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Author: Yoon, Min-Kyung

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Chapter 2: Powerfully Affecting with Emotions

The power of art partly derives from the emotional connection a viewer makes with an artwork. Art provokes emotions, but in North Korean art, emotions are circumscribed. As expressed by Kim Jong Il in the *Treatise of Art*, “pure emotion devoid of ideology has no meaning.”¹ The basis of an individual’s emotions, as Kim further explains, is always ideology.² North Korean art also triggers emotions and, as such, the mechanisms behind it are not radically different from other, non-socialist art. The primary difference, however, is that emotion in North Korean art is restricted to ideological emotion (*sasang kamjǒng*). Although emotion (*kamjǒng*) is subjective, it is ideological emotion that is taught through history education in North Korea.

Art adds an additional layer to the process of the ideological mobilization of the people because it has an immediate, emotional impact. While history education turns people into revolutionaries, art enables the people to connect emotionally to history. Art complements formal history by emotionally linking the people to the North Korean system and its leaders, pushing the ideological mobilization further. North Korean art mobilizes emotion to make history effective as a political mechanism for the revolution through the fusion of ideological emotion learned from history education and the aesthetic sensitivity (*yesuljǒk chǒngsǒ*) embedded in an artwork, the element that emotionalizes history. Historical themes are one part of North Korean art and the key to understanding why historical representations are important in North Korean paintings is the union between correct historical thought and emotion. Paintings depict history emotionally, transforming history into something that can be felt, touched, and sentimentalized. Emotionally reproducing history is the paramount task of North Korean art.

¹ Kim Chǒngil, *Misullon* (P’yǒngyang: Chosǒn rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 1992), 70-71.

² Ibid.

History is recreated to legitimate the North Korean state and its leaders, and North Korean art theory and the reviews of paintings further tell us that this history is recreated emotionally in the arts.

Emotion is an inherent element in art. Art arouses an emotional reaction, registering the way the viewer emotionally connects with life. By affecting the viewer with emotions, art can open the eyes to a new reading of life. Emotion in art is not so new. What is noticeable in North Korean art theoretical writings is how frequently the relationship between art and emotion is discussed and emphasized. Thus, an awareness that art has an emotional impact exists in North Korea. Yet emotion is used for ideological purposes, the distinguishing element that separates North Korean art from non-socialist art. Art is one way to ideologically mobilize the people and it only succeeds as an ideological tool because of the emotional component. Art affects with powerful emotions and, through the act of affecting, art illumines new readings of life. In North Korea, art as an ideological instrument is effective only by emotionally impacting. By emotionally impacting, the people are revolutionized.

Emotion in the Arts

Art is a medium that triggers emotions and many parallels can be found between the use of emotion in North Korean paintings and non-socialist art. How emotion is conveyed in art is largely through the presentation of the content of the work. Noël Carroll argues that content leads to aesthetic experience.³ The form, the organization of an artwork or as Carroll describes it, the “ensemble of choices,” leads to the realization of the main purpose of the artwork.⁴ All

³ Noël Carroll, “Aesthetic Experience Revisited,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no. 2 (2002): 145-168.

⁴ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 107-154.

elements of an artwork serve its main purpose by emotionalizing the artwork to affect the viewer, hewing to Derek Matravers' analysis that properties of an artwork prompt an emotional reaction,⁵ a characteristic that is also central in North Korean art.

The crucial question in the creation of a painting is the question of representation—how to visually articulate an emotion. At this juncture, artworks require the interference of an artist through his or her talents. In this respect, North Korean paintings do not differ drastically from Jenefer Robinson's analysis on emotion in the arts where an artist individualizes an emotion through the exaggeration and distortion of colors, lines, and shapes.⁶ She argues that expression is an intentional activity, the process of choosing appropriate shapes and sounds that corresponds to a particular emotion.⁷ In reference to this particular emotion, Robinson argues:

That the artist individualizes and articulates this emotion in the process of manipulating his medium, not merely by choosing colors, lines, images, and so on that are naturally expressive—they correspond to some emotion—but also often by emphasizing or even distorting and exaggerating the aspects of these sights and sounds which make them correspond to emotions, in order to express the emotion in question even more clearly.⁸

The visual articulation of an emotion, as Robinson argues, is an individualized process that demands a manipulation of the art form through a careful selection of choices, such as colors, lines, and images, and an outright distortion and exaggeration of these choices, which all determine how an artwork is represented.

⁵ Derek Matravers, "Art and the Feelings and Emotions," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31, no. 4 (1991): 327.

