

Article

# Gendered Landscapes in Colonial Korea: The Invention of a Feminine Inner Geumgang

KIM Soyeon



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## Introduction

This study examines visual representations of one of Korea's most renowned mountains, Mt. Geumgang (Diamond Mountains 金剛山), whose landscape and surroundings have long been divided into two Inner Geumgang 內金剛 and Outer Geumgang 外金剛.<sup>1</sup> Under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), Outer Geumgang was developed for tourism with a focus on its towering peaks and dramatic waterfalls, while Inner Geumgang was stripped of its former role as the emblematic site for viewing Mt. Geumgang and treated instead as a serene landscape that was feminine in essence and a vestige of the past (S. Y. Kim 2022). This perspective was further consolidated through publications produced by the colonial Government-General of Joseon 朝鮮總督府 (hereafter, the Government-General), its affiliated institutions, and Japanese authors.<sup>2</sup>

Since Edward Said's introduction of orientalism as a critical lens, studies of imperialism and colonial discourse have commonly aligned colonizers with masculinity and the colonized with femininity (Schaffer 1988; Sinha 1995; Valente 2010).<sup>3</sup> Despite the prevalence of such gendered metaphors in imperial discourse, the projection of gendered attributes onto natural landscapes in Korea has received little sustained scholarly attention. In this article, I therefore investigate how colonial powers employed notions of gender to reconfigure Inner Geumgang's landscape and modern ways of seeing Mt. Geumgang and how visual representations reinforced this.

Located in Gangwon Province on the eastern side of the Korean peninsula, Mt. Geumgang was recently added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. It has long functioned as both a sacred religious site and a sightseeing destination. Rising to an elevation of 1,638 meters, the mountain spans a vast expanse of

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1 While the mountain is sometimes categorized into three sections—Inner Geumgang, Outer Geumgang, and Sea Geumgang—Sea Geumgang is generally considered part of Outer Geumgang.

2 The Government-General of Joseon (1910–1945) was the Japanese colonial administrative authority that governed Korea following its annexation by Japan.

3 Masculinity functioned as a key ideological basis through which countries like Britain justified their colonial rule. For example, Mrinalini Sinha (1995) demonstrates that the binary notion of the “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali” was constructed in late nineteenth-century Bengal, where the British strategically implemented their imperial economic and political exploitation. Similarly, Kay Schaffer (1988) has examined how the very land of Australia was imagined as a woman through the gaze of British explorers and settlers. As Joseph Valente (2010) has observed, gendered interpretations were applied even in England's attitude toward annexed territories within the British Isles.

approximately sixty kilometers north to south and forty kilometers east to west. Composed of multiple peaks, waterfalls, and rock formations sculpted by geological activity and erosion, its seaward facing side is known as Outer Geumgang. Inner Geumgang, the inland area situated to the west (facing present-day Seoul), traditionally functioned as the primary destination of Mt. Geumgang tourism.

However, during the Japanese colonial period, a new interpretive framework impacted tourism to the region in ways that characterized Outer Geumgang as masculine and Inner Geumgang as feminine (Tamura 1916, 15). Even after liberation, this binary framing has continued being reproduced uncritically into the present day and has even been transplanted into major reference works, including the relevant entry in the *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*.<sup>4</sup>

Inner Geumgang was largely excluded from state-led development during the Japanese colonial period and instead treated as a pristine and untainted area, despite the fact that it had been a major tourist destination in the dynastic period. This study focuses specifically on the transformation of the sense of place of two representative sites in Inner Geumgang under colonial authorities: Manpokdong (Valley of Ten Thousand Waterfalls 萬瀑洞) and Myeonggyeongdae (Mirror Rock 明鏡臺). As these sites were central destinations for tourism in premodern Korea, they constitute a productive locus for examining the shifts in perception that followed the establishment of colonial rule. Indeed, Inner Geumgang had been one of the most prominent subjects in premodern Korean landscape art. However, as it ceded its symbolic position as the dominant representational site of Mt. Geumgang, the quantity of its visual depictions noticeably declined. Moreover, because the focus of modern tourism development was on Outer Geumgang, scholarly research has likewise tended to concentrate on that region. The present study therefore represents an attempt to redress this imbalance.

I incorporate a comparative analysis of texts and images to examine paintings of Inner Geumgang produced during the Japanese colonial period alongside travel guidebooks, pamphlets, and photographic albums published by the Government-General and its Railway Bureau, and Japanese authors closely associated with the colonial administration. I pay particular attention to pictorial

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4 Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, s.v. "Geumgangsán" (Mt. Geumgang), accessed February 15, 2026 (<https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Article/E0007529>).

postcards, which, as the most popular travel souvenirs of the time, selectively visualized scenic sites of Mt. Geumgang and played a crucial role in shaping ways of seeing the region. Meanwhile, publications issued by the Government-General, along with the visual materials produced and circulated in their wake, prescribed normative frameworks for how Mt. Geumgang was to be perceived and remembered.

## The Primitive and Mysterious Inner Geumgang

In premodern Korea, gendered attributes were not assigned to Mt. Geumgang or its constituent regions. As suggested by the fact that the mountain's name derives from Buddhist scriptures, Mt. Geumgang was understood primarily as a sacred religious site. Following Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, however, Mt. Geumgang came to be recognized for its potential as a tourist resource, and the Government-General promptly initiated systemic plans for its development. Imperial technological capabilities were mobilized to transform Outer Geumgang—which had been relatively undeveloped due in part to its rugged terrain—into a modernized destination. The Government-General and its Railway Bureau meanwhile actively promoted Outer Geumgang through newspaper articles, magazine advertisements, travel accounts, posters, guide pamphlets, and postcards featuring scenic views.

Inner Geumgang meanwhile came to be defined as a relatively unchanging space that preserved vestiges of the past. Emphasis was simultaneously placed on the claim that this wilderness had been “discovered” (or rediscovered) by the West and Japan. Numerous sources published during the Japanese colonial period describe British traveler Isabella B. Bishop (1831–1904) as the first to discover and explore Mt. Geumgang in the late nineteenth century, thereby subordinating its history to a narrative of Western exploration (Kikuchi 1918, 2–3).<sup>5</sup> In materials issued by the Japanese Railway Bureau, Mt. Geumgang was likewise described as a place that had long been “abandoned to the rest of the world” and was shrouded in mystery until it finally returned to being “known to the world”

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5 This rhetoric parallels what Anne McClintock (1995) has identified as a recurrent imperial strategy of claiming that lands long inhabited and known within colonized regions were “newly discovered” by imperial powers.

thanks to intrepid foreigners (Japan Department of Railways 1920, 88).

Following Bishop's "discovery," Friedrich Krüger, the German consul stationed in the colonial capital of Gyeongseong (present-day Seoul), visited Mt. Geumgang and described its "pristine waterfalls" and "virgin forests" (Kikuchi 1918, 18).<sup>6</sup> This visit and its discourse was particularly significant and strategic, given that Japan modeled its imperial rule after Britain and Germany in its efforts to establish imperial authority in East Asia. A narrative thus emerged in which Mt. Geumgang was "discovered" by Western imperial powers (particularly Britain and Germany) and then developed in earnest by Japan. This narrative articulated Japan's claim to inherit the legacy of imperialism and to assert hegemony in East Asia.

The sense of place attributed to Inner Geumgang was then relationally constituted and shaped in contrast to the modernized Outer Geumgang, whose features were characterized as majestic and spectacular. Accordingly, Inner Geumgang was described as densely wooded and abundant in water and depicted in gentle, tranquil hues of green that conveyed a sense of serenity (Tamura 1916, 15). A travel account by Japanese novelist Kikuchi Yūhō 菊池幽芳 (1870–1947) reinforced this imagery. He portrayed Inner Geumgang as a region so thickly forested that sunlight scarcely pierced its depths, where heavy vines hung like great serpents and ancient trees lay fallen and intertwined.



Figure 1. *Mangundae*, 12.9 × 32.6 cm (Shiinoki 1936).

6 As Mt. Geumgang came to be "discovered" and introduced to the world in this manner, Inner Geumgang was perceived as a landscape of tranquil, mysterious, and untamed nature. This was linked to the fact that Bishop's and Krüger's visits occurred prior to the construction of railway lines and the tourism development initiated by the Government-General and were therefore largely confined to the Inner region.

He characterized the place as an untouched virgin forest into which no ax had entered and where the whispers of nature could be overheard (Kikuchi 1918, 93). Other descriptions of Inner Geumgang frequently featured phrases such as “serene contemplation” and “secluded realm.” These terms appeared repeatedly in photographic albums and pictorial postcards of the region, which bestowed upon it such epithets as “Mountain of Mystery: Inner Geumgang” and “The World’s Mysterious Realm.” The expression “profoundly secluded,” connoting depth and inward withdrawal, was also commonly employed. Inner Geumgang was thereby configured as an isolated, remote space where the beauty of primeval nature revealed itself.

Among the photographic albums of Mt. Geumgang published during the Japanese colonial period, the panoramic views taken from Mangundae (Terrace for Observing the Army 望軍臺) are particularly noteworthy (Figure 1). Mangundae is an elevated site from which the entirety of Inner Geumgang can be surveyed. To reach it, one must ascend a steep, narrow path, and then climb a sheer cliff by means of an iron chain over thirty meters long. However, the traveler is rewarded with a view of numerous peaks and valleys, which led to its popularity as a lookout spot. In this period, this expansive scenery was typically reproduced either as panoramic fold-out postcards that provided an extended the horizontal format or as photographic albums designed for readers to unfold and contemplate.

Meanwhile, the historical semantic network embedded in the landscape of Mangundae was gradually effaced and transformed. The name “Mangundae” implies a platform for observing military forces, underscoring the site’s historical and political significance. Due to its commanding geographic position, which afforded a sweeping view of the surrounding terrain, the site had long been associated with the ancient narrative that a crown prince of the fallen Silla kingdom (57 BC–935 AD) once entered Mt. Geumgang and observed enemy movements from this spot. Accordingly, the nineteenth-century literati, Yi Sangsu, who ascended Mangundae often commemorated and identified with the crown prince’s righteous indignation and heroic resolve (M. Lee 2022).

Two centuries later, Kikuchi ascended to Mangundae escorted by the Government-General officials and articulated a markedly different response. Experiencing the scenery through the lens of the imperial masculine gaze, he likened Mangundae and its surrounding terrain to a flower in which Mangundae formed the pistil, while the encircling mountains unfolded like petals around it

(Kikuchi 1918, 104; Shiinoki 1936).<sup>7</sup> This metaphor effaced traditional martial or conventionally masculine elements, recasting the landscape in feminized terms. The floral metaphor distorted its historical associations, rendering its imagined contrast with Outer Geumgang ever more pronounced. This transformation also entailed the erasure of premodern realities, including the flourishing temples that once filled the valleys and the travelers who seasonally traversed its terrain.

### **Murmurs of Tranquility: The Feminized Landscape of Manpokdong**

Other places in Inner Geumgang also came to be symbolically aligned with femininity as they were framed by Japanese writers and the Government-General according to the criteria of “valley aesthetics” 溪谷美 (Kikuchi 1918, 17; Railway Bureau of the Government-General of Joseon 1927, 41). The concept of “valley aesthetics” itself emerged in deliberate opposition to the “mountain aesthetics” 山岳美 attributed to Outer Geumgang. Despite Inner Geumgang featuring its own massive rock formations and towering peaks, these were increasingly excluded from the exemplary views showcased for the region. Instead, emphasis was placed on valleys and pools, as well as on Buddhist temples that, having largely lost their religious centrality, were now regarded as vestiges of the past.

At Manpokdong, waters descending from the peaks of Birobong and Jungyangseong converge in a gorge of dramatically carved rock formations. Although it had already been renowned in dynastic Korea, it was reborn under the new aesthetic framework of “valley beauty” as the foremost scenic site of Inner Geumgang. What is particularly noteworthy is the shift in the mode of appreciation from an emphasis on grandeur to on tranquility. A colonial-

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7 Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and Simon Ryan (1996) offer a useful framework for understanding the imperial masculine gaze, particularly the panoramic mode of vision from elevated viewpoints. According to Pratt, explorers often experienced the act of surveying vast, panoramic landscapes from a vantage point one of discovery and symbolic possession. Such perspectives were subsequently transmitted to readers through visual media that projected the explorer's gaze. Pratt famously termed this structure of vision the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” scene. As Ryan has demonstrated in his analysis of Australian exploration narratives, this surveying gaze could also encode a gendered dynamic by positioning the male viewing subject above a feminized landscape that lay passively before him.

period postcard capturing a wide view of Manpokdong bears a Japanese poem describing “jade-like dew” 玉露 and a gentle breeze stirring above the pines, which constructs an atmosphere of subdued tranquility and reinforces an emerging aesthetic of stillness (Figure 2).<sup>8</sup>

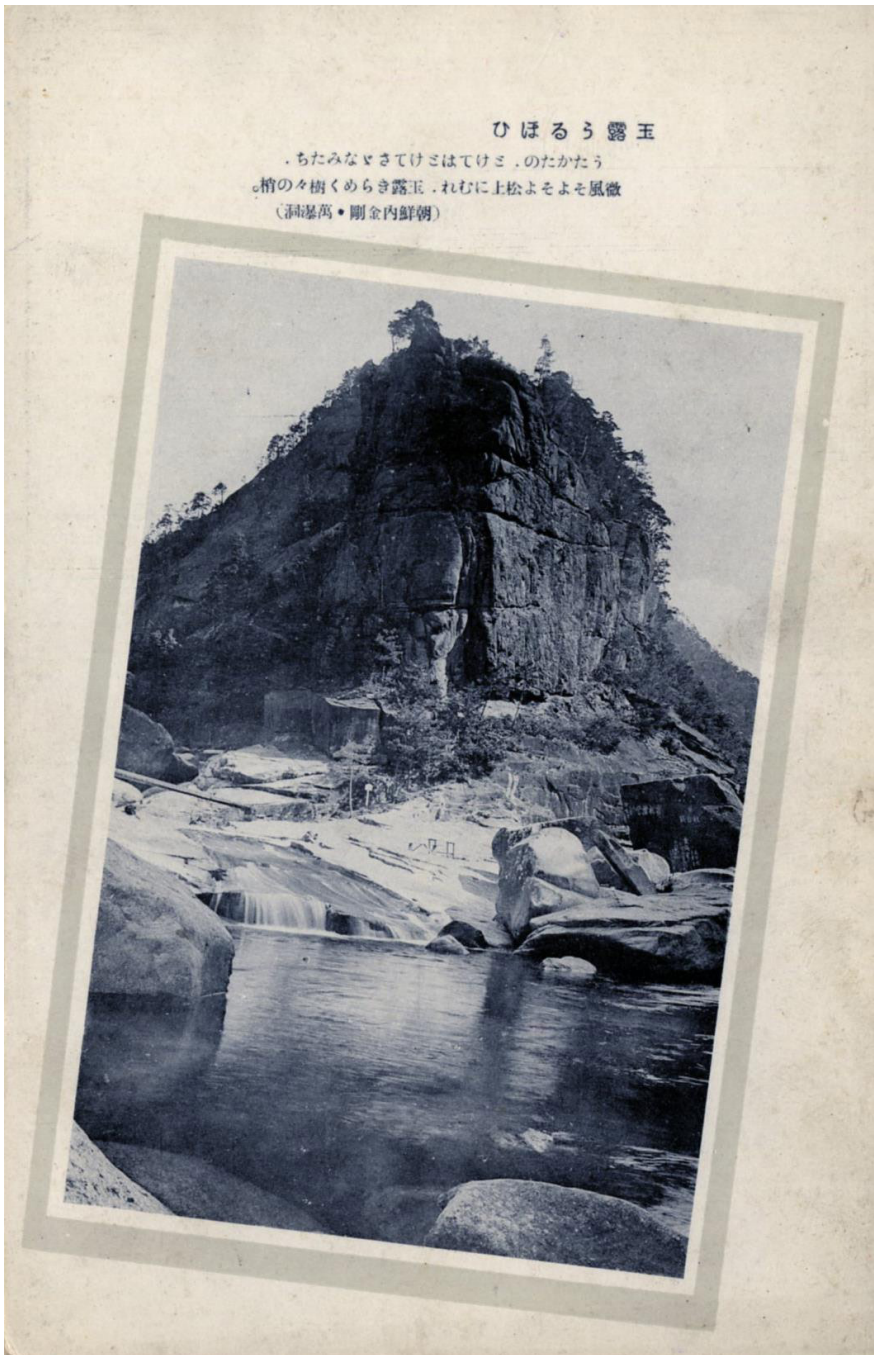
In another postcard, Manpokdong is introduced under the title “The Hushed Sound of Water,” and the shot deliberately foregrounds the peaceful lower basin rather than the cascading torrents above, accentuating stillness and repose (Figure 3). Numerous travelogues and guidebooks also remarked on the smooth white granite of Manpokdong. Compared to Outer Geumgang, the granite of the Inner region was described as lighter and more luminous. Notably, it was often likened to the delicately made-up skin of a woman (N. Choi 1928 [2000]).

This, too, stood in sharp contrast to the impressions recorded by premodern travelers to Manpokdong. Accounts from the Joseon period (1392–1897) such as Chae Je-gong and Heo Gyun frequently describe the cascades as resembling lightning flashes or furious thunder and compare their force to countless horses galloping to the tumultuous beat of war drums. The celebrated pools that punctuate the valley are Heuknyongdam (Black Dragon Pool 黑龍潭) and Hwaryongdam (Fire Dragon Pool 火龍潭). When Manpokdong is understood in a broader sense, