Shin Yun-bok's Duplex Criticism and the Loss of Confucian Ideology*

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Abstract

The picturesque theme of Hyewon jeonsincheop 蕙園傳神帖 *(Collected Paintings of Hyewon Shin Yun-bok) can best be described as a critical ridicule that makes use of the duplex placement technique. The duplicity of an abstract icon—whereby two opposing codes are conjoined with one abstract icon, i.e., one abstract icon implying two codes—is one of the more effective methods used to portray such a theme. For example, widows,* yangban, *Buddhist monks, ladies, female servants, and others are the original icons, but through anti-Confucian, antireligious, and amoral acts are construed as secondary abstract icons with lewd conduct, voyeurism, sexual harassment, aberration, and more. With the mechanism of the dual codes of one abstract icon, the criticism falls upon both of the two codes whereby Confucian ideology as doctrine and Confucian ideology as order (as implied by the icons) are lost. Shin did not just superficially express voyeuristic curiosity nor hedonic fantasy. His pictures include a certain critical mechanism, thus, there is much room to infer the spirit of the times in his world of painting.*

Keywords: Shin Yun-bok, genre painting, Confucianism, icons and codes, duplex placement technique

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Introduction

Confucianism as a ruling ideology in premodern China was a firm principle not only in the realm of governance, morality, and mindsets but also in artistic creation, and acted as the most significant basis of the literati phenomenon[1] established during the Song dynasty. In terms of artistic paintings, which were the fundamentals of the literati phenomenon, they can be considered *signifiants* as formative images while Confucian ideology can be referred to as a *signifié* as text. In this semiotic system, the relation between the *signifiant* and the *signifié* works with a single algorithm with a formula predicated on the notion that art exists and is meaningful only for the sake of society and history. The Joseon dynasty, which assiduously followed the Chinese literati order and Confucian discourse system, orbited around the same course.

In the case of painting, just as in other artistic genres, the principle of Confucian aesthetics had dominated literati painters' artistic spirit since the early Joseon dynasty. Near the end of the Joseon dynasty, however, these traditions of representation were faced with crisis due to political, economic, and social changes, all caused by the collapse of a class-based society. Those changes appeared on the sphere of art just as they were. In particular, "visible art, in terms of its representation to see an image itself with eyesight, gives people much more sensation and shock than any obscene liter-

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1. Literati phenomenon implies the combination of power, learning, morality, and art. Literati were *sa* 士 (*shi* in Chinese; scholar-official) who held posts in the government; Confucian scholars following Confucian doctrines; *gunja* 君子 (*junzi* in Chinese; a man of honor and integrity) possessing perfect morality; as well as artists expressing their inner feelings through literature or formative arts. Literati, who were Confucian scholars and aimed to be a *gunja*, nominally or practically, monopolistically enjoyed art and culture, namely, *yugye* 六藝 (*liuyi* in Chinese; six classical arts) and *yeak* 禮樂 (*liyue* in Chinese; propriety and music), and made them a useful means to justify their privilege and to produce their discourse. The creation of dominant discourses of the society had been dominated by the literati class until the end of the Qing dynasty in China and the late Joseon dynasty. For the details on literati phenomenon, see Lim (2006b, 274-276). "Scholars' painting was the art of an educated minority, practiced only in a circle of intimates and appreciated by a chosen few" (Bush 1971, 181).

ary works do" (Jin 2008, 105). Shin Yun-bok's (1758–?)[2] painting is on the first line of such stimulus and shock. However, we also found Shin's very unique, systematic, and intentional criticism with a high level of satire between the stimulus and shock in his own descriptive style and the crack and collapse of the real world of the day. This is the reason why we need to examine Shin's world of paintings from a new, unconventional perspective.

In this article, I will consider Shin's spirit of art as a criticism of the reality of Confucian society, studded with absurdities and disharmony with the society, through his works of genre painting in *Hyewon jeon-sincheop* 蕙園傳神帖 (Collected Paintings of Hyewon Shin Yun-bok). I, however, do not attempt to prove the point that sexuality is considered "not as a primordially natural phenomenon but rather as a product of social and historical forces" (Weeks 2003, 6) nor to make the distinction that "the problem of sexuality is a political problem beyond the problem of oppression and liberation, and is also the problem showing a micro-scopic power relation" (Kim 2008, 130). Shin was an obscure figure, being only a mere court painter in his time. In this article, I intend to investigate Shin's criticism or disclosure as an expression of ridicule by way of the tools of *métalangage* (metalanguage) and the duplex placement technique. I will also analyze the aspects of the *mentalité* (mentality)[3] phenomenon circa the eighteenth century in the late Joseon dynasty and examine how we can characterize the value of ridicule aesthetics that Shin's world of painting exhibited.