⁶ Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 266-268.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Through the manipulation of the various elements of an artwork, the expression of emotion in paintings, according to Robinson, develops in the following way:

Many paintings represent the expression of emotion in the sense that they depict people in the act of expressing their emotions. In painting, of course, characters do not express their emotions verbally but via their facial expressions, behavior, and actions or action tendencies... The idea is that a poem, painting, or song can help us grasp a particular emotional state by causing us to 'recreate' in imagination what it is like to be in that state by actually putting us in that state, or at least encouraging us to imagine we are in that state and then to reflect about it.⁹

The idea is, according to Robinson, to vicariously experience someone else's emotional state through an imaginative recreation of that particular state. Facial expressions, behavior, and actions are crucial for conveying a character's emotions because paintings as a medium are still and static. An appropriate moment is chosen to be depicted and this moment is emotionalized by a process of individualization, which involves the use of exaggeration, distortion, and fabrication.

Ideological Emotion (sasang kamjŏng) and Aesthetic Sensitivity (yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ)

North Korean art theoretical writings distinguish between *kamjŏng* and *chŏngsŏ* and it is these two terms and their distinction that are the key to understanding how North Korean art mobilizes emotion. *Kamjŏng* is referred to as emotion, a feeling originating from the mind, and *chŏngsŏ* is best referred to as aesthetic sensitivity. According to the *Korean Cultural Language Dictionary (Chosŏn munhwaŏ sajŏn)*, a North Korean dictionary, *kamjŏng* is a subjective feeling

⁹ Ibid., 275-276.

in reaction to an object, phenomenon, and people and their actions in an objective reality. It is also a feeling that results from knowing what is right and wrong, true or false, based on scientific evidence.¹⁰ In addition, Kim Jong Il defines *kamjŏng* in his *Treatise on Art* as a psychological phenomenon that reflects an individual's attitude toward an object.¹¹ In the *Korean Cultural Language Dictionary*, *chŏngsŏ* is defined as all the emotions that are aroused in the minds of the people. It is further defined as a psychological experience in reaction to whether or not a particular stimulus satisfies the needs of the peoples' lives. When the stimulus meets the needs, *chŏngsŏ* is expressed as pleasure and when it does not, it is expressed as displeasure.¹² In the *Treatise on Art*, Kim Jong Il adds to this definition by further defining *chŏngsŏ* as the feelings that are experienced as a result of a specific living condition and environment.¹³ Kim Jong Il additionally notes that while *kamjŏng* is relatively constant and generalized, *chŏngsŏ* is more variable and concrete.¹⁴ He continues that a similar feeling or emotion (*kamjŏng*) can have a different *chŏngsŏ* depending on the specific living condition and environment.¹⁵

The core difference between *kamjŏng* and *chŏngsŏ* is revealed through the terms *sasang kamjŏng* referred to as ideological emotion and *yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ* referred to as aesthetic sensitivity, a distinction similar to the one found between history and art. Like history, *kamjŏng* develops from science based on objectivity. While it is a subjective feeling, *kamjŏng* can be taught because it stems from recognizing values, principles, and standards that are always rooted in ideology, hence ideological emotion. What is right and proper necessitates a positive emotion while what is false and improper requires a negative emotion. Learning to distinguish right from

¹⁰ *Chosŏn Munhwaŏ Sajŏn* (P'yŏngyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1973), 22.

¹¹ Kim Chŏngil, *Misullon*, 6.

¹² *Chosŏn munhwaŏ sajŏn*, 638.

¹³ Kim Chŏngil, *Misullon*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

wrong is achieved, in part, through history education. Through history education, North Koreans are taught to discriminate between right and wrong, true and false, based on a nationalist narrative centered on the revolution and Kim Il Sung as part of the ideological indoctrination of the people. Values and principles are always linked to the greatness of the revolution and Kim Il Sung and learning to discern them is the most fundamental element to becoming a revolutionary, socialist citizen. What is true and proper is superior and, therefore, they become scientific.

