-1960s Chosŏnhwa painting. As a reproduction it is not immediately obvious to the viewer what genre the original is. In this specific work we can also detect a strong influence from the artwork produced during China's Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

Cult, modernization, style

The early 1960s is also the time of a spurt in the personality cult around Kim Il Sung. The November 1959 cover of the art magazine *Chosŏn misul* displayed a Russian artist's sketch of Lenin; the June 1960 issue already showed a Kim Il Sung sketch by Chŏng Kwanch'ŏl (1916–83). Apart from Chŏng, one of the first painters to advance in that area was Mun Haksu (1916–88), a native of P'yŏngyang, also trained in Japan, and a painter who had also been very well established during the colonial period. Mun was long known for his attempts to incorporate specific Korean themes and to develop a style of oil painting that would express national sentiments. He would therefore become the natural leader of the group of oil painters in their fight for power and recognition with the brush-and-ink painters and their Chosŏnhwa. During the colonial period Mun's paintings typically resembled those



Fig. 9
Mass Gathering to Welcome the Return of the Great Leader of the Revolution, Comrade Kim Il Sung, Mun Haksu, oil on canvas, 1953



Fig. 10
Mass Gathering to Welcome the Return of the Great Leader of the Revolution, Comrade Kim Il Sung, Mun Haksu, 333 x 197 cm, oil on canvas, 1961

of Delacroix, and he carried over quite a lot of this style into the post-liberation period, as we can see in his painting *Mass Gathering to Welcome the Return of the Great Leader of the Revolution, Comrade Kim Il Sung*, boosting Kim's welcome meeting on 14 October 1945. Mun executed at least three versions of this scene (see figs. 9 to 11).

As with the often discussed painting of a very similar depiction by Dong Xiwen (1914-73), *The Ceremony to Declare People's China*,²⁶ also from 1953 and repainted in the 1960s in order to eradicate two politicians from the scene, in the 1961 version Mun "corrected" issues of both style and content. In the intervening period he was much influenced by socialist realism and, like hundreds of professionals had undergone training in the Soviet Union. Lenin and Stalin are now reversed, Kim Il Sung's hand gesture no longer resembles that of Mao Zedong (in Chinese depictions), we see more script banners, there are army officers standing behind him, and very importantly, there are now more workers and poor farmers in the crowd (rather than members of the middle class). In yet another repainted version from the 1960s, Mun "corrected" history again by cutting off the billboard with the Lenin and Stalin portraits. Removing these icons is not an indication of a de-Stalinization process; it is just one more transfer of authority to Kim Il Sung.

This later version of Mun's painting is still used today, reproduced in many other media, such as murals,²⁷ mosaics, postage stamps (fig. 11), and so forth. John Clark's note about the Dong Xiwen painting/s (see above) applies just as well to North Korea: "The contemporary without history, even without the very recent past which founded the contemporary, only occurs in a context of empowerment."²⁸

²⁶ Reproductions of two of several versions can be found in Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 209.

²⁷ For a discussion of the reproduction of Mun Haksu's painting in the form of a mosaic mural, see the chapter by Marsha Hauffer in this volume, "Mosaic Murals of North Korea," especially figs. 14 and 15 on pp. 260-61. The title given in this article to the work is variously *Cheers of the Whole Nation* and *The First Speech of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung upon Returning to Korea in Triumph*.

²⁸ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 284.

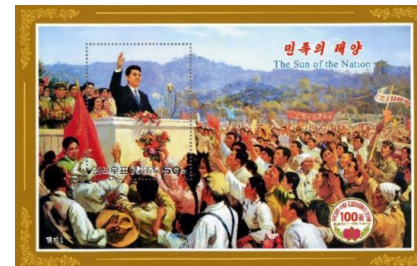


Fig. 11
DPRK postage stamp to celebrate the year 2011, that is, "Juche 100" according to the official North Korean calendar, which starts with Kim Il Sung's year of birth; the stamp was released in September 2010.



Fig. 12
Detail from an image in a North Korean publication from 1977: *Put' velikoi liubvi* (The Way of Great Love) (P'yongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977); artist unknown.

Without history there also is no conflict, and what there was can be reinvented, wherever and whenever needed.

Mun's paintings were just the beginning. In the 1970s, such cult depictions began to get more and more cultic and surreal in quality. In a 1977 Russian-language publication from North Korea, *Put' velikoi liubvi* (The Way of Great Love), Kim Il Sung is placed standing in the middle ground of a painting like a majestic, erect phallus (with two kids as testes), several times larger in size than the orgasmic bystanders in the foreground (fig. 12). At the same time, the leader with the two children—who are also oversized in relation to the people in the foreground—is a borrowing from Christian iconography, in pre-Renaissance depictions.²⁹ What we have here is most decisively a work of sacral art. The image of the charismatic leader with his dwarf-sized community serves as a cultic stimulus, depicting the leader's body as the phallic head, a classic example of symbolic submission and domination. In this case the painting itself becomes a cult object, and it is indeed the case that all images showing one or other of the two leaders are treated as cult objects in North Korea, as they are important tools for the regime's mechanisms of ritual control. This example demonstrates that even essential elements of modernity and the modernization process, such as the replacing of religions and belief sys-

²⁹ There are also many examples, mostly since the 1980s, where the iconography of the Holy Trinity is applied to depictions of Kim Il Sung with his first wife Kim Jong Suk (Kim Chöngsuk; 1917–49), the mother of Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Il as a child.

tems by rationalization—usually a strong element in socialist countries—seem to have been reversed by the ever-growing implementation of a personality cult with religious characteristics. The mystification of the political leader, who is given the role of moral, cultural and intellectual leader, a leader in every area of life, creates intense friction with the processes of rationalization, which is the core element of modernization. The question then becomes whether we can still understand North Korea as a modern nation-state at all. We may need to readjust or expand the classical paradigm of modernization and modern nation-state if the answer is yes.



Fig. 13. Photo of Chŏng Yŏngman's repainted *Evening Glow over Kangsŏn* in the entrance hall of the Mansudae Art Studio in P'yŏngyang, mid-1990s.

The most celebrated Chosŏnhwa painting is probably *Evening Glow over Kangsŏn* by Chŏng Yŏngman (1938–99), done in 1973, showing the Kangsŏn Steel Works shimmering in an all-illuminating reddish evening glow with tall smoking chimneys: a symbol for North Korea's industrialization. In the 1990s, Chŏng himself repainted his famous work for the entrance hall of the Mansudae Art Studio (fig. 13), this time making use of techniques known from baroque art: we now see an added smiling leader, Kim Jong Il, positioned in an illusive space in front of Chŏng's large work (the painting of the painting), that is nested in an imaginative painted frame, hanging on a fictitious marble wall. This Mansudae version of the painting—with its dimensions further enlarged and the picture in the picture now horizontally stretched—is then hung over a socket made of real marble tiles. A true baroque pie-in-the-sky spectacle!³⁰

Oil painting and Chosŏnhwa in the formation of national culture

Even before Kim Il Sung himself had addressed Chosŏnhwa in its “upgraded” nationalized meaning, which seems not to have been before 1965, but most likely only in 1966, we can detect the beginnings of a power fight between oil painters and brush-and-ink painters. In January 1965, the director of the Fine Arts College in P'yŏngyang was already reporting on a national identity movement and describing

30 The specific workflow in the manufacturing process of this painting even caught the attention of a British economic weekly; see “Borderlines of Art,” *The Economist* (1 April 1995): 69–70.

severe measures in the school's art classes aimed at oil painting.³¹ Even earlier, in a January 1964 exhibition review of the seventh National Art Exhibition by Cho In'gyu, the author had devoted far more space and attention to Chosŏnhwa at the cost of oil painting, although the actual number of brush-and-ink paintings on display counted still much less than the number of oil paintings.³² From now on, indeed, there was some sort of one-to-one reverse engineering of the colonial policies as regards painting genres. As these simple statistics of the Chŏsen Art Exhibition demonstrate, the colonial Japanese authorities had chosen oil painting as their “modern” representative art genre in the colonies:³³

Year	Brush-and-ink	Oils
1922	79	79
1929	33	133
1930	40	184
1930	(101)*	(698)*

* submitted works

For the North Korean National Art Exhibition, held since 1957, we have the following data:³⁴

Year	Brush-and-ink	Oils
1957	24	112
1964	42	114 (?)
1966	70	121
1990	145	89

The same ratio between Chosŏnhwa and oil painting that we see in 1990 continues: all national exhibitions have, as far as I can see, about one-third more Chosŏnhwa on display than oil paintings, and looking at the few art-related publications from P'yŏngyang, the emphasis is even more on Chosŏnhwa.

31 See Chang Sidon, “Kongsanjuŭi kyoyanggwa hyŏnsil ch'imt'unŭn misulganbu yangsŏngesŏ sŏnggwaŭi kibon tambo” (The Awareness of Communist Culture and the Infiltration of Reality are the Foundation of Success for the Training of Fine Arts Cadres), *Kodŭng kyoyuk* (January 1965): 16.

32 Cho In'gyu, “Che-7-ch'a kukka misul chŏllamhoeŭi chuyo sŏnggwa” (Highlights of the Seventh National Art Exhibition), *Chosŏn misul* (January 1964): 4–9.

33 Data based on Chŏsen Sŏtokufu, Chŏsen Bijutsu Tenrankai, *Chŏsen bijutsu tenrankai zuroku* (Illustrated Catalog of the Chŏsen Art Exhibition), vols. 1 (1922), 8 (1929) and 9 (1930) (Keijō: Chŏsen Shashin Tsūshinsha, 1922, 1929 and 1930, reprinted Seoul: Kyŏngin Munhwasa, 1982).

34 Numbers based on: Cho In'gyu, “Che-7-ch'a kukka misul chŏllamhoeŭi chuyo sŏnggwa,” 1964; “Chŏn'guk misul ch'ukchŏn chakp'um mongnok” (List of Artworks of the National Celebratory Art Exhibition), *Chosŏn misul* (April 1957): 53–56; “Che-9-ch'a kukka misul chŏllamhoe” (The Ninth National Art Exhibition), *Chosŏn misul* (December 1966): 51–56; “Chosŏn rodongdang ch'anggŏn 45-tol kyŏngch'uk kukka misul chŏllamhoe chuyo chakp'um mongnok” (List of Principle Works of the National Korean Art Exhibition Celebrating the Forty-fifth Year of the Foundation of the Korean Workers' Party), in *Chosŏn misul nyŏn'gam 1991* (P'yŏngyang: Munye Ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 274–93.

Mun Haksu, as a representative of the oil painters, was given a chance to react to the new emphasis on Chosŏnhwa—and the debate that resulted from this discourse seems then to have been ended over two years later in October 1966 by Kim Il Sung. Mun replied in the next issue of the art magazine, where he was allowed exactly the same number of pages, and reading his reply it is evident that this is a defence of oil painting vs. Chosŏnhwa. His treatise, “The Implementation of National Characteristics in Oil Painting,”³⁵ is his own theoretical approach and suggestion of how to Koreanize oil painting according to socialist principles and cultural locality. We should note that Mun had visited the Soviet Union and even before that visit had got to know the Soviet Korean painter Pyŏn Wŏllyŏng (1916–90),³⁶ who had given him better insights into Soviet-style socialist realism. While both Cho In’gyu and Mun Haksu gave lip service to Juche thought and Juche principles, the actual emphasis in their exhibition reviews (and also in other publications of 1964) was on the implementation of *minjokchŏk t’ŭksŏng*—national characteristics—in combination with *hyŏndaesŏng*—modernity—and revolutionary themes as subject matters in paintings: Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary fight against the Japanese, the fight against the US imperialists in the Korean War, steel workers at work, and so on.

Modernity and modernization (*hyŏndaehwa*) were in the 1950s and 1960s key terms in the South, too, also for their art community. An important part of that was Westernization. But in the North “modernity” was “socialist modernity,” the same incomplete and compartmentalized modernity that was characteristic of most socialist countries at the time. While individuality and the displacement and replacement of traditional collectivism with modern individualism is at the very core of capitalist modernity, in a one-party, one-leader regime like North Korea’s, with no art market and no civil society, modernity has been fractured so much that one might even call it an anti-modern project. In any case, we need to acknowledge that there are crucial differences in the point of departure to modernity (as explained) and in its trajectory and ultimate destination. Mun Haksu argued that, given there are no differences in the materials used for oil painting between Korea and other nations, national character can only be created by the expression of Juche spirit. As an outstanding example Mun discussed the oil painting *Noon Time* (fig. 14) of 1963 by Chang Myŏngryong (b. 1934).³⁷

³⁵ Mun Haksu, “Yuhwaesŏ minjokchŏk t’ŭksŏngŭi kuhŏn” (The Implementation of National Characteristics in Oil Painting), *Chosŏn misul* (February 1964): 8–13. Mun had built up his theory in earlier articles: see *Chosŏn misul* (January 1963): 2–4, and (April 1963): 9–10.