A Reference, Magritte's *Dépaysement* and *Métalangage*

René Magritte's (1898–1967) surrealistic world of painting is a very good reference to help understand Shin's spirit of painting and the formative characteristics of his works. Through whimsical thoughts about ordinary

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2. Shin Yun-bok 申潤福, better known by his penname Hyewon 蕙園, was a famous genre painter of the late Joseon dynasty.

3. *Mentalité* is understood as the group unconsciousness at the basis of sociocultural phe-nomena (see Cho 2000, 39).

materials, Magritte suggested a denial of conventional thinking, inducing the observer to lose his or her way between reality and image, and conjured up questions about everything in real life considered as normal by social convention. His formative world allows us to divert our focal attention from ordinary objects normally perceived with conviction. The two characteristic methods Magritte used in order to express his own spirit of art were *dépaysement*—which can be translated as defamiliarization—of objects and *métalangage*.

According to Bowness (1992, 150), the technique of *dépaysement*[4] could be described as "a visible metaphor to give rise to embarrassment through an irrational juxtaposition of things." Through this technique, Magritte intended to liberate an unconscious world lurking in the observer's inner nature by composing pensive and shocking pictures by putting familiar objects in unexpected places. For example, we can see how Magritte's technique of *dépaysement* was used in his work *Le blanc-seing* (Fig. 1), wherein he defied the law of physics through taking issue with dogmatic viewpoints on the physical world with simultaneous generation of two events originally separated in time.[5]

Figure 1. René Magritte, *Le blanc-seing*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 81.3×65.1 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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4. The technique of *dépaysement* is expressed by the ways of isolation, alteration, entanglement of things, size changes, an abnormal meeting, overlapping of images, paradox, and so on. For further details, refer to Yoo (2008).
5. See Gablik (2007, 176).

On the other hand, *métalangage* refers to a method used in order to disclose absurdity and contradiction intrinsic in the relation of words and things, that is, *another word* to explain and regulate a *certain word*. For example, the expression, "the word of lemon doesn't taste like acid" is *métalangage*. We usually utilize contradiction to recognize equally a lemon as a word due to the intuitive conditioning of its sour taste and contradictory as an acidic tasting fruit. Here *métalangage* functions to arouse such absurdity and contradiction between things and recognition.

Of Magritte's works, *La trahison des images* (Fig. 2) stimulates the intrinsic relation between images and texts, and shows the most remarkable characteristic of *métalangage*. Compared with the traditional function of painting explanations, Magritte's text is doubly paradoxical. He intended to name what he didn't need to and, at the time of naming it, he gave the name yet denying it factually. Such confusion was devised to embarrass all the traditional relations between languages and paintings. Through the phrase "This is not a pipe" (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*), Magritte defied and ridiculed the absurdity of initial recognition by putting a brake on the structure in which we have ever associated a picture of pipe with a real pipe. Such metastructure takes on the strong characteristic of antipredominant discourse. The term *antipredominant discourse* defines a criticism against certain discourse in cases where it seizes hegemony and spreads its ideology.[6] The works expressed by *dépaysement* of objects and *métalangage* demand us to break the mold of common sense and fixed ideas, and to see our world with new eyes.

Figure 2. René Magritte, *La trahison des images*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 60×81 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Magritte adopted *dépaysement* and *métalangage* as devices to evince

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6. See Oh (2001, 40-47, 64).

the distortion of nature, contradiction of recognition, absurdity of phe-
nomenon, and so forth, which are ultimately exposed in the relation
between images and texts by way of ridicule. These tactics also strive to
liberate the scope of recognition embedded in the relation through the
denial of the established standard relation between images and texts.
Interestingly, we can find the standard relation between images and texts
in the realm of Confucian aesthetics. For example, these standard rela-
tions are also a core element in literati painting. As a corollary then, Shin's
genre painting could be said to express the denial and disparagement of
the traditional and fixed relations between Confucian aesthetic images
and texts by way of ridicule. In this regard, Magritte and Shin share the
same spirit of painting.