While history as a science is rooted in objectivity and based on facts, it needs to be compelling in order to effectively satisfy its political objectives. As a result, a North Korean painting needs to *persuasively* render a visualization of history true to the Kim Il Sung-centered narrative. To accomplish this task, an artwork must compellingly represent its depicted subject to emotionally connect the people to the Great Leader. Echoing Carroll's argument on the importance of the "ensemble of choices," North Korean paintings place a great emphasis on the proper presentation of an image. Historical truth is always emotionally true and, therefore, one of the paramount tasks of a painting is to impart correct emotions. Every component involved in creating and structuring an image serves the end, political goal by heightening the emotionality of the painting. It is here that *chŏngsŏ* in the form of *yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ* distinguishes itself from *kamjŏng*. If *kamjŏng* can be described as static because it is learned, *chŏngsŏ*, on the other hand, is variable and fluid. While *kamjŏng* is an ideologically informed, immediate reaction of a viewer to a represented object and people and their behavior, *chŏngsŏ* is about what is in the painting. It is the ambiance, the atmosphere, the aesthetic depiction of the painting. Kim Jong Il speaks about the different mechanisms that are involved in creating and organizing a pictorial representation in the *Treatise on Art*. Colors, lighting, placement of characters, character portrayals, or the inner world of characters, sense of rapport between characters, nature, and the

depiction of an appropriate moment all contribute to expressing emotions in an image. These elements are *chŏngsŏ*, or *yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ*, the aesthetic sensitivity of the painting that determines how a scene is represented. These elements alone, however, do not emotionalize the painting. These elements are the tools, but they are further supplemented and enhanced by hyperbole and fabrication to express a particular emotion in the most convincing, persuasive way. North Korean paintings freely utilize exaggeration, distortion, and fabrication in order to convincingly create the utopian vision that legitimates the ruling Kim family. These various methods help to render history emotional in paintings to bring Kim Il Sung closer to the people.

The process of emotionally tying the people to the Great Leader through the aesthetic sensitivity of a painting can be seen through paintings that depict the theme of hard labor. In a painting that features Koreans conducting manual labor under the authorities of the Japanese during the colonial period, North Koreans automatically know subjectively to feel antipathy toward the Japanese from their history education. The theme of hard labor, the scene of Koreans working laboriously, is depicted as suffering, oppression, and misery under the living condition and environment of the exploitative Japanese colonial system. The same theme of hard labor can have an opposite effect in the case of a painting depicting North Korean coal miners in the midst of difficult and dangerous labor set during the post-Korean War. Under the living condition and environment of the reconstruction efforts of North Korea after the devastation of the Korean War under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, the theme of hard labor is depicted as joy because the work is for the revolution and the Great Leader. In both instances, hard labor is the common theme. However, the theme is depicted differently aesthetically in the two scenes. The depiction of the scenes is the stimulus for the viewer to emotionally connect to the scenes.

To become emotionally affected is the key to understanding how North Korean art functions. According to Kim Jong Il, when an emotion that is based on the artist's correct ideology embodies an appropriate societal issue in a meaningful way, then, the artwork is able to cultivate the people's thoughts and emotions.¹⁶ A societal issue is without exception emotionally wrapped with ideology extolling Kim Il Sung and the revolution. The use of emotion in art is, thus, directly linked to the peoples' aesthetic education (*chǒngsǒ kyoyang*). According to the *Korean Cultural Language Dictionary*, aesthetic education is learning to feel and understand beauty in nature and society and to improve artistic emotion and hobbies, and finessing the ability to apply this knowledge to everyday life.¹⁷ By emotionally rendering history in art, *chǒngsǒ* moves the viewers, using the depiction of a scene as an impetus for action and shaping the people into revolutionaries in their everyday life.

By witnessing individuals in the throes of specific emotions, which are individuated and articulated in a painting, art seeks to give way to the potential divide between a painting and its viewer. In North Korean paintings, this idea of collapsing a possible divide between an image and its viewer is translated as emotionally uniting the people to Kim Il Sung, *kamjǒng* and *chǒngsǒ* coming together. By emotionally linking the people to the Great Leader, the people are revolutionized, leading to the collapse of the divide between a painting and its viewer. As the lines between utopia and reality are blurred, art becomes history's important tool. What characterizes this utopia is that it is performative where the people are called upon to carry on the revolution into the future. Therefore, North Korean paintings too are a part of this performative utopia. On a basic level, the paintings are performative because of their ideological and didactic elements, reinforcing the ideological emotion taught through formal history. For the viewer, for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Chosǒn munhwaǒ sajǒn*, 638.

whom the paintings are created, the performative element is to be emotionally affected, the aesthetic sensitivity of the paintings coming alive. Thus, art turns history into an emotionally performative utopia. In this utopia, art is historically and teleologically right.

Learning Ideological Emotion (sasang kamjǒng) from Formal History

Learning to discern true from false, proper from improper, or an education of values, begins from a formal history education. *Kamjǒng* is about ideology and by learning the revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung from history textbooks, a North Korean is taught from an early age to associate certain emotions to specific people, objects, behaviors, and events. History is deeply embedded in ideology and an education of *kamjǒng* is actually an education of ideological emotion (*sasang kamjǒng*). History textbooks devoted solely to describing the revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung are used throughout North Korean secondary education.¹⁸ These textbooks directly serve the personality cult of the Great Leaders. A second type of history textbooks is titled *The History of Korea (Chosŏn Yŏksa)*, which, unlike the history textbooks on Kim Il Sung, encompasses the entire history of Korea from the ancient to the modern period.¹⁹ What is noticeable from these history textbooks is how everything leads to the Great Leader, underscoring that what happens in North Korea is not so unique because this is what national history is about. Particular periods and events are emphasized, reinforcing the teleological and revolutionary role of history in North Korea. Large segments of these history

¹⁸ Chang Rijun, *Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il Sung taewŏnsunim: hyŏngmyŏng ryŏksa kotŭng chunghakkyo* 4 (P'yŏngyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1999).

Chang Rijun, *Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il Sung taewŏnsunim: hyŏngmyŏngr yŏksa kotŭng chunghakkyo* 5 (P'yŏngyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1999).

¹⁹ Ri Inhyŏng, *Chosŏn Ryŏksa: chunghakkyo* 1 (P'yŏngyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 2005).

Ri T'aeyŏng, *Chosŏn Ryŏksa: kotŭng chunghakkyo* 2 (P'yŏngyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 2000).

textbooks are devoted to the history of the Kokuryō kingdom (37 BC to 668 AD), which is particularly important because the territory of Kokuryō covered present-day North Korea and P'yōngyang served as the kingdom's capital. Sections are also devoted to Tan'gun, a legendary figure in both North and South Korean mythology who is considered the father of Korea by founding Kojosŏn from P'yōngyang, the first Korean kingdom, and Tongmyōng-wang, the founder of Kokuryō.²⁰ The history of slaves from the period of Kojosŏn and various noteworthy individuals and events from the Kokuryō period are given special mention, particularly loyal generals who fought to protect their kingdom from foreign invasions.²¹ Emphasis on key individuals and memorable events continues in the latter periods of Korean history as well. Chapters are given to Wanggŭn, the founder of Koryŏ, various generals who fought off foreign invasions, famous inventions, such as the Korean language, peasant rebellions and the farmers who led them, the Kapsin Coup, the murder of Queen Min, important individuals who fought the Japanese during the colonial period, the Eulsa Treaty, the March 1st Movement, and the anti-Japanese resistance struggle of June 10, 1926.²²

Both types of history textbooks (the Kim Il Sung revolutionary history and the history of Korea) illuminate the historiography of North Korea. While the history of North Korea is centered on Kim Il Sung, history predating North Korea is largely focused on key events and individuals that help to reinforce the North Korean revolution as the legitimate outcome of Korean history. Through an education of selected history, North Koreans are taught that the revolutionary roots of North Korea can be traced far back to the numerous battles against foreigners and peasant rebellions. The atrocities committed by the Japanese can also be traced

²⁰ North Korea established the Mausoleum of Tan'gun in Kangdong near P'yōngyang after claiming to have found the tomb of Tan'gun. The tomb was excavated in 1993 and the mausoleum was restored in 1994.

²¹ Ri Inhyōng, *Chosŏn Ryōksa: chunghakkyo* 1, 1-2.

²² Ri T'aeyōng, *Chosŏn Ryōksa: kotŭng chunghakkyo* 2, 1-2.

far before the colonial period and the greatness of North Korea is legitimated by Tan'gun, Kojosŏn, and Kokuryŏ. Events and historical figures who contribute to justifying the revolution are right and proper while events and individuals who do not are wrong and improper. It is through this ideological indoctrination that a North Korean is able to link appropriate emotions to specific objects, peoples, and behaviors.

From Ideological Emotion (sasang kamjŏng) to Aesthetic Sensitivity (yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ)

In a North Korean painting, a scene from the peoples' everyday life must be filled with ideology and artistically move the viewer. How a painting depicts the aesthetics of life (*saenghwal chŏngsŏ*) is one of the important factors that determines the artistic merit and value of a painting.²³ An article on how to express the aesthetics of life in the arts explains that a central character's portrayal must capture the essence of the character by alluding to an object or nature that seizes the viewer's attention by emotionally emphasizing the essence of the depicted character.²⁴ This rather confusing statement is best explained by looking at several paintings that show this process.

²³ Cho Myŏngch'ŏl, "Kamjŏng chojik-kwa chakp'um- ŭi saenghwal chŏngsŏ p'yohyŏn," *Chosŏn Yesul* Issue 3 (P'yŏngyang: Chosŏn munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2002), 50.

²⁴ Ibid.



Fig. 1: The People from the Laborers' Bunkhouse, Song Suyŏng, watercolor, 1991

The painting titled *The People from the Laborers' Bunkhouse* (figure 1) depicts a scene from the everyday life of Korean indentured laborers residing in a Japanese-controlled bunkhouse during the colonial period. A group of Korean laborers, from men to women and young to old, are seen cramped in a filthy, dilapidated bunkhouse. A young father holding his crying baby and a young boy crying with his head down are seen. In the center, a young mother stands with her hand protectively holding her daughter who is clinging to her mother. Three other children surround the young mother, most likely her other children. The Koreans are dressed poorly with their traditional clothing dirtied and tattered. Worn-out shoes are seen strewn across the floor and the shabby condition of the bunkhouse is reinforced by the cracks on the floor. On the right of the painting, a man and woman are seen looking disdainfully at the young Korean mother in the center. It is clear that the man is the Japanese head of the bunkhouse from his western suit attire and what seems to be a moustache. He is holding a long, thin cane, which he is pointing at the young Korean mother, close enough to poke the head of the young boy next to her. As for the woman next to the Japanese man, she seems to be a Korean woman who is collaborating with the Japanese from her traditional Korean dress-like attire. The

young Korean mother has her head turned away from the Japanese man and the woman next to him. From the facial expressions of the characters, the Japanese man is scolding the Korean mother. It seems that as a punishment the young mother and her children are being dismissed from the bunkhouse as evidenced by the scarf around the mother's head, the daughter holding her mother, and her other children with a hood and knapsack, ready to leave in the middle of the night. With a look of resolve on her face, the mother seems determined to carry on with her life despite the difficulty.

It is immediately apparent that the Japanese are the evil characters and the Korean laborers are the wronged characters in the painting. However, certain objects in the scene bolster the evil nature of the Japanese and the exploited reality of the Koreans. The long, thin cane held by the Japanese man and the way he is holding it—pointing it so close to the head of the young boy next to the Korean mother—immediately capture the attention of the painting's viewer and the cane serves as an object that symbolizes the evilness of the Japanese. While the light held by the woman next to the Japanese man fulfills a practical purpose of brightening the dark room, it also shows the dismal, terrible condition in which the Koreans are subjected to live and sleep on a daily basis. No light exists in the room and it is only when the Japanese come to check on the Koreans that light is provided. The clothing of the Japanese man and the woman next to him are much cleaner than the clothing of the disheveled Koreans. Thus, clothing serves as another object that symbolizes the shameful condition of the Japanese and the exploited Koreans. The tattered shoes of the Koreans that can be seen on the floor further symbolize the exploited condition of the Koreans. These objects—the cane, light, clothing, and shoes—express the aesthetics of life (*saenghwal chŏngsŏ*). The cane, light, clothing, and shoes express the *chŏngsŏ*, the aesthetic sensitivity of the painting, and it is the way they are depicted that emotionalizes the scene.

While the evilness of the Japanese and their exploitations against the Koreans arouse the feeling of anger, these key objects are instantly identifiable and emotionally essentialize the nature of the Koreans and Japanese.



Fig. 2: The Furnace Blast Workers of the Bygone Days, Kim Sŏngmin, Chosŏnhwa, 1981



Fig. 3: Carbide is Gushing Forth, Ko Yŏnggŭn and Kim Sunam, Chosŏnhwa, 1988

The location and environment of a scene also contribute to expressing *chŏngsŏ*. When the location and environment are merged with character portrayals, the content of the painting and the feelings of the characters emotionally move the viewers.²⁵ Scenes of industry where laborers are working under difficult conditions are recurring themes in North Korean paintings. The paintings *The Furnace Blast Workers of the Bygone Days* (figure 2) and *Carbide is Gushing Forth* (figure 3) illustrate how the theme of hard labor can convey different emotions depending on how the theme is aesthetically depicted.²⁶ The first painting (figure 2) depicts the wretched lives of Korean workers at a Japanese-run blast furnace during the colonial period. From the weary facial expressions of the workers, the hard labor is overwhelming and debilitating, sapping every ounce of the workers' strength. In the second painting (figure 3), a group of laborers is rejoicing after seeing carbide pouring out from a carbide-producing plant. With smiling, excited

²⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁶ Both paintings are further examined in Chapter 3.

faces and arms raised in the air, the scene is filled with the workers' sense of happiness and joy after a long laborious work. The laborers' work in the carbide plant is equally difficult as the work of the blast furnace workers. However, the laborers in the carbide plant are toiling away to reconstruct North Korea after the Korean War. While labor under the power of the Japanese is always grueling and miserable, labor during the post-war reconstruction years under the leadership of Kim Il Sung is always joyous because it is putting into action Juche ideology. Juche is about the power of man and paintings of hard labor during the reconstruction years, as part of Juche art, are about building a new nation through North Korea's own strength. Numerous paintings depicting the rebuilding of North Korea after the Korean War are characterized by the happy faces of workers. Despite the intense labor, a great sense of pride pervades these images because the labor is happily for the revolution.

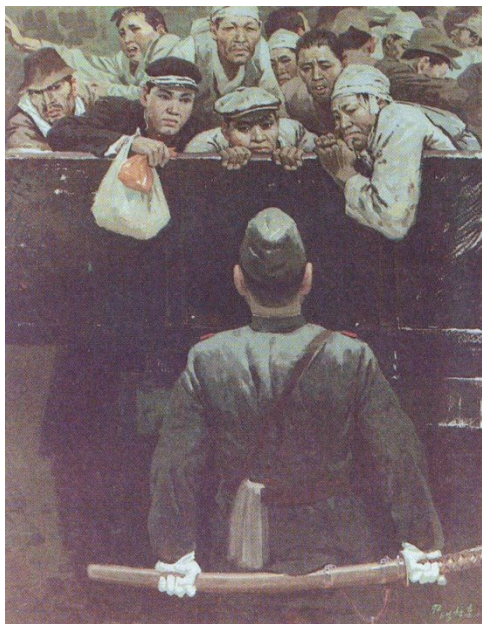


Fig. 4: Conscription, Paek Hakhun, 1993



Fig. 5: On the Day of Becoming a Furnace Blast Worker, Song Ch'anhŏng, Yuhwa, 1993

In this context, the paintings *Conscription* (figure 4) and *On the Day of Becoming a Furnace Blast Worker* (figure 5) also demonstrate how a similar theme can have opposite emotional effects on the viewer because of the aesthetic sensitivity of the painting. The painting *Conscription* depicts a group of Korean men forcibly conscripted for labor by the Japanese during the colonial period. Loaded onto a truck, the Koreans are looking hard at the Japanese soldier standing in front of them, emphasizing the cruelty and immorality of the Japanese. Cowering, the Koreans are weak and dejected. A Japanese soldier holding a long sword is a faceless figure in the center of the painting whose back and sword are the only parts visible to the viewer. Unlike the Koreans, he is straight and tall. A sense of movement pervades the scene as it travels from the Koreans on the truck looking down to the Japanese soldier. In comparison, the painting *On the Day of Becoming a Furnace Blast Worker* shows a young man on the first day of his job as a blast furnace worker. He is seated next to an older furnace worker whose hand is placed on the back of the young man. Another furnace worker is seen behind them, wiping his face with a towel, looking at the two men. In the background, workers are seen laboring away. All three men in the center are smiling broadly. They are proud and strong unlike the cowering Korean workers in the *Conscription* painting. They are also their own masters. As the title and the broad smiling faces of the men suggest, becoming a furnace blast worker is a joyous and proud occasion. While hard labor awaits the new young man, it is for the right and proper cause of the revolution, the reconstruction of North Korea. For the Koreans in the painting *Conscription*, whose first day of work awaits them in the immediate future, labor is unjustifiable and immoral because it is forced and for the Japanese colonial power. For the new furnace blast worker during the post-Korean War years, labor is fulfilling, a meaningful and rightful path.

Folk and Traditional Customs and Nature

An element that drives the revolution is the peoples' eternal love for their homeland. Depicting folk and traditional customs and nature in paintings is a powerful reminder of all that is splendid about the homeland. While scenes of industry are about pride in what “we” (the North Koreans) have accomplished, scenes of traditional customs and nature are about the immense pride in “our” (North Korean) common heritage. Due to their role as an ideological instrument, the depiction of traditional folk customs and nature must be imbued with the proper *chöngsö* to fit the emotions of the people.²⁷ Just as an industry scene can convey different emotions depending on the context and environment of the industry taking place, so too can scenes of traditional customs and nature have enhanced emotional effects that encourage the love for the homeland when contextualized in a proper environment.

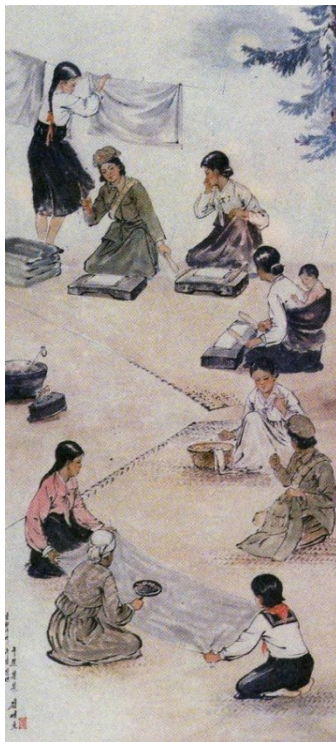


Fig. 6 (left): The Guerrilla Unit's Fulling Cloth by Pounding, Kim Myönggho, Chosöghwa, 1991



Fig. 7: The Victory Beating of Chiktongnyöng, Yun Ch'örho, Chosönhwa, 1991

²⁷ Cho Myönggh'öl, “Kamjöng chojik-kwa chakp'um- üi saenghwal chöngsö p'yohyön,” 51.

The paintings *The Guerrilla Unit's Fulling Cloth by Pounding* (figure 6) and *The Victory Beating of Chikdongnyŏng* (figure 7) contextualize two Korean traditional customs within the setting of the Korean War. In the painting *The Guerrilla Unit's Fulling Cloth by Pounding*, a group of women are partaking in the activity of fulling cloth by pounding. Two of the women are soldiers dressed in the female military attire, indicating the setting of the Korean War. A young girl is seen in the back hanging white cloth on a line hanger, a mother with a baby on her back is also present, and another young girl is helping to hold the cloth as well. While the war rages, this painting captures a peaceful scene of women performing a traditional Korean custom. By choosing to depict two female soldiers during their precious moment of reprieve from war among women participating in a traditional custom, the painting underscores the idea of the love for the homeland, which fuels the fighters' morale. In the painting *The Victory Beating of Chikdongnyŏng*, the traditional custom of beating rice is depicted. A young woman in the center is happily beating away while a group of women and an elderly man are also joyfully helping. The women are smiling and laughing at a baby who is perhaps the young mother's son. The painting is a visual rendering of the wartime folk song "The Victory Beating of Chikdongnyŏng," which refers to a key victory by the Peoples' Army against the U.S. troops at Chikdongnyŏng, a mountain pass in Kangwŏn province. The song praises the peoples' hard work in order to send foods grown from their farms to the fighting soldiers on the front-lines. While the theme of the song is the peoples' intense love for their homeland, the painting aesthetically captures this love in an emotional way by enhancing the song with a traditional custom. The painting shows how art enhances, contributes, and feeds into what is already known in history. The title of the painting tells the viewer what the painting is about. The painting becomes interpretative because

the viewer already knows the song. Both paintings, where only women, children, and the elderly are seen, capture a moment from the everyday lives of soldiers and ordinary citizens during a time of war. By depicting traditional customs within the setting of war, the paintings juxtapose the harsh reality of war with idyllic and romantic scenes of rural life.

As in the case of paintings featuring traditional customs, it is difficult to immediately associate North Korean landscape paintings with ideology from a casual glance. However, in the similar manner of paintings depicting traditional customs, landscape paintings are also designed to foster the peoples' pride in homeland and national landscape by enhancing the majestic qualities of nature. In the *Treatise on Art*, Kim Jong Il states that landscapes must be depicted with deep thought and *chǒngsǒ*.²⁸ Landscape paintings, according to Kim, nurture the peoples' love for their homeland and, therefore, ideology and aesthetic sensitivity (*chǒngsǒ*) must be united. A landscape painting with deep thought is created when it reflects the desires, aspirations, and emotions of the people and serves the revolution.²⁹ In North Korea, Kim Jong Il further states that every creation from the land, every grass, and every tree are imbued with the revolutionary history of the people under the march of Juche ideology.³⁰ As such, the structure of landscape paintings is not about how pleasing the landscape is; rather, it is about expressing the artist's aesthetic sensitivity (*chǒngsǒ*).³¹ In an insightful passage from an article on the truthfulness and creative individualism of a landscape portrayal, how an artist's aesthetic sensitivity (*chǒngsǒ*) is created is described:

²⁸ Kim Chǒngil, *Misullon*, 66-75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Ch'oe Myǒngsu, "Myosa-ŭi chinsilsǒng-kwa ch'angjakch'ŏk kaesǒng munje: inmin yesulga Sǒn Uyǒng misulchǒn-ŭl pogo," *Chosǒn Yesul* Issue 12 (P'yǒngyang: Chosǒn munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2001), 56.

A depiction is an artistic reproduction on reality. It is not possible to draw something in reality or transplant a landscape because it is appealing in its entirety onto a canvas. Even if an artist's emotional inspiration is great, a depiction undeniably becomes an artistic reproduction. Therefore, an artist does not transplant onto the canvas the sky, clouds, valleys, and fog as directly experienced in nature. Instead, an artist must always take deep care to paint close-range clouds in detail, yet gradually omit the clouds in order to enhance the artistic quality of the scene.³²

While nature scenes may seem to be a direct replication from reality, in actuality, as revealed by the passage above, they are an artistic reproduction. As an example, a detailed depiction of close-range clouds is needed, but the clouds should be slowly omitted to have the effect of naturalness to enhance the aesthetic sensitivity (*chǒngsǒ*) of the painting. What the passage reveals is that a landscape painting is not an actual depiction of natural phenomena, but an artistic rendering based on individual creativity and imagination to invest nature with an aesthetic emotion that triggers the peoples' sense of pride in the homeland.



Fig. 8: Mount Ch'ilbo's Winter, Yang Yunp'ung, Chosŏnhwa, 1990

³² Ibid., 58-59.



Fig. 9: Summer in Mount Paektu, Chi Chongsik, Yuhwa, 2006

As in thematic paintings, an appropriate landscape must be picked to be depicted visually. In an article that speaks about the practical training of creating landscape paintings, nature is tied to both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and a landscape impregnated with deep thought must be chosen.³³ A site such as Mount Ch'ilbo (figure 8), a mountain in the northern region of North Korea, where Kim Jong Il conducted on-site instructions for the soldiers of the Peoples' Revolutionary Army during the days of Sŏngun (Military First), is a landscape infused with deep thought.³⁴ As a site that is imbued with the footprints and memories of Kim Jong Il, the landscape of Mount Ch'ilbo powerfully affects the viewer because the site has been graced by the presence of the Dear Leader (Kim Jong Il). According to official North Korean propaganda, Mount Paektu, the legendary mountain, is said to have been the birthplace of both the North Korean revolution and Kim Jong Il. Reflecting its ideological importance, Mount Paektu is probably one of the most commonly featured mountains in North Korean landscape paintings (figure 9). Celebrated mountains, such as Mount Kūmgang and sites with revolutionary significance, for instance Man'gyōngdae, which is touted as the official birthplace of Kim Il Sung, are also commonly featured in landscape paintings as well. Even seemingly innocuous

³³ Han Sŏngch'ŏl, "Chosŏnhwa p'unggyōng silsŭp kyoyug-esŏ nasŏ-nŭn myŏtkaji munje," *Yesul Kyoyuk* Issue 3 (P'yŏngyang: Yesul kyoyuk ch'ulp'ansa, 2003), 38.

³⁴ Ibid, 38-39.

depictions of flowers are imbued with ideology, such as the Kimilsungia (pink orchid) and Kimjongilia (red begonia) named after the Great Leaders.

A Restricted Imaginative Experience

The artistic merit of an artwork in North Korea rests not in directly replicating a scientific fact into a visual form, but in emotionally conveying a scientific fact. The distinction between *kamjŏng* and *chŏngsŏ* in the form of ideological emotion and aesthetic sensitivity sheds light on how the emotional rendering of a scientific fact is achieved. The use of emotion in art entails an active engagement with the viewer, seeking to create an experiential identification and unity with the idea depicted in the artwork and the viewer. Matthew Kieran speaks of this engagement between an artwork and its viewer:

Through the felt experience afforded by artworks we may come to a fuller understanding of ourselves and others in our own world. Artworks are not mere objects whose meaning is to be transcribed into separately identifiable propositions. Rather, artworks' meaning arises from the imaginative experience they afford us in our engagement.³⁵

North Korean paintings are produced because they must radically change the viewer's perception, how the viewer looks at the world. The imaginative experience, which Kieran speaks of, takes on a different shape in the context of North Korean paintings. Imagining is not about becoming cognizant of all the different possibilities of oneself and the world, instead it is about emotionally

³⁵ Matthew Kieran, "The Impoverishment of Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 1 (1995): 25.

connecting to the revolution, buttressing the North Korean state's impregnable power to control the course of the socialist revolution and the future. North Korean paintings seek to provoke emotional reactions that are always confined and directed to the revolution and the Great Leaders.