

Another Form of Orientalism: Koreans' Consciousness of Southeast Asia during the Japanese Colonial Period*

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Abstract

During the Japanese colonial rule of Korea, the term nambang 南方 (south), which traditionally simply referred to the cardinal direction, came in Korean minds to refer to Southeast Asia in particular. This change in meaning was associated with the political situation of that period. Nambang came to carry connotations of “undeveloped countries inhabited by indigenous peoples” and evoked a sense of superiority by those who used it. This was a manifestation of another form of Orientalism on the part of Koreans, who were themselves colonized people. Following the way Japan viewed Southeast Asia, the Korean people during the Japanese colonial period regarded the Southeast Asian region as the origin of life with a focus on its abundant natural resources. Unlike the brand of Orientalism of the Western romanticist, which focused on the harsh and violent barbarity of Asia, the image of the Southeast Asian regions as created by Japanese artists tended toward the idyllic and lyrical. Ironically, the people of Korea held imperialistic illusions about Southeast Asia without a tinge of sympathy, although they displayed an infinite sense of affinity toward India. This reveals Koreans' dual standard of Orientalism mixed with a sense of relative superiority and unease.

Keywords: nambang, Southeast Asia, Orientalism, Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, Southern Seas, China

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Southeast Asia, a Newly Opened World to Korea

In the Joseon period of Korea, the term *nambang* 南方 (*nanpo* in Japanese; south) referred literally to the “southward” direction. However, during the period of Japanese colonial rule over Korea (1910–1945), the term came to be adopted by Koreans to refer to South Asia and then, gradually, to Southeast Asia, while the term *namyang* 南洋 (*nanyo* in Japanese; southern seas) came to refer to the areas “south” of Korea and Japan without any specific geographical focus (Morimoto 1985, 22–23). The changes in meaning of these terms were closely associated with the worldwide political situation during Japan’s colonial rule of Korea (Yi 2011, 99–102). From the very beginning of the twentieth century, and as a result of Japanese influence, the term *nambang* as used by Koreans came to have connotations of “undeveloped countries inhabited by indigenous peoples,” and thus evoked a sense of superiority among them. In other words, this was the manifestation of a certain kind of Orientalism on the part of Koreans, who were themselves the people of a colonized country, toward countries in Southeast Asia. That being the case, how the term *nambang* came to be thus used by Koreans and how they came to acquire such a fixed notion about it is worth examining.

“Civilization” and “barbarism” are two significant keywords regarding attempts to rationalize Western imperialism under the pretext that undeveloped countries should be made to join the ranks of the civilized ones. In the early twentieth century, various Korean press organs—including daily newspapers such as the *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, and *Maeil sinbo*, and the monthly magazine *Byeolgeongon*—made various references to Southeast Asia as a place of “uncivilized countries” inhabited by indigenous peoples, and to the *nambang* regions as inhabited by “barbarians,” negatively reductive images of and notions about Southeast Asia that were influenced by Japanese imperialist propaganda. In the post-1938 period, imperial Japan launched the concept of the “Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere” (Daitoa Kyoeiken 大東亞共榮圈) and some Korean intellectuals assimilated themselves to this idea, accepting the status quo as protégés of the Japanese imperialists (Mendl 1995, 21–25). Furthermore, in the early twentieth cen-

ture, some Koreans clung to the illusion that they were part of imperial Japan, and as such were influenced by Japan into holding these negative images of the southern Asian regions.

Koreans came to acquire an image of Southeast Asia as a geographical entity that was essentially a reflection of the earliest Japanese propaganda concerning the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Thus, at that time, the image of Southeast Asia held by most Koreans, who as previously stated were the citizens of a Japanese colony, was formed through the prism of Japan. In fact, most Koreans' view of the *nambang* was formed through their imagination, just as the Japanese imperialists' concept of Southeast Asia was visually represented in the form of photos or illustrations carried in newspapers or magazines. Such a concept ultimately became fixed in people's minds through the repeated representation of the same images. During the Japanese occupation of Korea, Koreans' image of Southeast Asia characterized it as a place of scorching sun, endless sea, and coconut trees lining long white sandy beaches. These images were based on romantic illusions which were conveyed through various routes. In a short time, this idyllic image of the tropical regions in the South inevitably changed in the face of stark reality. Japan's invasion of Southeast Asian countries led to a change in the thinking of Koreans, who used to have a dual self-consciousness.

Originally, the term "Orientalism" referred to simply an "interest in the Orient" on the part of modern Europeans. However, as Edward Said (1978) conceptualized the term, it now indicates a distorted awareness that asserts the superiority of the West and justifies imperialistic rule through the distinction of characteristics between the East and West. Colonial Joseon was the object of Orientalism on the part of the Japanese, who regarded Korea as inferior and uncivilized, and thus being in need of "civilizing" and protection. Koreans, considered as the "the other" by the Japanese, in turn held similar viewpoints regarding Southeast Asia. Though the people of Joseon thought that Korea was the object of Orientalism, they also considered Southeast Asia to be primitive and uncivilized. Even if Korea itself was a Japanese colony, Koreans of the period viewed Southeast Asian people as if they were colonized citizens of an imperialist nation.

Here I am characterizing this viewpoint as “another form of Orientalism.” This term comes from the fact that the subject and the object were different; in this case the subject of Orientalism being the people of Korea during the Japanese colonial rule and the object being Southeast Asia. The fact that the subject in this case was a colonized people, not an imperialist nation, is what makes this Orientalism different from the meaning of the term as developed by Said. It is certain that the Korean people had a dual consciousness, as both the subject and object of Orientalism. This article, by employing the concept of “another form of Orientalism,” seeks to show these various levels of Orientalism. The ideas colonial Koreans held as a result of imperialist rule of Japan deluded them into the notion that they stood in-between a civilized Japan and a primitive Southeast Asia.

The Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and Japan's Image of Southeast Asia

Fujishima Takeji 藤島武二 (1867–1943), a romanticist painter who served as a professor at the Tokyo Art School (now Tokyo University of the Arts), traveled around Korea in 1913. Upon returning to Japan, he wrote an essay on Korea, which included the introduction of French Orientalist paintings. Fujishima argued that “Orientalist painting” should be adopted in Japan, comparing the relationship between Korea and Japan to that between Algeria and France (Nishihara 2005). In his essay, he also suggested that Japanese artists should exploit the new colony like French painters did theirs. He used the expression “the Asiatic taste of Delacroix, De Gas, Guimet, etc.,” rather than using the term “Orientalism.” The Asiatic taste noted by Fujishima referred to the Orientalism of romantic painters represented by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), who painted *La Mort de Sardanapale* (The Death of Sardanapalus) (Fig. 1), and Theodore Gericault (1781–1824), artist of *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (The Raft of the Medusa).

In 1905, Fujishima had studied in Europe with the support of the Japanese Ministry of Education and appears to have witnessed close up the



Figure 1. Eugène Delacroix, *La Mort de Sardanapale* (The Death of Sardanapalus), 1827. Oil on canvas, 392 × 496 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 2. Théodore Géricault, *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (The Raft of the Medusa), 1818–1819. Oil on canvas, 491 × 716 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

brand of Orientalism harbored by European romanticist painters. As for Orientalism, those who “watched” were Westerners while those who were being watched were non-Westerners. But in this case, the Japanese were to be among those who “watched.” In the pre-Meiji Reform period, Japan had been an object of Westerners’ gaze. In the post-Meiji Reform period, however, the Japanese succeeded in reversing the situation. While being Oriental, they became a subject rather than an object and cast a critical gaze on other Asians in a manner very much similar to the way Westerners had beheld them. This reversal of the situation, whereby an object became a subject, was made clearer through imperialism. Their views of other Asians and the way they expressed their views about other Asians were no different from those of Westerners. Studies on the works, which revealed the exotic tastes of the early modern Japanese painters who remained in South-east Asia, are based on such an understanding (Okaya 2007; Rawanchaikul 2001; Hada and Kim 2007).

Toward the end of the Meiji period, the proponents of colonialism gained strength in Japan. Their confidence boosted by the occupation of Taiwan in 1895 and the annexation of Joseon in 1910, the Japanese impe-

rialists now targeted countries located between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, Java, Sumatra, and New Guinea (Tomatsu 2007). Traditionally, China had called the regions to its east “the East” and the regions to its west “the West” from a Sino-centric perspective,¹ as distinguished from the East and the West as we know them today.

In the twentieth century, the concept of *nambang* was added to the traditional view that had divided the world into east and west. It has been said that the term “Southeast Asia” stemmed from the Allied Forces’ South East Asia Command during World War II. However, in Japan, state-published geography textbooks started referring to the region of Southeast Asia as *nanpo* (*nambang* in Korean) in 1919 (Yamamuro 2005, 73-75). Concerning the term *nanyo* 南洋 (*namyang* in Korean), Shiga Shigetaka 志賀重昂 (1863–1927), the author of *Nanyo jiji* 南洋時事 (Current Events in the Southern Ocean), was the first to refer to the region of Southeast Asia as the “Southern Seas,” or *nanyo*, during the Meiji period around 1887. It is noteworthy that the Japanese from this period designated this third region beyond that of just “East” and “West” (Matsunaga 1987; Ryoo 2005).

Up until the 1960s, the Chinese referred to Singapore and Malaysia as *nanyang* 南洋 (*namyang* in Korean) in a narrow sense of the word. In the broader sense, these Southern Seas included all of Southeast Asia (Wang 1933, 287-289). Following World War I, some Japanese referred to Micronesia as the “inner Southern Sea” and Southeast Asia as the “outer Southern Sea.” As far as Japan was concerned, the Southern Seas was a concept associated with islands in Southeast Asia in connection with calls for Japan to expand its maritime sphere of influence (Yim 2005). With regard to the term “Southeast Asia,” Western countries, China, and Japan all referred to different regions differently. It was only natural that Koreans followed what Japan defined as the Southern Seas during the colonial period. During that time, the Southern Seas meant Southeast Asia, and chiefly

1. *Dongxi yangkao* 東西洋考 (A Study of the Eastern and Western Oceans), a book written during the Ming period, referred to Malacca and Borneo as the East, and Thailand, Java, and Sumatra as the West. Later, during the Qing, the Chinese referred to both these regions as Southern Seas (see Morimoto 1985, 22-23).

small islands in the Pacific for Koreans, following Japan's launch of the concept of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and the associated propaganda slogans.²