Duplex Placement: One Abstract Icon, Two Codes

It is not possible to directly apply the mechanism of Magritte's *dépayse-
ment* and *métalangage* to analyze Shin's own world of painting for, though
they share the same critical spirit by means of disclosure and ridicule,
there is a different aspect in terms of techniques to express their own spir-
it. Here, I suggest the *duplex placement technique* as a method to analyze
Shin's genre paintings. If Magritte's *dépaysement* is meant to have two or
more icons i.e., objects placed in one picture, Shin's duplex placement is a
technique allowing one icon to doubly imply two conflicting or opposing
codes.[7] On the other hand, the two conflicting or opposing codes have the

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7. Icons generally refer to individual items of composition in paintings, such as moun-
tains, water, people, houses, pavilions, small bridges, boats, waterfalls, wind, moon,
clouds, mist, snow, rain, rocks, trees, flowers, birds, animals, insects, musical instru-
ments, and so on. Codes are the meanings and messages that such icons imply. For a
simple example in Confucian aesthetics, the code of a bamboo as an icon implies the
spirit of a *gunja* (see Lim 2006a, preface). Here, the concept of the relation between
icons and codes was grounded in the *bideok* 比德 (*bide* in Chinese) doctrine, which was
originally called *imulbideok* 以物比德 (*yiwubide* in Chinese), meaning "to present moral
values by metaphorically comparing them to a visual object." This is the peculiar aes-
thetic mechanism used in East Asian traditional art. The process of aesthetical experi-

characteristic of *métalangage* as *this is not that* in terms that the "this is not a pipe" phrase implies.

I define the theme of pictures in *Hyewon jeonsincheop* as a critical ridicule through duplex placement techniques. One of the ways used to express such a theme is the duplicity of an abstract icon[8] meaning that two opposing codes are doubly placed on one abstract icon, or in In other words, that one abstract icon implies two codes. For example, widows, *yangban* 兩班 (privileged gentry class), Buddhist monks, ladies, female servants, and others, which appear as original icons in Shin's paintings through anti-Confucian, antireligious, and amoral acts, secondarily produce abstract icons such as lewd conduct, voyeurism, sexual harassment, aberration, and so on. In the mechanism of the dual codes of one abstract icon, it is doubly criticized that both the two codes, Confucian ideology as doctrine and Confucian ideology as order, which those abstract icons imply, are lost. If so, the pictures of such a category are actually elegies conveying the notion of confusion and loss, which is combined with unconsecrated unworldliness.

In Shin's paintings, *métalangage* and duplex placement techniques are still important in terms of the composition of pictures. Magritte's statement that the painting of a pipe is not a pipe is a way to express a style of

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ence of *bideok* consists of three phases. Let us examine an example picture of bamboo. At the first stage, an upright *gunja* has an aesthetic interest in bamboo that possesses the attribute of straight joints, and decides to draw it. At the second stage, the bamboo in the picture displays the quality of integrity, thus becoming the mirror of the integral inner world of *gunja*. At the third stage, a person who observes the picture does not value the artistic beauty of the picture, but instead discovers in it the integrity of *gunja*, represented by the bamboo with straight joints. Hence, the observer is ethically inspired by the drawing of the bamboo and, from now on, starts to perceive the greater beauty of the bamboo whenever he sees it. When such circulation becomes continuous, bamboo or an icon turns into a symbol of a specific moral characteristic or a code, and people acquire mutual understanding through viewing bamboo (Lim 2012, 120n12).

8. The stylistic characteristic of the duplex placement technique is duplicity of a single icon, which could be classified into two dual codes of a concrete icon and dual codes of an abstract icon. For the analysis of dual codes of a concrete icon in Shin's paintings, see Lim (2012, 122-130).

damaged nature such as "This is not that." The structure of *métalangage*, in which *the pipe in the picture* in front of our very eyes is not *the real pipe* in terms of the original thing or nature, is expressed in Shin's pictures as the structure in which this (widows, *yangban*, Buddhist monks, ladies, or female servants in the pictures) is not that (widows, *yangban*, Buddhist monks, ladies, or female servants worthy of the name).[9] In that structure of *métalangage*, the abstract icons of lewd conduct, voyeurism, sexual harassment, and aberration are produced, and it is formed from a dual division of codes between the original icons, i.e., widows unlike widows, *yangban* unlike *yangban*, Buddhist monks unlike Buddhist monks, ladies unlike ladies, or female servants unlike female servants in the pictures and the abstract icons, i.e., lewd conduct, voyeurism, sexual harassment, or aberration. The divided dual codes are the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine and the loss of Confucian ideology as order. Then, each original icon doubly involves the two codes drawn from abstract icons which are formed metalinguistically. In other words, from the figures of widows, *yangban*, Buddhist monks, ladies, or female servants in the pictures, through the theme of lewd conduct, voyeurism, sexual harassment, or aberration established by the composition of pictures, we can conclude that both Confucian ideology as doctrine and Confucian ideology as order are lost and contradictory in connotation. According to the category of icons, I shall examine in the following subsections some of Shin's genre painting works implying dual codes of one abstract icon through *métalanguage* and the duplex placement technique.

Lewd Conduct

There are two kinds of ridicule in *Ibu tamchun* 嫠婦耽春 (Spring in the Backyard)[10] (Fig. 3). One is the ridicule against the laughter that a young

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9. This was based on *jeongmyeong* 正名 (*zhengming* in Chinese; meaning "observance of being worthy of the name") doctrine. The doctrine was considered very important in the time of Confucianism.

10. The titles for Shin's paintings have been borrowed from those in *Hyewon jeonsincheop* ([n.d.] 1974).

Figure 3. Shin Yun-bok, *Ibu tamchun* 嫠婦耽春 (Spring in the Backyard), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Figure 4. You Qiu 尤求, *Shinutu* 仕女圖 (Painting of a Lady), Ming dynasty. Ink and colors on paper, 21.9×25.8 cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.

widow bursts into while dressed in white mourning clothes by seeing dogs flirting, which suggests a forced faithfulness for serving but a single husband. The other is the ridicule against the widow's crumbled will to remain faithful to her husband. We can see the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine from the crumbled will of faithfulness, and can identify the loss of Confucian ideology as order from the ignored ethics. Shin ridiculed and criticized both of these two types of loss. When comparing *Ibu tamchun* (Fig. 3) and *Shinutu* 仕女圖 (Painting of a Lady) (Fig. 4), we can more acutely understand the characteristics of ridicule and criticism of the losses. In *Shinutu*, though it is similar to *Ibu tamchun* in terms of context, it is expressed as spring sentiments or longing in which both Confucian order and Confucian doctrine exist.

Voyeurism

Jeongbyeon yahwa 井邊夜話 (Moonlight at the Fountain) (Fig. 5) depicts a failed *sindok* 愼獨 (self-restraint) of a *yangban* 兩班 who falls over a urination wall, and middle-class women who seem to enjoy being peeped on. We can see the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine in the former fig-

Figure 5. *Jeongbyeon yahwa* 井邊夜話 (Moonlight at the Fountain), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Figure 6. *Dano pungjeong* 端午風情 (A Scenery on Dano Day), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

ure, and can identify the loss of Confucian ideology as order in the latter. In this and other examples to follow, Shin ridiculed and criticized both of these two types of losses. Another example is *Dano pungjeong* 端午風情 (A Scenery on Dano Day) (Fig. 6), a painting of a failed *jigye* 持戒 (following discipline) of Buddhist monks,[11] who peep over rocks women who are bathing in the stream, unreservedly spending the festive day.

Sexual Harassment

Sonyeon jeonhong 少年剪紅 (Courtship in the Blooming Garden) (Fig. 7) illustrates a *yangban*'s sexual desire and a woman servant's non-irresistible but non-explicit rejection of sexual oppression. A handsome newlywed groom is busy chatting up a woman servant in the backyard. She, howev-

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11. The theme of this article is concerned with Confucian ideology; however, we can also comprehend the loss of ideology as doctrine from the Buddhist monks' aberration. Thus, in this article, I also refer to the case of the Buddhist monk because it is the same icon in terms of the loss of ideology. The case below is the same.

er, does not seem to dislike it, either. We can see it from her expression and posture with her done-up hair, though shy. Here is no sexual discrimination. We can see the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine from the *yangban* as he derives pleasure according to his lustful desire, and can comprehend the loss of Confucian ideology as order from the woman servant not rejecting sexual allurement.

In *Chunsaek manwon* 春色滿園 (Curiosity in the Early Spring) (Fig. 8), a *yangban*'s sexual desire is implicitly illustrated. A slightly intoxicated young *yangban* stops a passing housewife returning from the field with a basket of edible herbs, and is chatting her up. From her hair style and clothes, she seems not to be a humble woman, with her expression and posture not rejecting an unfamiliar man's temptation, which is uncommon at the time. Although there is no feeling of sexual discrimination,

Figure 7. *Sonyeon jeonhong* 少年剪紅 (Courtship in the Blooming Garden), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Figure 8. *Chunsaek manwon* 春色滿園 (Curiosity in the Early Spring), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.235.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

just as in the case of *Sonyeon jeonhong* (Fig. 7), the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine is observable from the *yangban* behaving anyway he pleases. The loss of Confucian ideology as order is also comprehended from the woman not rejecting sexual enticement. In *Gyebyeon gahwa* 溪邊

佳話 (Women by the Crystal Stream) (Fig. 9), the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine is observed in the *yangban*'s[12] unreserved gaze, as much as in the women not avoiding his gaze implying sexual curiosity. The *Pyomo bongyok* 漂母逢辱 (An Episode at the Stream of Water) (Fig. 10), which features a Buddhist monk flirting with a woman, who does not avoid his sexual luring, also illustrates the corruption of Confucian values.

Figure 9. *Gyebyeon gahwa* 溪邊佳話 (Women by the Crystal Stream), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Figure 10. *Pyomo bongyok* 漂母逢辱 (An Episode at the Stream of Water), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Aberration

In *Wolha jeongin* 月下情人 (Lovers under the Crescent Moon) (Fig. 11), which portrays a love affair violating a curfew, it seems obvious that the couple has to meet in secret and avoid public spaces. Here the two aspects are overlapped: one is the loss of social order as an ignored curfew, and the other is the loss of the individuals' doctrines, who do not care for

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12. The yangban was practing archery, which is one of the six classical arts that are the conditions to be a *gunja*.

Figure 11. *Wolha jeongin* 月下情人 (Lovers under the Crescent Moon), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

Figure 12. *Worya milhoe* 月夜密會 (Courtship under the Full Moon), 18th century. Ink and colors on paper, 28.2×35.2 cm. Gansong Museum of Art, Seoul.

their situation nor condition. The curfew is a sign of dominating consciousness through physical coercion. A personal love affair illustrated in this painting can be construed as a sign of antidominance showing that the private sphere is superior to the collective ethos as the ruling Confucian ideology.

In *Worya milhoe* 月夜密會 (Courtship under the Full Moon) (Fig. 12), a man and a woman meet and share their deep affection in the middle of the night. They also seem to have to meet in secret or away from public view. In this painting, alluding to the aberration of a man and a woman, the losses are similarly understood as in the previous painting.

Shin reiterated his ridicule and criticism throughout these examples. I classified all the duplex correspondence of one abstract icon and two codes mentioned above as in Table 1.

Table 1. The Duplex Correspondence of One Abstract Icon and Two Codes

Figure no.	Original icon	Abstract icon	Duplex codes	Metalanguage (this ≠ that)	Duplex criticism*
Fig. 3	A widow	Lewd conduct	Ignored Confucian ethics	Widow ≠ oppressed being	D
			Crumbled will of faithfulness	Widow ≠ family woman	O
Fig. 5	A *yangban* and women	Voyeurism	Failed *shindok* (*yangban*)	*Yangban* ≠ Confucian	D
Fig. 6	Buddhist monks and women		Failed *jigye* (monks)	Monks ≠ disciplinants	O
			Enjoying being peeped on (women)	Women ≠ virtuous beings	
Fig. 7	A *yangban* and a female servant	Sexual harass-ment	Sexual desire (*yangban*)	*Yangban* ≠ Confucian	D
			Non-explicit rejection of sexual oppression (female servant)	Female servant ≠ virtuous obedient beings	O
Figs. 8 and 9	A *yangban* and a woman or women		Sexual desire (*yangban*)	*Yangban* ≠ Confucian	D
			Non-explicit rejection of sexual oppression (woman)	Women ≠ virtuous beings	O
Fig. 10	A monk and a woman		Sexual desire (monk)	Monk ≠ disciplinant	D
			Non-explicit rejection of sexual oppression (woman)	Woman ≠ virtuous being	O
Figs. 11 and 12	A man and a woman	Aberration	Ignored norm (love affair)	Affair ≠ regulated feeling	D
			Ignored order (midnight)	Curfew ≠ regulated condition	O