³⁶ A few years ago, many letters from major North Korean painters to Pyŏn and also many of Pyŏn’s own notes and photos from his immediate post-Korean War period in North Korea were published in South Korea. These are valuable documents to help us in reconstructing the northern art world of this early period. See Mun Yŏngdae and Kim Kyŏnghŭi, *Rŏsia hanin hwaga Pyŏn Wŏllyŏnggwa pukhanesŏ on p’yŏnji* (The Soviet Korean Painter Pyŏn Wŏllyŏng and the Letters He Received from North Korea) (Ŭijŏngbu: Munhwa Kajok, 2004). See also Youngdai Moon, “Wolryong Byun and Russian Realism,” in *Arirang kkotssi: Korean Diaspora Artists in Asia*, ed. Kungnip Hyŏndae Misulgwan (Seoul: K’ŏlch’ŏ Puksŭ, 2009), 246–51.

³⁷ Chang, a second-generation painter and illustrator with a clean proletarian family background, is also considered as “theirs” by the Korean-Chinese artist community in Yanbian in China, where he started his career. He fled to Korea in 1959 to avoid the severe hardships caused by Mao’s Great Leap Forward campaign (1958–61).



Fig. 14
Noon Time, Chang
Myŏngryong, 79.5 x 116.5 cm,
oil on canvas, 1963

Mun pointed out that the artist expressed national sentiments (*minjokchŏk kamjŏng* or *minjokchŏk chŏngsŏ*) by means of implementing various subtle changes to Western oil painting styles that mediate national characteristics—such as using clear, vivid and bright colours to depict the beautiful Korean scenery. Such a painting, Mun stated, needed to represent and produce the emotional attachment to the fatherland and should be able to create heroes solely by subtle stylistic and compositional means. Such an implementation would of course be linked closely to communist society, and would have to follow the communist model in order to be effective. But this was not convincing enough. The oil painters lost the battle, and later on, in 1972—just like Pae Unsŏng—Mun himself was “exiled” to Sinŭiju, while his opponent Cho In’gyu, the author of the January 1964 pro-Chosŏnhwa review, would four decades later still be in charge of publishing the latest set of style updates according to Kim Jong Il’s art theory book (see footnotes 3 and 62).

Girl meets tractor – if art movements and styles had avatars, socialist realism, no doubt, would have one showing a young woman with headscarf on a red tractor. In this early painting, Chang’s wife modeled for the young woman in the foreground with a tanned, roundish face, wearing traditional Korean garb and caressing two baby calves that she is feeding. The young woman seems to beam with joy; she seemingly loves her job. Mun Haksu (and many other North Korean writers after him) praised this painting as a localized Korean version of socialist realism. The painting seems to have all the basic elements of socialist realist paintings: the tractor and electricity stand for technology in the countryside, for development, and working women for a just and advancing new society; red symbolizes socialism and the party. If it were a Soviet painting, however, the young woman would most probably be driving that red tractor instead of feeding the baby calves. She might also not be wearing some costume from a dynastic, feudal past.

Chosŏnhwa and Nihonga

The most authoritative book on Chosŏnhwa published in North Korea is still Ha Kyŏngho's *Chosŏnhwa hyŏngsang riron* (Theory of Form in Chosŏnhwa, see footnote 3). The author claims that on 11 March 1965, Kim Il Sung instructed Korean artists on Juche art (*chuch'e misul*), socialist in content and national in form, and on developing colored brush-and-ink painting. Ha quotes a speech by Kim Il Sung, one that is widely seen as the origin of Chosŏnhwa.³⁸ In fact, the sentences Ha quotes are identical word for word with a speech that Kim Il Sung gave after visiting the ninth National Art Exhibition; that was on 16 October 1966, one and a half years later. Earlier that same year, in May 1966, Mao Zedong had launched the Cultural Revolution in China. It appears that Ha backdated the speech in order to hide the fact that Kim Il Sung was borrowing parts of Mao's concept and rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution (without the extremist edges), and was now advertising this as Juche (self-reliance) ideology and consequently Juche aesthetics.³⁹ The key sentences of Kim Il Sung's speech read as follows:

To take Chosŏnhwa as the foundation of development in our nation's art does not mean to blindly follow reactionary painting styles of the past. We need to study the vivid and concise techniques of traditional Chosŏnhwa and further develop them to meet the demands of our times. Chosŏnhwa is a great artistic form. Yet, in Chosŏnhwa of the past there was a considerable number of flaws. Looking at the paintings done by painters of the past, there are not many colored pictures, almost all are painted with [black] ink. This is one of the major shortcomings of Chosŏnhwa of former times. In order to further develop Chosŏnhwa, we need to avoid these flaws and reflect upon contemporary judgments and sentiments in Chosŏnhwa.⁴⁰

His main theme and directive does indeed concern coloring. In his speech Kim also introduces the slogan “national in form and socialist in content”—which is actually part of the title. It was afterwards to become the key slogan, and was even incorporated into the 1972 DPRK Constitution at article 52: “The State shall develop a Juche-oriented, revolutionary literature and art, *national in form and socialist in content*” (emphasis added). This, of course, is a phrase borrowed directly from Stalin, originally used in his 1934 book on Marxism and the national and colonial question:

³⁸ See Ha Kyŏngho, *Chosŏnhwa*, 25.

³⁹ See also p. 78, footnote 15 in Brian R. Myers's article, “Knocking on the Great Gate: The ‘Strong and Prosperous Country’ Campaign in North Korean Propaganda.”

⁴⁰ Kim Ilsŏng, “Uriŭi misurŭl minjokchŏk hyŏngsige sahoejuŭijŏk naeyongŭl tamŭn hyŏngmyŏngjŏgin misullo palchŏnsik'ija: che-9-ch'a kukka misul chŏllamhoerŭl pogo misulgadŭlgwa han tamhwa, 1966-nyŏn 10-wŏl 16-il” (Let Us Develop Our Revolutionary Fine Arts to be National in Form and Socialist in Content: A Talk with Artists after Seeing the Ninth National Art Exhibition, 16 October 1966), in *Kim Ilsŏng chŏjakchip*, vol. 20 (P'yŏngyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1982), 474.

Under the conditions of a dictatorship of the proletariat within a single country, the rise of cultures national in form and socialist in content has to take place, so that when the proletariat wins in the whole world and socialism is a part of ordinary life, these cultures will merge into one culture, socialist both in form and in content.⁴¹

For Stalin, “national in form and socialist in content” was a temporary concession until all national tributaries (and as the title of his book indicates, he was mostly talking about Soviet minorities like Estonians or Uzbeks, basically Soviet colonies) were ready to “merge into one culture, socialist both in form and in content,” to complete their Sovietization. The formula “national in form and socialist in content” was taken up by Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948), third secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, after the Second World War as one of the main slogans of socialist realism for Soviet minorities and Soviet satellite states like East Germany⁴² or North Korea. It seems more than likely that Kim was under the direct influence of Zhdanov. Kim had met Zhdanov several times and described him in his reminiscences as a good and trustworthy friend.⁴³ Not surprisingly, the North Korean model seems to offer neither an alternative model to modernism nor an alternative model to Stalinist art practices. All indications speak for a consequent implementation and continuation of Zhdanovism with its emphasis on institutional uniformity, mythmaking and the glorifying functions of art, not so different from its former implementation among the Soviet minority peoples or the minorities in Mao's China.

To be fair, the Soviet adversary—the United States—had a Zhdanov of their own at about the same time: that was the Republican Congressman George A. Dondero (1883–1968). What Zhdanov was to Joseph Stalin, Dondero was to Joseph McCarthy (1908–57). As chairman of the House Committee on Public Works, Dondero dominated the US Congress with regard to modern art policies during much of the McCarthy years. Dondero summed up his views like this: “Modern art is communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, and our material progress.”⁴⁴ Many modernist art exhibitions were censored or forbidden; artists were investigated and harassed by the House Un-American Activities Committee. One of the results is that modernist art was not sent to South Korea to be exhibited, neither

⁴¹ J.V. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional'no-kolonial'n'yvo pros* (Moscow, 1934): 195, quoted in Mikuláš Bek, Geoffrey Chew, and Petr Macek, *Socialist Realism and Music* (Prague and Brno: KLP and Institute of Musicology, Masaryk University, 2004), 39.

⁴² In Dresden, for example, the first and only big exhibition of modernist art after the war was attacked on Zhdanov's orders by the East German Communist Party (SED) with demands for a German art that was “democratic in content and national in form.” That was August 1946; in later years the slogan was altered to “socialist in content.”

⁴³ See Kim Il Sung, *With the Century*, vol. 8 (P'yŏngyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1998), 448–55.

⁴⁴ George A. Dondero in the *New York World-Telegram* (1951), quoted in William Hauptman, “The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade,” *Artforum* 12, no. 2, (October 1973): 48.



Fig. 15
Kwak Sŏngae with the author, 1996,
at the Korean Art Gallery in P'yŏngyang;
on the wall hang brush-and-ink paintings by Kim
Kich'ang, of the late colonial period, in what
can be considered Nihonga-esque style.

during the American occupation there in the late 1940s, nor even immediately after the Korean War. Those early years also meant, as Charles Armstrong has summarized it, "that the U.S. was losing the cultural cold war in Korea to the communists."⁴⁵ It took until 1955–56 for a real reversal in the role of modernist arts to take place.

To return briefly to Kim Il Sung's 1966 speech: as the South Korean art historian Pak Kyeri has already convincingly argued, the side of the brush-and-ink painters had in the foregoing debate been represented by Kim Yongjun, who can be seen as the actual inventor of Chosŏnhwa.⁴⁶ In the late 1940s he was already discussing what would later become the basic ideological construct for Chosŏnhwa: Korean national culture (*minjok munhwa*), he argued, in comparison with that of China and Japan, needed to borrow features from foreign cultures in order to modernize and to develop, but, in a criticism of its Japanization during the colonial period, should always be grounded in native traditions.⁴⁷ Once the painter had won out in the debate, his views were then reproduced by Kim Il Sung in his speech, and the new Chosŏnhwa directives were officially implemented. As will be shown, the technical means and aesthetics of the newly implemented directives happened to rely on late-colonial Nihonga techniques.

In a country without modern and contemporary history or art history, a nation where everything about history seems very obviously to be props or staged or otherwise manipulated, it is at first surprising to find colonial-period paintings by so-called collaborators⁴⁸ on public display in its main art museum, the Korean Art

⁴⁵ Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945–1950," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (February 2003): 73.

⁴⁶ See Pak Kyeri, "Kim Ilŏngjuŏi misullon yŏn'gu: chosŏnhwa sŏngnipkwajŏngŭl chungsimŭro" (A Study on Kim Il Sungist Art Theory: With Emphasis on the Formation Process of Chosŏnhwa), *T'ongil minje yŏn'gu* 15, no. 1 (May 2003): 289–309.

⁴⁷ See Kim Yongjun, *Kŭnwŏn Kim Yongjun chŏnjip* (Complete Works of Kŭnwŏn Kim Yongjun), vol. 5 (Seoul: Yŏrhwadang, 2002).

⁴⁸ For the works classified as their "collaboration works" in the South, see, for example, Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso, ed., *Singminji chosŏn'gwa chŏnjaeng misul: chŏnsi ch'ejewa chosŏn minjungŭi sam* (Colonial Korea and War Art: The Exhibition System and the Life of the Ordinary People) (Seoul: Minjok Munje Yŏn'guso, 2004): 182–83 (Kim Ŭnho), 184 (Kim Kich'ang), and others.

Gallery in P'yŏngyang (fig. 15). It is even more surprising that those paintings were done (before 1945) by Kim Kich'ang, after liberation the most prominent brush-and-ink painter in the South. The museum has thirty-two works by Kim Kich'ang from the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s in its collection, and also owns paintings by Kim Ŭnho (1892–1979), Chang Sŭngŏp (1843–97), Kim Kyujin (1868–1933), and Yi Toyŏng (1884–1934). In addition to a few references to classical times, such as Koguryŏ tomb murals and Chŏng Sŏn (1676–1759), important for building legacies, these works are at the same time some of the key historical references, repeatedly named in all North Korean books and articles about the development of Chosŏnhwa:⁴⁹ they are, so to speak, the proto-Chosŏnhwa painters. Kwak Sŏngae, for many years the head guide at the Korean Art Gallery and a graduate of P'yŏngyang Art University, was straightforward in explaining things:

Individuals who had learned painting under Kim Ŭnho came to the North during the Korean War and contributed to our Chosŏnhwa and greatly influenced it. Students coming back from Japan painted in a somewhat Japanese style, but that's acknowledged. There has of course been criticism against pro-Japanese activities.⁵⁰

Acknowledged ... some criticism ... but the debate is long over. She mentioned Kim Ŭnho. He too continued his career after 1945 in the South, where he was known for his continuous use of the Nihonga style. Kim was the teacher of Kim Kich'ang and of Ri Sŏkho (1904–71). Other than Kim Ŭnho, Ri was one of the few painters not to collaborate with the Japanese, and who, with a couple of exceptions, did not produce propaganda works for the Kim regime either (predictably, it is always one of these two works that are reproduced in North Korean publications). Kim Kyujin was a noted bamboo and orchid painter (Four Gentlemen painting), but also served as an awards judge for the Chŏsen Art Exhibition. He also underwent eight years of training in China, where he adopted a more colorful style of painting. Chang Sŭngŏp, on the other hand, passed away before the colonial period had begun. He was also known for having introduced more color into brush painting during his final years, in close imitation of Chinese trends.

Coloring clearly became the main emphasis for the further development of Chosŏnhwa. Western shading techniques also played a role, but coloring held the center of attention. Why colored painting? The short answer is: because it was a Western and therefore a modern technique. Together with shading techniques and linear perspective, it helped to produce illusionistic depictions that did not require a traditional East Asian scholarly and educational background to decipher

⁴⁹ See, for example, Ha Kyŏngho, *Chosŏnhwa*, 182–88, 196, and elsewhere; Ch'oe Sŏngryong, *Molgoŏp ch'obo* (An Introduction to the Single-stroke Technique), vol. 1 (P'yŏngyang: Yesul Kyoyuk Ch'ulp'ansa, 1991): 136–37 and 140–41.

⁵⁰ Kwak Sŏngae, 2007, quoted in the online magazine *minjog21* 82 (1 January 2008), at <http://minjog21.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=3566>, accessed 15 March 2011.

and appreciate the image. The historical answer is more complicated. Western arts and techniques were barely introduced to Korea before the colonial period. Many emissaries from the Korean delegations to the Chinese court (almost seven hundred delegations visited between 1637 and 1881) had a chance to see European architecture and paintings there, mostly introduced by Jesuit missionaries. But the response to Western oil painting was a very mixed one: some emissaries viewed it with admiring enthusiasm,⁵¹ but in the end neither the Chinese nor the Koreans bluntly adopted Western painting techniques. The orthodox aesthetics of literati painters allowed for some fusion of Western and traditional brush-and-ink techniques, but certainly not for an adaptation, as the realistic representation of nature with illusionistic techniques was basically considered a demonstration of unsophisticated tastes. Another important difference between Korea and Japan comes in through the history of literati painting. In Japan it only became popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and unlike Korean scholar amateurs these Japanese Nanga⁵² painters often did not come from an upper-class background but were typically professional painters seeking more individual freedom away from the restrictions of the Japanese academic styles of the time. As a result, in Japan Nanga painting stood mostly for a style, a school of painting, and not so much for a social class, while in Korea the opposite was true: literati painting was hardly, if at all, distinguishable from the paintings done by professional court painters. There were certainly substantial class distinctions in Korea, but almost no correlation between that and painting techniques and styles in those genres that both groups practiced, such as landscape painting. It was only from the 1890s that the beginning of a shift in prominence became evident from monochrome to color in the works of painters such as Kim Kyujin and others like Chang Sŭngöp in his late work. These painters had closely followed Chinese trends and may also have directly been influenced by Japanese Nihonga.

A highly interesting argument was made by Aida Yuen Wong, in her book *Parting the Mists*,⁵³ that the creation of *guohua* in China, basically the Chinese counterpart to Chosŏnhwa, is almost entirely based on influences from Nihonga. Many young Chinese artists were very attracted by Japanese Nihonga and the pan-Asian ideology that came with it. To the young people in the group known as the Lingnan School of Painting, Nihonga stood for a chance to open up an alternative modernization process, a specifically Asian modernization process that would come without the bitter semi-colonial or colonial taste of Euramerican superiority. Following the ideologies developed by Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), they believed in a synthesis of East and West. Okakura Kakuzō had also travelled to India

51 See Hong Taeyong's (1731–83) *Tamhŏnsŏ* (Tamhŏn's Writings), "Oejip," k. 7, 10b. Pak Chiwŏn (1737–1805) also left a positive but less fascinating description of his visit in 1780 to the same location, which can be found in his *Yŏnamjip* (Yŏnam's Collected Works), k. 20, 11a-b.

52 Short for Southern School of painting (referring to China).

53 Aida Yuen Wong, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-style Painting in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

and spread Nihonga as well as his pan-Asian cultural identity theories and aesthetics there. In India it was Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), nephew of the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1914), who as the founder of the Bengal School of Art adopted various elements of Nihonga. It was again the construction of a model for a modern pan-Asian artistic tradition that had caught his interest (here vs. British colonial modernization). All this tells us that even the early stylistic changes in the works of painters like Chang Sŭngöp and Kim Kyujin (those referenced by North Korean writers) – the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century shifts to more color in brush-and-ink painting – were in fact all caused by the influence of Nihonga, because Nihonga had been presented together with a theoretical concept of a local Asian way of modernization vs. the transfer model of Western modernization that appealed at the time to intellectuals and painters.

Looking at what happened in post-liberation North Korea from a distance, and given the socialist system's dislike of *l'art pour l'art* modernism, if it wanted to create art based on national culture and local traditions, why was there no focus on a revival of the native visual traditions of the lower strata of Korean people? Why were classical high-art genres such as court and scholar painting revived and modernized? I think the answer is again closely related to the dilemmas and contradictions that had been created by the preceding period, a modernization process under colonial conditions, a second-hand, compartmentalized modernization that had left out several essential elements of what modernization meant in the West. New post-colonial states like South and North Korea implemented development models based on reversal, keeping technical and/or institutional structures and value systems. In the North, once the Russians had left and the North Korean regime was able to balance out the influence of its powerful neighbours China and the Soviet Union (using the frictions between them) to ensure its own independence, the Soviet-style socialist realist model for the arts was stripped naked and the old colonizer's techniques were revived, merged with the country's pre-colonial traditions—and Chosŏnhwa became the model here. The resulting culture seems, then, just as contradictory as the entire twentieth-century modernization process was.

Styles and development: genealogical charting

The North Korean author Ha Kyŏnggho, in his Chosŏnhwa book, provides a painting techniques chart⁵⁴ (fig. 16 on the right) that explains all the various elements that contribute to the style. Let us try an unlikely comparison. On the left is the chart devised by Alfred Barr (1902–81) for the 1935 MOMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, generally known as the Barr chart and the best-known of all charts in Western art history.

Barr's chart presents the relationships between the various "isms," movements and styles of modern art (as of 1935) as a network of rather abstract con-

54 Chart reproduced from Ha Kyŏnggho, *Chosŏnhwa*, 131.

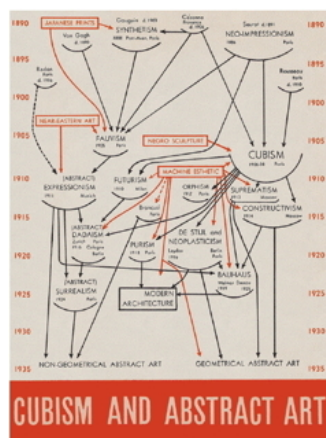
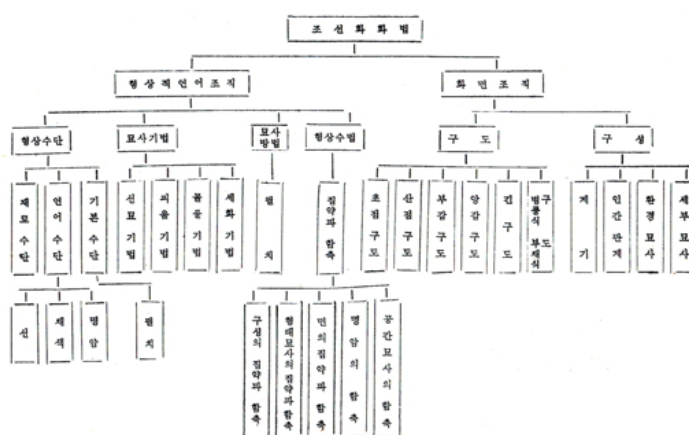


Fig. 16
Left: Alfred Barr's chart, 1935.
Right: Ha Kyŏngho's chart of Chosŏnhwa painting techniques, 1986.



nections mapped on a grid of time, creating temporal and causal levels of representation. He makes heavy use of geometric forms, and the two-color graph itself thus became a work of abstract art in its own right. Each art movement is represented as independent, a combined interplay with multiple sources and multiple resulting styles and movements, showing both parallel and consequential temporal developments, with black arrows indicating direct continuous developments and red-colored arrows showing outside influences and interactions, sometimes just suggesting links between them by using dashed lines and arrows. Barr appropriated a biologist's tool, the scientific chart, to create a genealogy of styles, an evolutionary diagram of modern art. The chart demonstrates the strong positivist and Social Darwinist influences on his time, the prevailing idea that over time there is progress in the arts just as there is in technology and the sciences, and that such progress can be scientifically explained and charted on a grid. Art in 1935 had thus to be better, more advanced and so forth than art in, say, 1907 or the nineteenth century. Until then, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the high point, thereafter unattained in the fine arts, was signified by classical Greek and Roman works. Contemporary art as the historic culmination of artistic development was a revolutionary new thought, and the strong Social Darwinist supremacy in North America helped to push modern art and later aided popular art movements ("low art") in their success.

In the North Korean case, we find the same preoccupation and ideas taken from Social Darwinism and neo-Lamarckism with their teleological approaches and paradigms, their ideas that aesthetics are universal and all forms equivalent, that art progresses with human, mechanical, and scientific development, and so forth. These notions seem to have been left over from late-nineteenth-century reform and modernization movements and the Japanese colonialist ideologies that succeeded them. As Koen De Ceuster has explained in his summary of North Korean Juche

aesthetics and art education (as the system is officially presented in North Korea, especially by Kim Jong Il),⁵⁵ much emphasis has been given to making it appear as if art and aesthetics in the country are scientifically designed as well as based on need. Art is supposed to follow scientific rules as well as to serve the demands of the people. Artistic styles have therefore mostly been presented as the outcome of the "correct" application of a set of ideological as well as aesthetic rules. A brief look at the Barr chart and the one by Ha Kyŏngho immediately shows the differences in approach. To be sure, we cannot truly compare the Barr chart of developments in modern art with any from North Korea, because there are no such charts in North Korea. Art history mostly stops with the end of dynastic Korea and the country's loss of independence in 1910. There is practically no history of art that extends beyond 1910 in North Korea. The second volume of *Chosŏn misulsa* (History of Korean Art) by Cho In'gyu et al.,⁵⁶ published in 1990—the only such "history" this writer is aware of—tells the story of modern art in North Korea from after liberation to the early 1980s. However, what it presents is rather more the making of history, telling of the process of forming ideology and a hierarchically structured set of rules which the fine arts then *followed*. And looking at Ha Kyŏngho's chart on Chosŏnhwa painting techniques, we see no mapping of cross-currents either—no references to conflicting ideas, styles, or traditions. There are no outside influences and no suggested relations. Nothing is left to the imagination or interpretation of the reader. The formal representation of Chosŏnhwa is stripped of all doubts, complexities or parallel worlds. This is the attempt to chart the formal aspects of Chosŏnhwa aesthetics as a top-down hierarchy that has borrowed its basic structural model from genealogy. The chart looks in fact strangely similar to the various charts explaining North Korean political or military command structures.⁵⁷ Thus, Ha's crudely drawn and printed chart (without the use of a ruler, it seems—Juche realism begins right here) emerges as quite formalistic and with down-to-earth practicability, explaining the formation of the visual language used in Chosŏnhwa and the principles of image composition. Juche ideology makes some reappearance throughout the text and is taken as the superstructure, the *Überbau* that makes Chosŏnhwa possible, but its translation into a theory of art production ends up in a rather dry and hierarchically arranged set of rules about color, form, line-drawing, subject matter, and composition.

⁵⁵ See the chapter by Koen De Ceuster on pp. 51–71 of this volume, "To Be an Artist in North Korea: Talent and Then Some More."

⁵⁶ Cho In'gyu et al., *Chosŏn misulsa*, vol. 2.

⁵⁷ See any of the thirty-or-so command structure figures on the North Korean army in Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *Shield of the Great Leader: The Armed Forces of North Korea* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2001).

Techniques of Chosŏnhwa:

In the same work, Ha Kyŏngho sets out the following techniques as the essential ones for Chosŏnhwa:

- *Sŏnmyogibop*, or line drawing technique,⁵⁸ allows the painter first to draw lines, then fill them in with color to create form and structure; the technique derives mostly from the traditional Korean *ch'aesaekhwa* ("painting in brilliant colors") style of painting.
- *P'iumgibŏp* (also *urimbŏp*), or shading technique,⁵⁹ uses more than one brush, one with color and one with just water, at the same time—or the two are used alternately: first water is put on the paper, and then color is spread over it with the other brush. This technique is used to create a sense of contrast and layering, to bring out depth and textures.
- *Molgolgibŏp*, or single-stroke technique,⁶⁰ is a technique whereby the painter describes the object in one stroke (without outline) of the brush and by the spreading of color with water while the paper absorbs it (see fig. 17). Ha refers to the eighteenth-century painter Chŏng Sŏn and the nineteenth-century art-ist Chang Sŭngŏp as masters of the *molgolgibŏp* technique. The single-stroke technique is a further developed and expanded version of the *sŏnmyogibŏp* technique, expressing with just one or two strokes of the brush the unique-ness of form and sentiment, all this without creating outlines. It is mostly used when the painting's motif is one of power and action. Sometimes the technique is used within the *sŏnmyogibŏp* technique; in such cases it is used in the background or where forms or shapes are not so clear.
- *Sehwagibŏp*, or detail technique,⁶¹ is pretty much a self-explanatory term; other than in traditional styles small brushes are used to fill in details as in Western realist painting.

With the publication of Kim Jong Il's *Misullon* (Treatise on Art) in 1992, there were some updates to terminology.⁶² Instead of *p'iumgibŏp*, Kim uses *myŏngambŏp* for "shading technique," and everyone thereafter used the Leader's expression. In this and several other instances, his wording is actually clearer, less traditional and less outdated than that of the writers discussing the subject before him. (The writing style also shows a difference in generation: Ha Kyŏngho is Kim Jong



Fig. 17
Illustration from a North
Korean handbook dealing with
the *molgolgibŏp* technique.

Il's father's generation.) It also seems that he gave more emphasis to composition and linear perspective than did earlier writers – a finesse that he certainly learned through his known preoccupation with cinema. This was then also redone in all later writings and interviews by painters and others. Chŏng Ch'angmo (1931–2010), for example, who was both a well established and honored North Korean brush-and-ink painter as well as the author of numerous books and articles on art, was in 2004 quoted in the South Korean press as repeating exactly the same essential rules for Chosŏnhwa in exactly the same order and wording as they appear in Kim Jong Il's writing.⁶³

It seems that from the 1990s onwards, many art critics and art traders in South Korea have been referring to a further essential Chosŏnhwa rule:

- *Chŏmmyo* (*chŏmmyobŏp*), or pointillism, that is, painting with dots, which uses many dot-like detailed strokes to describe objects. It is similar to pointillism—we are reminded of Paul Signac (1863–1935) or Georges Seurat (1859–91)—but also to the Chinese Mi Fu style ("Mi dots"), which in Korea was practiced by Chŏng Sŏn in his landscape painting.

It would appear that *chŏmmyo* may have travelled from the South to North Korea in later years, but it is difficult to verify the situation. Kim Ŭnho—his influence was discussed above—certainly used it as his preferred technique for landscape paintings throughout the whole of his long career.

58 See Ha Kyŏngho, *Chosŏnhwa*, 170–78.

59 See *ibid.*, 178–82.

60 See *ibid.*, 182–88.

61 See *ibid.*, 188–89.

62 Kim Chŏngil, *Misullon* (Treatise on Art) (P'yŏngyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1992). Pages 95–110 are devoted to Chosŏnhwa, forming a chapter headed "Chosŏnhwa, that Is Our Painting," and its techniques and rules are listed on pages 97–98.

63 See <http://culture.joins.com/exhibition/main4.html>; accessed 15 March 2011.



Fig. 18
Reclamation of Tideland,
Ri Ryulsön, 177 x 355 cm,
Chosŏnhwa, 1961



Fig. 19
The Night When the
Great Leader Came,
Sök Ryejin, 136 x 159 cm,
Chosŏnhwa, 1979

This large-scale brush-and-ink painting from 1961 by Ri Ryulsön (b. 1933), depicting male and female workers engaged in working on the Hũich'ŏn dam at the Tae'gyedo tideland reclamation project, is one of a handful of works that was later tagged as Chosŏnhwa (in the redefined new sense), even though it was painted before Kim Il Sung had explained the stylistic concepts for the genre. The theoretical tagging seems still somewhat ahead of the artistic practice: the full characteristics of Chosŏnhwa were to be reached only in works from 1966 onwards. Half a century later, Ri Ryulsön paints velvet paintings ("barbershop painting," as they are also jokingly called) for the South Korean market, and of course exact copies of his own 1961 painting above—well, almost exact, since the numbers on the tractor's number plate usually run on.

The 1970s was the time when the development of Chosŏnhwa attained its original aims. This painting by Sök Ryejin (b. 1946), produced in 1979, is a perfect example of the completed style (fig. 19). The entire picture plane is filled with color; the artist makes full use of coloring and shading techniques. The picture's composition is also perfected to the maximum: we see borrowings from Christian iconography, here the nativity of Christ, where we do not need to see the Christ child himself; the icons will represent it. In this case the viewer is presented with Kim Il Sung's white snow boots right in front of the door of a Korean farmer's house, placed a step higher than several other pairs of shoes, the toecaps already pointing outwards, ready for him to leave. Kim's wartime jeep (echoing the donkey in a Jesus-in-Bethlehem scene) is visible in front of the gate. The light shines from inside the house, originating in the Leader's resting place, illuminating the snow outside and the girl's face as she keeps the pathway clear of snow. Both the whiteness of the snow and the girl are symbolic of the purity of the Korean people. Cleverly choreographed, the girl herself also symbolizes adoration of the Leader through her cleaning activity and the devout posture that this entails, while her reddish costume also stands for socialism. We notice that the techniques of rendering lighting, shading and linear perspective, all borrowed from the illusionist approach of Western oil painting, have now all been fully integrated. Taken all together, technically and stylistically, as well as in its propagandistic theme, the painting much resembles late colonial wartime Nihonga works. The project of creating a national genre, a style somewhere between socialist realism and Pop Art, had in the 1970s been "completed" and was then locked in for eternity, to be only slightly altered in the coming three decades—mostly through the use of newer material means, the use of different synthetic colors, silk replacement materials, and more recently the use of photographic and computer design programs to compose paintings (see fig. 3 and footnote 66).



Fig. 20
left, *Pine Tree,*
Ri Sökho, 86 x 60 cm,
Chosŏnhwa, 1965

Fig. 21
right, *Pine Tree,*
Ri Sökho, 253 x 131 cm,
Chosŏnhwa, 1966

While Sök Ryejin's painting is an exemplary representative of the majority of Chosŏnhwa works since 1965–66 – in one way or another fully colored paintings with a clear political subject matter and propagandistic message – Ri Sökho's works above like most of Ri's oeuvre also classified as Chosŏnhwa, signify a whole other branch of brush-and-ink painting. Many such plant, bird, or landscape paintings are not at all directly political in their subject matter. No red flag, no red tractor, no modern concrete bridge, no electricity pylon, and no "Kim Il Sung Flower" either: these works still continue to be produced today (but make a disproportionately small appearance in North Korean print media). Their political deciphering, if at all possible, can only be done within the greater context of Korean patriotism and nationalism (in ways in which we would discuss, for instance, German Romanticism). Ri Sökho's very calligraphic Pine Tree of 1965 (fig. 20) seems to link to late nineteenth-century painting traditions. We can already note a smooth coloring scheme, but no Western realist techniques yet. But his 1966 Pine Tree (fig. 21), with the protective falcon sitting on the top branch, its needles painted in an intense green tone and rendered in a realistic manner with much detail, already reminds the viewer of Nihonga works. This school continues to produce artwork in North Korea. Works of the 1970s and later works by, for example, Han Myŏngryŏl (b. 1926), a painter mostly noted for his bamboo and orchid paintings, also utilize intense coloring and detailed, realistic rendering, but in addition apply strict linear perspective. The result (see fig. 22) comes across almost like a Lichtenstein Pop Art version of *Heidi of the Alps*, just without Heidi.

Politics to shopping mall

Not all rules are applied in one and the same painting (and Ha lists many more rules); there is more than just one painting style. And while oil painting, acrylics and other genres have been firmly adjusted to Chosŏnhwa aesthetics, others still follow Soviet-style socialist realist rules. Poster art with its propaganda themes is one such example,⁶⁴ sculpture is another. In general however, the longer Chosŏnhwa has been practiced, the more have other two-dimensional genres followed the same set of rules. By the 1990s and more so in the new millennium, we can detect a *gleichschaltung* of all genres. In reproductions, even good-quality color reproductions of recent artworks, it is often most difficult to detect whether the original is a Chosŏnhwa, an oil painting, an acrylic, or a Western watercolor, or if some other technique is involved. Chosŏnhwa aesthetics have been applied to almost all genres. The outcome is perfected props. By now the artist no longer respects

⁶⁴ On posters, see also Koen De Ceuster, "Banners, Bayonets and Basketball", in *North Korean Posters: The David Heather Collection*, ed. David Heather and Koen De Ceuster (Munich and London: Prestel, 2008), 8–19.



Fig. 22
First Rhododendrons on Mt. Paektu, Han Myŏngryŏl, 81 x 144 cm, Chosŏnhwa, 1977.

surfaces and the materials he works with by trying to utilize material characteristics, but hides these characteristics. We have already seen an early example of this, marking the beginning of such a trend, in the woodcut *Bumper Harvest of Reeds* (fig. 8) by Pae Kyŏngun (Pae Unsŏng's son). This approach has by now been perfected.

In this same connection we can note, for instance, the establishment of a new annual national drawing exhibition,⁶⁵ and the display of large-scale pencil and charcoal drawings at international shows. What is interesting here is the story line that North Koreans provide to international traders and curators about such works, declaring them to be pencil drawings or sketches within the work process of, for example, creating a large oil or Chosŏnhwa. Actually, these drawings are clearly being manufactured after the finished painting. Showing part of the work process, work in progress, always means showing change and alternatives, and for the arts it undoubtedly means improvisation and varying interpretations. None of that is wanted in North Korea. The last time the actual, by definition unperfected, process with sketches and so forth was shown was in the early 1960s. What we see now is the "perfectionized" application of repetitive techniques, patterns, motifs: props, to be sure. These can then be sold to the international art market. It is also obvious that computer technology and photography are now being used in the production of many art works.⁶⁶ This may or may not be a side effect of mass production techniques and reproduction techniques being used for other purposes, for instance to satisfy the demands of the South Korean art market for "original" North Korean art.

⁶⁵ The catalog for the inaugural show can be found in *Chosŏn munhak yesul nyŏn'gam: chuch'e 96 (2007)* (Korean Literature and Arts Yearbook: Juche 96 (2007) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Ch'ulp'ansa, 2009), 405–24.

⁶⁶ For an example, see an oil painting that was recently on display at the National Art Exhibition, by Chi Ch'ŏlhyŏk, depicting a young girl picking a flower. The reproduction in the catalog can easily be mistaken for a photo snapshot, which must indeed have been used to produce the artwork. See Kim Sangsun, ed., *Kukka misul chŏllamhoe: Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk ch'anggŏn 60-tol kyŏngch'uk* (Korean National Art Exhibition: Celebrating the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (P'yŏngyang: Munhak Yesul Ch'ulp'ansa, 2009): 78.

Since 1998, with the lifting of the ban against North Korean artwork in South Korea, if not a few years before that, North Korean art started to be produced for South Korean and overseas consumers. It is now consumer art! There is hardly any domestic market. The entire fine arts production industry has adapted to the new, external market. In the 1990s and early 2000s places like the North Korean Art Gallery in Yanji, in northeast China, across the border from North Korea, had specialized in trading North Korean art, including rare works of the 1950s and 1960s. Local Korean Chinese painters such as Ri Puil (b. 1941), now dean of the Fine Arts Department of Yanbian Academy of Art, took care of buying North Korean artworks for the gallery that offered them to mostly South Korean, Japanese, and Korean American customers. But many of the works sold in such markets were forgeries done in China.⁶⁷ By now such “copies” are produced directly in DPRK art studios (often but not always done by the artists of the actual works that are being copied). The South Korean art market has in the meantime developed astonishing regulatory means and trading practices with the North. Last year, for example, a South Korean expert of North Korean art reported in a newspaper interview that he had been called by a company to evaluate artwork in a “huge container” that was “full of paintings.” After he had determined that “the quality was all poor,” he “suggested the company burn them all, fearing that if they entered the art market, it would cause disruption with such a huge volume.”⁶⁸ Also revealing in this connection, the South has entirely accepted the North’s hierarchical classification system: South Korean art trading websites such as “porart.com” categorize every North Korean work by the artist’s rank according to the North’s system (People’s Artist, Merited Artist, etc.), *not* according to their own system of evaluation.

67 Information based on firsthand observations and meetings and interviews with Ri Puil in China and North Korea, 4 August and 18 August 1996. On art export and mass production, see also Aidan Foster-Carter and Kate Hext, “DPRKrazy, Sexy, Cool: The Art of Engaging North Korea,” pp. 31–50 in this volume.

68 Yi Chŏngha (Lee Jong-ha), quoted in *The Korea Times*, 7 January 2010.