During the early modern period, many Koreans thought that *namyang* referred to islands in the Southern Seas. The *Godeung sohak dokbon* (Sohak Textbook for High-Level Students) published by Hwimun Uisuk 徽文義塾 School (now Hwimun High School) in 1908 contains the following sentence: "People with palm-colored flesh live on the islands in the Southern Sea [*namyang*] . . ." (Hwimun Uisuk 1908, 215). An article carried in the *Maeil sinbo* in 1911 used the term *namyang* to refer to countries like the Philippines and Singapore (Jung 2007, 201-260). The Japanese viewed *nanyo* as a region whose abundant natural resources and primitive natives they could use in order to reap great economic gains, as well as a useful foothold for a foray into the Americas. Having gained confidence by running Korea as a colony, the Japanese imperialists looked for an opportunity to advance into the region of Southern Seas. In April 1922, they established the Office of the Southern Seas (Nanyocho 南洋廳) under Imperial Ordinance No. 107 in connection with their plans to occupy islands in the Southern Seas (Soo-yeol Lee 2011, 101-103). At the time, some Japanese scholars asserted that the Japanese originated from these southern regions in an attempt to confer legitimacy on national leaders' plans to advance into them (Okuma 2003; Tanaka 2004). Japan's 1895 annexation of Taiwan, which was in geographic proximity to Southeast Asia, gave momentum to Japanese plans to occupy and colonize regions to its south.³

After these scholars had provided the theoretical basis for legitimizing Japan's advance into the southern regions and the country had secured footholds there, the Japanese started taking actions to foster an atmosphere conducive to the country's plan to advance further into those regions. The painting titled *Minamikaze* 南風 (Southern Wind) (Fig. 3) by Wada Sanzo

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2. During the 1910s, the *Maeil sinbo* carried a total of 36 articles about *namyang*, all of which concerned Singapore and the opening of the sea route to the Philippines (see Jung 2007, 251).
 3. Tokutomi Soho 徳富蘇峰 (1863-1957) referred to Taiwan as "our gate opened southward."



Figure 3. Wada Sanzo, *Minamikaze* 南風 (Southern Wind), 1907. Oil on canvas, 151.5 × 182.4 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

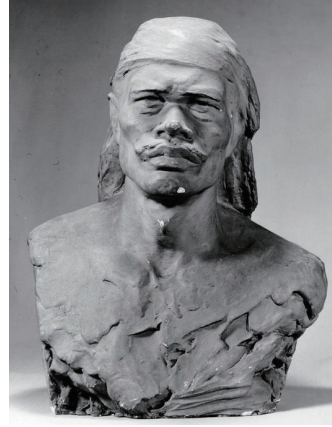


Figure 4. Asakura Fumio, *Dojin no kao* 土人の顔 (Face of a Native), no. 2, 1911. Painted plaster, 57.5 × 44.0 × 32.5 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

和田三造 (1883–1967), which won a prize at the first National Fine Arts Competition (帝國美術展覧會) sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1907, displays a man in the center of the canvas gazing far beyond the sea.

It is said that the painting clearly alludes to Japan's desire to advance into *nanpo*. At the same time, Wada's *Minamikaze* emphasizes the intimacy between Japan and other Asian countries by painting people sharing the same boat as if they were trees derived from a single root. At the fifth National Fine Arts Competition held in 1911, Asakura Fumio 朝倉文夫 (1883–1964), who created a number of artworks based on his travels to Singapore and Borneo, won a prize for his sculpture *Dojin no kao* 土人の顔 (Face of a Native), no. 2, which portrayed the face of a native he had met on the Malay Peninsula (Fig. 4).

In a travelogue recounting his trip to Southeast Asia written in 1931, he claimed to have created his works of art based on the elderly and women of Malaysia and a Thai man whom he had met during his travels,

and to have made an attempt to express what he felt about the arts of those in and outside the civilized world. His remarks clearly appear to make a distinction between civilization and barbarism (Asakura 1931, 247-265). Such images and representations about native people in “uncivilized” regions had an impact on Koreans.

During the late Meiji period, Japan concentrated considerable efforts on the formation of its national identity as a modern nation-state. The country studied the systems and institutions of Western countries and devised a variety of ceremonial events and protocols associated with the system of *tenno* (emperor), which it planned to adopt in close similarity to that of the royal families of Europe (Takagi 1995). It is well known that Japan used fine arts, cultural heritage, and the relevant administration to assist its restoration of the *tenno* system and the establishment of its new image as a modern nation-state. However, although it is possible to imitate other countries’ systems, “the modern spirit” of a nation-state is not something that can be formed within a short period of time. The identity of a modern nation-state is obtained through the representation of others. For Japan, those “others” were Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, and Southeast Asia (Nishihara 2005). Edward Said (1978) pointed out how representations were turned into visual expressions through the depiction of Oriental customs in numerous works by dozens of British and French painters, including Delacroix. Japanese painters performed the same role. One can assume that Japan, as a non-Western country, could attain its identity as the “East,” at first, through a process of “self-Orientalization.” And then Japanese painters placed Japan above other Asian countries from the perspective of Orientalism and they generated images associated with barbarism and idylls where Southeast Asia was concerned. Unlike the Orientalist paintings of Western painters, these paintings displayed an idyllic atmosphere without alluding to the violence associated with barbarism and draconian harshness. The difference in the approaches adopted by the West and Japan is attributable to the fact that the latter laid the basis for its advance into Southeast Asia in accordance with the theory that their ancestors originated from those regions.⁴ No collision, similar to the colli-

4. Attempts to locate the origins of the Japanese nation began in earnest during the Meiji

sion which occurred between Europe and the countries of West Asia, occurred between Japan and the countries in Southeast Asia. The Japanese attempted to advance into Southeast Asia based on the theory that their ancestors had originated from those regions, and thus Japanese painters were supposed to avoid painting pictures containing scenes of violence concerning them.