* D denotes criticism of the loss of Confucian ideology as doctrine; O denotes criticism of the loss of Confucian ideology as order.

Social Change in the Late Joseon Dynasty and the Rise of *Mentalité*

In the Joseon society, a new wave appeared in the realms of economics, schools of thought, and culture. Social change was derived from the improvement of economic conditions. However, the economic growth was facilitated not by the form of sustainable development but by the form of the evils of unauthorized shops, and this implies the seriousness of the contradictions in the society.[13] Although material improvement was achieved, such material affluence and the change of mindsets caused by it had no choice but to lead to the weakening of the order of Confucian ideology.

   The economic change and the weakening of Confucian ideology caused by it were directly reflected in social atmosphere. It created confusion in values and led to the deterioration of official discipline.[14] We can see the backlash against speculative Neo-Confucianism in examples such as when Jeong Yak-yong (1762–1836) criticized the then Neo-Confucianism from the perspective of Silhak 實學 (Practical Learning).[15] Kim Jeonghui (1786–1856) pursued respect for the old, seeing the ultimate goal of learning to realize the way of sages, that is, the original doctrine of Confucianism.[16] Such moves away from Neo-Confucianism show that they criticized Neo-Confucianism by making original Confucianism the standard and that there was a serious crack in the Neo-Confucian order of the time. Such economic and ideological change ultimately implied the weakening of Confucian thoughts; on the other hand, it also implied the laxity of individual morality and social cohesion, which had been maintained by Confucian ideology.

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13. See Lee (1995, 277-278).

14. We can find examples of the deterioration of official discipline in many places of the *Jeongjo sillok* 正祖實錄 (Annals of King Jeongjo) (Lee 1995, 278).

15. Jeong Yak-yong, "Sogyuron" (The Theory of a Vulgar Confucian), in vol. 1 of *Yeoyudang jeonjip* (Complete Works of Yeoyudang Jeong Yak-yong), DB of Korean Classics, a_281_253c.

16. Kim Jeong-hui, "Yeo Kim Dong-ri seo" (A Letter to Kim Dong-ri), in vol. 4 of *Wandang jeonjip* (Complete Works of Wandang Kim Jeong-hui), DB of Korean Classics, a_301_091a.

The contemporaneous culture responded to such changes more sensi-
tively. In the realm of literature, the thinking structure based in Neo-Con-
fucianism gradually came to be considered empty and pretentious since
the late Joseon dynasty, and thus there appeared a move to find the true
literature while escaping from the attitude that the function of literature
was to convey Confucian doctrine. From this, the writers gradually broke
away from the Neo-Confucian doctrine by apprehending that the essence
of literature was realistic expression. Incidentally, the Learning of Wang
Yangming influenced this realistic trend of literature in the late Joseon
dynasty. For example, the humanitarianism, exposure of the falsity of
the *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning) of Zhu Xi, the literary individuality affirm-
ing human desire and thoroughly opposing imitation of old styles that are
revealed in Heo Gyun's (1569–1618) novels, are very similar to the literary
trend of the left wing of the Wang Yangming School (Korean Philosophi-
cal Association 1987, 18). Such atmosphere within the Wang Yangming
School could be said to be another example indicating that the then
Neo-Confucian order was unstable. The thought and the change in world-
views of the scholars who studied practical matters in the late Joseon
dynasty also attested to the fact that the absolute thinking system of the
Learning of Zhu Xi was in fact collapsing.

There appeared a new change in the realm of painting, too. The most
overt change was Shin Yun-bok's genre paintings. Shin, as mentioned ear-
lier, used the absurdity and disharmony in Confucian society as the lan-
guage for criticism and thinking. However, it would be too far-fetched if
we consider Shin's genre painting as the representation system which he
consciously designed in order to express the self-awareness out of Neo-
Confucianism or to set forth a counterargument against the predominant
Confucian discourse of his era. He might merely have been a court painter
tuned into the throbbing pulse of social change, or all the more, who, at
first, could never think of getting out of the prevailing social current. By
the way, he, regarding the pulsating as a privilege of speech, embodied the
aesthetics of ridicule in his painting world. In this respect, Shin can be
called a pioneer; yet in other fields there were also varied movements of
deconsecration, in which lots of unsacred icons on such pulsation peculiar

to the late Joseon dynasty appeared as a result of the accretion of wealth, the breakdown of the status system, the weakness of ideological centripetal force derived from the crack of Neo-Confucianism, cultural diversity, and so on.[17] Shin was an avant-garde artist in such atmosphere of the era. The atmosphere, however, was engendered not by a certain power or trend but by invisible forces such as the public or the stream of the times. Since Shin's works were consumed by the public, communicating with the public, it can be said that his genre painting shows the order of *mentalité* located at the opposite side of ideological order as leverage.[18]

Conclusion: Ridicule as the Spirit of the Times

In the late Joseon dynasty, unlike normative literary texts, oral texts frankly and clearly illustrated the reality of sexuality and the sexual desire of the people of the time. This shows that there was a sexual space not influenced at all by ethics in the hidden side of the Joseon society, which sought to be a moral society (Kang 2008, 32-39). Thus, the fact that the realm of sexuality could be expressed plainly, as in Shin's case, not through anonymity but by way of its true nature, offers counterevidence exposing the weakness of Confucian ideology and also provides the circumstantial evidence that *mentalité* became the general trend of that time. Shin's pictures are the pictorial representation of the stories spreading orally at the time. While the creators of such oral stories could depict human desire only through anonymity, Shin expressed it in his paintings under his real name. It was possible because there was no governmental authority or ethical force to con-

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17. For example, the novel *Geumbyeongmae* 金瓶梅 (*Jinpingmei* in Chinese; The Plum in the Golden Vase) was an indicator expressing the change of sexual discourse during the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century in the Joseon society. There started to appear the advocacy of *Geumbyeongmae*, which had been considered as obscene literature, and this could be said to be an affirmation of emotion (Kim 2008, 133-135).

18. Ideology and *mentalité* are in relation of leverage. For example, in the late Joseon dynasty, as the order of Neo-Confucianism (ideology) eroded, obscene pictures and erotic novels (*mentalité*) appeared openly.

trol or prohibit such actions in the name of Confucian ideology.

Shin's paintings do not simply superficially express voyeuristic curiosity or hedonic fantasy, rather exhibit a certain critical mechanism, allowing for much room to infer the spirit of the times. His social status and occupation probably enabled him to express the overall spirit of the times by the way of ridicule, and his works derived from this situation could be said to be much valuable, aesthetic products in the eyes of modern art. In this respect, the sense of modernity is seen in the way that he expressed the criticism of an absurd social system and world order related to sexual desire by way of ridicule. Even though we cannot regard explicit revelation itself as modernity, it can be said that Shin's genre paintings fully connote the clue of modernity from the point that his pictures are the products of practical aesthetics created by a semiotic relation between icons and codes, using the tools of *métalangage* and the duplex placement technique.

If modernity is characterized by the "modernity of awakening," "modernity of criticism by ridicule and disclosure," and "modernity of creation suggesting an alternative new system" (Lim 2012, 133), then, Magritte, who thought of himself not as a painter but as a philosopher, could be said to note the modernity of creation as well as the modernity of criticism. In other words, he demonstrated the philosophical aim to pursue creation. Shin, going along with the atmosphere of an ideological vacuum, simply kept disclosure and criticism in mind lacking a philosophical and enlightening aim; thus, unwillingly, he ended up showing the modernity of ridicule. Although it can be argued that Shin's paintings are void of philosophical or logical grounds, it seems certain that he raised questions about human existence and the world by visually representing them in his paintings. This is why we can identify a touch of modernity, which questions the dominant ideology of his era, in his works.

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