The view that the Japanese race had originated from Southeast Asia also led to a generation of Japanese maintaining an image of Southeast Asia as the “source of life.” This was apparent in *Rakuen* 樂園 (Paradise), a painting submitted by Uenoyama Kiyotsugu 上野山清貢 (1889–1960), who had spent some time in Southeast Asia, to the seventh National Fine Arts Competition.⁵ People thought that the dark-skinned woman depicted in the picture was meant to represent the source of life, i.e., the origin of the Japanese people. Images of healthy women of the southern regions formed the subject of a series of paintings by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) in Tahiti. The painting *Rakuen* appears to have been closely associated with the fact that an increasing number of Japanese painters were following Gauguin’s style (Okaya 2007, 15).⁶ They could not simply associate Southeast Asia with barbarism, due to the opinion of some scholars that the Japanese people originated from Indonesia, Indochina, and Polynesia. Thus, they were supposed to stress that Southeast Asia was an area rich in resources and which their country was obliged to help develop, as this was the basis on which Japan, a civilized country, was created.⁷ That was

period. Scholars were divided into two groups: those who held to the belief that their ancestors had migrated from elsewhere, and those who thought that their ancestors had lived in Japan since time immemorial, and whose culture had spread throughout Japan. Torii Ryuzo was one of those who thought that the Japanese originated from Indochina and Indonesia (see Sekine 2011).

5. See Figure 11 in Seung-ik Kim (2008).

6. Seung-ik Kim (2008, 19-21) pointed out that Japanese painters, under the influence of post-impressionism, painted a brighter paradise, replacing the women of Tahiti with Japanese female divers.

7. Japanese viewed the southern regions as an area with infinite resources but whose inhabitants were uncivilized natives, producing films focused on just this point (see Kwon 2005, 354-355).

why Japan, which prided itself on being a civilized country, had to imagine and represent Southeast Asia in a different way to that adopted by Western countries.

What Japan sought in Asia, given its status as a late arrival on the imperialist scene, was the self-assigned role of a liberator of Asians from Western imperialism, rather than a sense of mission about delivering other Asian countries from primitive savagery. This is associated with the concept of “Asianism” espoused by Japan, which was based on familial, inter-Asian international relations (Kwon 2005, 380-384). In this hierarchical system, Japan becomes the most powerful, father-like patriarch among Asian countries in the name of family. It is interesting that the rhetoric of assimilation emerged in Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries while Japan was reiterating its propaganda concerning the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere in the post-1938 period (Kwon 2005, 378). Japanese imperialists attempted to rank each country according to its level of civilization. The goal of a Greater East Asia, which they saw as a single broad community sharing the same fate, meant that Japan would provide guidance to all Asian countries so that they might reach the same level of civilization as Japan. That is, Japan would act as the “household head of family” for East Asian countries. In fact, Japanese imperialists had urgent political and economic needs. Asianism was nothing more than a pretext to hide Japan’s imperialistic ambitions for invading other Asian countries. Articles about the “well-developed civilization in Singapore or Thailand” that appeared in *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), a magazine published in Korea during the 1920s, reveal Koreans’ knowledge of the Western-style modernization already under way in Southeast Asia. The image of the southern regions concocted and distributed by Japanese imperialists was only one strategy among many made to pave the way for its invasion of countries with useful resources. Under the guise of Asianism, Japanese imperialists compared tropical countries in Asia to women or children and said that these “immature barbarians” needed their protection. The main idea behind the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere was that unlike the Western powers, which were intent only on obtaining economic gains as outsiders, Japan, a fellow Asian country,

would protect Southeast Asian countries in the capacity of their guardian. Japanese imperialists asserted that Japan had the duty to overcome Western imperialism and establish a new, morality-based world order (Kang 2007, 178-185). Asianism was a concept that Japan, a latecomer in the imperial struggle, could exploit usefully to *recover* Southeast Asian countries from the hands of Western powers and protect them. Koreans uncritically adopted this dual image cooked up by Japan regarding the southern regions as a resource-rich area inhabited by barbarians.

Koreans' View of Southeast Asia

In the 1920s, the Korean press characterized the *nambang* as an idyllic tropical region unknown to them. Ordinary Koreans harbored an illusion about Southeast Asia derived entirely from the visual images carried in the press. During the Japanese colonial rule, Koreans held a very friendly view of India and Taiwan, all the more so because they were colonies of Western powers. In contrast, they held no sense of homogeneity with, nor any particular feeling of empathy toward, Southeast Asians. They created an image of a land inhabited by primitive natives based on a freewheeling illusion. They cast an *alienating* gaze toward the people of the southern regions, although they were not themselves imperialists, because they had established a new relationship with this new world through the prism of Japan and under the influence of Japanese imperialism (Kwon 2005, 392-400). The adoption of such a stance by Koreans can be interpreted as the desire of a people, who had scant knowledge of Southeast Asia, to be second-rate citizens of the Japanese empire amid the expansion of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. However, it is presumed that Koreans held very diverse views of Southeast Asia, considering that they had at least some knowledge of Vietnam and Thailand from the pre-early modern period.⁸ The names of such places as Singapore and Thailand were

8. There are stories about the famed Joseon-period Confucian scholar Yi Su-bong engaging in dialogue with a Vietnamese scholar in China and Thailand by means of written

mentioned in the *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, *Byeolgeongon*, and so on, while *Nambang-ui cheonyeo* (A Maiden from the Southern Region) by the Korean novelist Yeom Sang-seop 廉想涉 (1897–1963), an adapted story about a Cambodian princess and a British private investigator, was published in the 1920s. This being the case, it is difficult to say that Koreans' view of Southeast Asia developed in step with the Japanese concept of and propaganda about the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.⁹ We can also see that Korean intellectuals analyzed changes in the world situation, including that of Southeast Asia, and noted Japan's movements and their impact on Korea. The June 1930 issue of the *Byeolgeongon* (no. 29) carried an analysis and appraisal of a meeting held in Washington, D.C., in 1921, along with remarks about the importance of Yapto in the Southern Seas as a naval base.¹⁰ It also carried an objective explanation of the background and future prospects of the agreements made by the United States and Japan on the joint management of some Southeast Asian countries. It asserted that the United States would inevitably make a foray into the Philippines, showing an acute interest in that country.¹¹ It also shows that Koreans were attempting to analyze the world situation, paying attention to Southeast Asia and how the major powers were attempting to exert influence in the region.

There may have been some Korean artworks that depicted Southeast Asia just like Japanese artworks did. However, even though modern art education and artists existed in Korea during the Japanese colonial peri-

Chinese characters in which they discussed the dispatch of troops to join the Ming forces coming to Korea's aid during the Japanese invasions of the late sixteenth century (see Choe 2009; Cho 1999, 2009).

9. See Song (2007). Details about the original work from which *Nambang-ui cheonyeo* was derived are unknown. The Korean translation appeared in 1924.
10. Kim Se-seong, "Choegeun segye jeongguk-ui chuse" (Outlook of Recent International Political Trends), *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), June 1, 1930. It is interesting that it carried an analysis of an event that had occurred nine years before. "Yapto" referred to Java.
11. Kim Se-seong, "Choegeun segye jeongguk-ui chuse" (Outlook of Recent International Political Trends), *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), June 1, 1930. Issue number 14 of this magazine presented a detailed analysis of trade between the southern regions and the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan.

od, only a few modern artworks from this period have survived. Therefore, in order to study the visual expression of Southeast Asia during the colonial period in Korea, illustrations from newspapers and magazines are useful. Not many early twentieth-century paintings from Korea have survived. Of all the paintings of romanticism and post impressionism, only works of Yi In-seong 李仁星 (1912–1950), like *Gaeul-ui eoneu nal* (One Autumn Day) (1934) and *Gyeongju-ui sangok-eseo* (In a Mountain Valley in Gyeongju) (1935), provide us clues about the artist's perception of Southeast Asia. Yi's works were considered rich in the "local colors" (*hyangtosaek* 郷土色) of Korea. The intense and vibrant colors used in *Gaeul-ui eoneu nal* recall the work of Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), the artist of post-impressionism, who devoted himself to the expression of the vitality of Tahiti. Such usage of colors came from the interest in primitive Southeast Asia and Yi changed it into the local color of Korea.

It is not clear how Koreans viewed *namyang* or what type of geographical community they imagined it to be. Articles about the region in Korean newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s consisted largely of introductions to the region's women and local specialties. A *Chosun Ilbo* article



Figure 5. An image of a Philippine woman from "In Search of Women in a Strange Land (1)," *Chosun Ilbo*, November 11, 1929.



Figure 6. An image of a Javanese woman, from "In Search of Women in a Strange Land (13)," *Chosun Ilbo*, November 25, 1929.

dated November 11, 1929 carried a photograph of a Filipino woman dressed in traditional attire under the title, “In Search of Women in a Strange Land (1)—Women of the Philippines” (*Chosun Ilbo*, November 11, 1929) (Fig. 5). The same newspaper later introduced women from Java and Sulawesi as part of its series on women (*Chosun Ilbo*, November 25, 1929) (Fig. 6). Next to the photograph of a well-dressed Filipino woman, the article mentions that the black women are as beautiful as the white and that Filipino women are very active. An article about the women of Java explained that Java was a large island located south of the Malay peninsula, that the island was rich in resources, that the Dutch had made it their colony in the sixteenth century, and that its inhabitants had started calling for independence. These articles showed no sign of *alienating* the said regions; nor did they adopt an imperialistic view. They merely presented enlightening information on the outside world, displaying a natural curiosity about the civilization of a *strange* region.

This curiosity led to further stories about *nambang*, including the region’s indigenous inhabitants, women, and prostitution. An article carried in the *Byeolgeongon* concerning customs in strange lands introduced an episode experienced by novelist Hong Myeong-hui 洪命憲 (penname: Gain; b. 1888), who saw himself embroiled in an embarrassing situation involving a native woman. Initially, the story said that he was curious about local beauties in the Southern Seas.¹² Perhaps it became the talk of the town among celebrities in Seoul. The story was introduced again in the August 1931 issue of the *Byeolgeongon* (no. 46). The article added that the woman was a daughter of a local family residing on the Malay peninsula whom they had sold off to a white man. The article even noted that she had thick lips and bared her teeth when laughing, perhaps a sign of racial discrimination toward blacks. The September 1933 issue of the *Byeolgeongon* (no. 66) reported a story about brothels and prostitutes in the city harbors of several countries, under the title, “Women, a Grotesque Travel Guide about Harbors’ Prostitution around World.” It claimed that there were many Korean girls working in brothels in Shanghai and Singapore,

12. *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), January 1, 1930.

having been kidnapped by Chinese traffickers. Many black women were described as having seduced travelers the way tropical flowers attract. Interestingly, the writer of the article, whose penname is Goryeobeom 高麗帆 (Korean Ship), said that Koreans traveling to the southern seas (*nam-yang*) found that the brothels stimulated their sexual drive. He talked about prostitution in a matter-of-fact manner and without criticism. There was also a story about vast tracts of land, unattended crops and bountiful fruit trees with lazy locals, and their Chinese middle managers. Yet another article in the *Byeolgeongon* introduced a custom particular to natives in Borneo: a native male had to have all his body hair removed right before his wedding.¹³ However, it did not mention where it had obtained such information. These articles reveal the observers' objective views about local customs, social situations, and the social atmosphere in Southeast Asia. Since the *Byeolgeongon* was one of the most popular and bestselling magazines in Korea during the period, its articles tell us something about how Korean people perceived Southeast Asia.

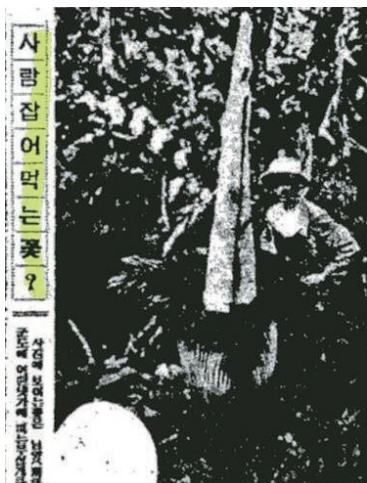


Figure 7. “Man-Eating Plants?”
Dong-A Ilbo, November 23,
1934.

The *Dong-A Ilbo* also published articles on the wonders of nature under such titles as “Man-Eating Plants?” (November 23, 1934) (Fig. 7) and “Interesting Animals of the Southern Seas” (July 31, 1938). These articles noted how the natives of the southern regions were uncivilized people who lived amidst an untamed nature, fighting crocodiles, monkeys, crabs, and lions. Similar articles carried in newspapers in the 1930s were mostly focused on the idyllic atmosphere of these southern regions, local products and delicacies, and the customs of the native inhabitants.

One article in the *Chosun Ilbo* (Au-

13. *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), May 1, 1930.



Figure 8. “Enticing Summer Foods,” *Chosun Ilbo*, August 6, 1933.

gust 6, 1933) occupied an entire page under the title, “Enticing Summer Foods,” listing melons, watermelons, lemons, peaches, lemonade, and beer as representative summer food enjoyed by Koreans (Fig. 8). Interestingly, the article carried photos of coconut trees and stores selling tropical fruits regardless of the content of the article. That is, these latter items were regarded as metaphors for summer, although such things could only be found in faraway lands.

In an article concerning the species of fruit trees that grow in the Southern Seas, the *Byeolgeongon* compared the region to the Garden of Eden and said that fruits were staple foods for natives there.¹⁴ By comparing the southern regions to the Garden of Eden, the article was perhaps unconsciously associating them with the origins of life. The stress on the pristine natural environment of Southeast Asia may also be taken as an expression of the sense of superiority felt by those living in civilized Joseon over the peoples of the uncivilized Southern regions (Kwon 2005, 373-383). Besides such a sense of superiority, the theory that Japanese ancestors originated from Southeast Asia was also contained in the Japanese view of that part of the world (Sekine 2011, 557-575). The comparison of Southeast Asia to the Garden of Eden did not really mean that Korea was more civilized than them at that time, but rather that Koreans were merely adopting the Japanese viewpoint of them. An article carried in the *Chosun Ilbo* under the title, “A Sketch of May (5): Adopted Culture from the Southern Seas,”

14. *Byeolgeongon* (Another World), August 1, 1927.

described people living in a small thatched house eating tropical fruits and enjoying jazz or a hula dance. It also portrayed the facial makeup of a Korean woman and the colored shirt of a man as “Adopted Children from a Tropical Region” (*Chosun Ilbo*, May 17, 1934) (Fig. 9). Such articles reveal the way Koreans viewed that part of the world. They had no clear understanding of it, but the following things were all associated in the imaginations of the great majority of Koreans: the southern seas, tropical regions, romantic passion, Southeast Asian women, hula dancing, and jazz. In short, they were the manifestations of a very vague kind of Orientalism.

During the 1930s, the Korean press carried many articles about Koreans who had emigrated to Southeast Asia. However, the number of such Korean emigrants was not large, particularly compared to the Japanese, who had started migrating there in large numbers in the pre-Meiji period.¹⁵ Moreover, the number of Koreans who moved to Southeast Asia was also less significant than the number of those who had moved to Manchuria or Kando. They did not have sufficient information on the southern regions; they only had an imagined notion of a region rich in resources. Min Yeong-hwan 閔泳煥 (1861–1905), a high government minister of the Korean Empire, was the first Korean known to have traveled to Southeast Asia before 1910, the year Japan annexed Joseon Korea as its colony. In 1897, Min passed through Singapore on his way to the United Kingdom, where he would serve as a special envoy. Later, another high official of the Korean Empire, Yi Jong-eung 李



Figure 9. “Adopted Children from a Tropical Region,” *Chosun Ilbo*, May 17, 1934.

15. Japanese, including traders and scholars, started moving to these southern regions in the sixteenth century, when they began engaging in exchanges with Western countries. It is said that those regions also served as a place of exile during and after the Meiji period (see Jung 2007, 207–209).

鍾應 (1853–1922) traveled the same route, but like Min he only passed through that region on his way to Europe (Lee 2009, 169–192). In the 1920s, the number of Koreans who sojourned there for long periods or moved there permanently increased. An interesting story appeared in the August 1930 issue of the *Byeolgeongon* (no. 31) about a Mr. An, a Korean ginseng merchant in Thailand, whom it referred to as “a demon of the Southern Seas.” Mr. An peddled ginseng to the Chinese in Thailand. He told a 25-year-old widow in Seoul about “the beautiful night sky formed by the two moons in the southern seas” and took her to Bangkok. After starting the journey from Andong, Korea, they passed through Shanghai and Hong Kong on their way south. The article referred to the Southern Seas (*namyang*), Thailand, and Bangkok as if they were all one and the same. Thus, the term *namyang* was understood as a generic term for Southeast Asia. After various twists and turns, Mr. An moved to Java. The article explains that anyone entering Java had to pay 100 *gulden* as an entry tax and that only those who carried a letter of guarantee provided by a local were allowed to enter. It also claims that the number of Korean emigrants then in Thailand numbered thirty, while there were ten in Penang and one hundred in Singapore. It is presumed that they had moved to those places for economic reasons, as even now those places remain centers of brisk commercial activities.

The August 1930 issue of the *Byeolgeongon* (no. 31) carried an article written by a Han Cheol-ju concerning his voyage to Taiwan, Hong Kong, the South China Sea, the Malacca Straits, and Calcutta. The author describes a boy he encountered in Singapore. Whenever Han threw a coin into the swimming pool, the boy would jump into the water to retrieve it, swimming like a fish. The author added that international trade was important business in Singapore, which was a strategically important place, and that the locals wore sarongs (a large tube of fabric often wrapped around the waist and worn as a skirt by men and women alike). He also notes the beauty of the scenery of the areas surrounding the Malacca Straits.¹⁶ The author associated these southern regions with primitiveness

16. The geographical names have been changed to reflect current usage.

and uncivilized natives, supposedly encouraging the immigration of Koreans to islands in Southeast Asia.

One manifestation of the yearnings Koreans had regarding the southern regions was migration. An article in the *Dong-A Ilbo* concerned Koreans living in the South Pacific under the title, “News from the Southern Seas: 300 Koreans Yearning for Home from beneath the Shade of Coconut Trees” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, October 28, 1933). In introducing the Namyang Gundo Jae-ryu Joseonin Chinmokhoe 南洋群島在留朝鮮人親睦會 (Association of Koreans in the Southern Sea Islands) formed in Saipan, it states that the home government should provide support for the Koreans working there to bring economic gains for the home country. In 1939, the *Dong-A Ilbo* carried an article about fifty Koreans from Gyeongsangnam-do who had moved to Palau (*Dong-A Ilbo*, February 9, 1939).¹⁷ This shows how Koreans in that region started forming associations in the early 1930s and that there was an increase in the number of Koreans seeking work in the southern regions.

Towards the late 1930s, when Japan started its propaganda campaign about the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, there was an increase in the number of people who viewed the southern regions (and their inhabitants) as an area rich in resources and populated by miserable people suffering under Western imperialism (Kwon 2005, 358), something that would seem to indicate Koreans’ view of the southern regions not just as some place off in the Southern Seas, but as a part of the world that included Korea and Japan. In the end, as they continued to become more informed of this region, it became a place they might realize their dreams of a better life. This enthusiasm concerning Southeast Asia stemmed from Koreans’ sense of pride in themselves as a people belonging to the eternal empire of Japan. Such an atmosphere is reflected in an article which introduced various resources of Thailand, including rice, teak, and tin, and which stated that the new trade agreement signed in 1937 between Japan and Thailand would serve as a good opportunity for Korea to advance into Thailand (Mun 1939). As they came to hold ever higher expectations

17. In the early 1930s, Koreans voluntarily emigrated there. It is presumed that those who left Korea in the late 1930s and early 1940s were sent there as forced labor.

about these resource-rich southern regions, Koreans began expressing concern about the possibility that less attention would be paid towards the need to develop resources in their home country. The feeling of unease felt by Koreans about the possible decline in productivity of Korean industry as a result of the increase in mining output on the Malay peninsula, in the Philippines, and Indonesia (occupied by the Netherlands) demonstrates that they had accurate information on the resources of these southern regions (Seung-beom Kim 1942).

The focus on the primitive nature of the tropical regions reminded Koreans of a need to view resources in Southeast Asia from an economic perspective. It also led to the appearance of men of letters justifying Japan's subjugation of these regions. The poem "Jeonmang 展望" (Prospects), by the Korean writer Yi Gwang-su 李光洙 (1892–1950), justified Japan's invasion of the southern regions as a necessity for a nation burdened with the duty to expand its territory to those regions and to protect them. It also lent relative superiority to Korea, which was "part of Japan" (Yi 1943). A similar stance was evident in "Son-e son-eul" (Hand in Hand),¹⁸ a poem by Ju Yo-han 朱耀翰 (1900–1979), and in "Eoseo neo-ui kita-reul deureo" (Pick Up Your Guitar, Please) by Yi Chan 李燦 (b. 1910).¹⁹ These pro-Japanese literary works urged Koreans to contribute to Japan's plan for the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, from a markedly different perspective to that of the Koreans who advanced into Southeast Asia in the 1930s. In such a sense, remarks to the effect that Koreans, as second-rate citizens of the Japanese empire, held certain illusions about the natives of Southeast Asia, makes sense (Kwon 2005, 355–373). After all, Koreans expressed both hope and unease as the people of a country that had become one of Japan's first colonies amid Japan's further colonial expansion and launch of plans to

18. Part of Ju Yo-han's poem reads: "When a bonfire is raised in the Malay Sea / You, young people in Sibir [Siberia], young maids in Java / Do you realize that the world brightens when Asia brightens?" (Ju 1941).

19. In this poem, Yi Chan says, "Scorching hot weather in tropical regions / under the shade of ripe coconut trees / amidst the fragrance of olives, cocoas, bananas, pineapples / Whether it is Java or Hawaii . . . / My lover, a black woman, hurry to pick up your guitar . . . / Play like a mad . . ." (Yi 1942).

establish its Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

School education also played an important role in the spread of the aforementioned image of Southeast Asia among Koreans. Volume 2 of the three-volume textbook *Chodeung jiriseo* (Elementary School Geography), published in 1932, concerned world geography (Shin 2009, 249-269). It divided the world geographically into China, the Americas, Europe, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, with Asia subdivided into Northeast and Southeast Asia. The textbook introduced Europe and the United States as civilized countries with developed industries and included relevant photos. In contrast, it carried photos of cane fields, rain forests, and primitive villages in Southeast Asia, focusing on the region's primitive nature (Fig. 10) (Shin 2009, 260-263). Teachers taught students that Southeast Asia was a land rich in natural resources inhabited by barbarians. This kind of education about the Southern regions led Korean students to harbor illusions about themselves as second-rate citizens of the Japanese empire. The image of Southeast Asia that Koreans came to form through literature, fine arts, and education gave them the expectation that they too had the right to share in the spoils exacted from the newly incorporated colonies of Japan.



Figure 10. Rice fields in Southeast Asia, from *Chodeung jiriseo* (Elementary School Geography) (1932).

Conclusion: A Strain of Orientalism Dissimilar to the Western Variety

As a latecomer in the imperialist struggle, Japan attempted to reestablish a new Japan-centric order in Asia, pushing aside the past tradition of Sino-centeredness and advocating a *pan-Asianism*, which stressed a community of Asians sharing a common fate.²⁰ In marked contrast to the strain of Orientalism that developed in Western countries in association with a penchant for exotic tastes, Japan's attitude was to regard Southeast Asia as the "source of life" and thus went far beyond a mere matter of taste. It was partly a result of the curiosity about regions that were then colonies of the Western powers and partly a result of the discourses designed to justify Japan's desire to take them out of the hands of the Western powers. Japan accelerated such discourses abruptly around 1938.

In the early 1940s, such imperialistic discourses emerging from Japan dominated the mass media of Korea. In Japan from the Meiji period onwards, voices were raised regarding the need to expand the nation's marine spheres of influence, based on the theory that the Japanese people's ancestors originated from the southern regions. Japan emulated the Western powers by increasing its colonies and adopted a different logic from that of the past. The Japanese imperialists launched their propaganda campaign about the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, asserting that Asian countries should extricate themselves from the oppression of Western imperialism and unite as one under Japan's guidance. In this regard, some Koreans, as part of the Japanese empire, felt that this represented an opportunity to jump on that country's imperialistic bandwagon. Even though they were themselves a colonized people, they regarded Southeast Asia from an imperialistic mindset.

The way Japan viewed Southeast Asia differed from that of the West-

20. It is a well-known fact that the concept of Asia as one united entity proposed in *Toyō no rīso* 東洋の理想 (The Ideals of the East) (1903) by Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 (1863–1913) provided the basis for the "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere" slogan of the 1930s (see Kinoshita 1999). For the process of the formation of the national entity in the post-Meiji period, see Kang (2007, 104–159).

ern powers. Japan regarded the southern regions as the origin of life and attempted to justify their advance into the region with a focus on its abundant natural resources. This was partly caused by their traditional way of viewing the ocean as the source of life, and partly based on a pan-Asianism. Unlike the brand of Orientalism embodied in the paintings of Western romanticist painters, which focused on the harsh and violent barbarity of Asia, the image of the southern regions as rendered by Japanese artists tended toward the idyllic and even lyrical, and suggested a primitive vitality rather than focusing on the fundamental inferiority of the natives in their colonies. Such an idealized image became a fixed notion through a process of repetition and representation by means of literature, visual images, and geographical education in schools. The image of Southeast Asia as a region of miserable countries trampled upon and exploited by the Western powers, or as the primitive source of life, was similarly adopted by Koreans. Having given up the expectation that Japanese colonial rule over them would soon end, some Koreans accepted their status as second-rate citizens of the Japanese empire and many Koreans moved to Southeast Asia to realize their illusion. During the late 1930s and 1940s, for Koreans, Southeast Asia was the object of desire and disregard at the same time. It was an attitude generally derived from Japanese imperialists rather than being an idea original to Koreans. This is the reason why I refer to Koreans' attitude toward Southeast Asia during the period as "another form of Orientalism."

In the early twentieth century, both the Japanese and Koreans created their own images in regards to the countries of Southeast Asia, each of which had its own distinct languages, cultures, and customs, as if they could be bound together under a single unified identity. Such an image spread rapidly on the back of propaganda about the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, which was intended as a means of establishing a new order in Asia by pushing aside both the deep-rooted Sino-centeredness and the Western imperialism. The view that all Asians should be united under the guidance of Japan and the peoples of the southern regions were uncivilized barbarians was imbued with a mixed multi-level identity that is difficult to interpret simply by comparing it with Western-style Ori-

entalism. It is interesting that the people of Korea, who were at that time colonial subjects of Japan, held imperialistic illusions about Southeast Asia without a tinge of sympathy, although they displayed an infinite sense of affinity toward India, which was also under colonial rule. Thus, Koreans' complacent view of the southern regions as a tropical idyll was essentially a self-disruption mixed with a sense of relative superiority and unease.

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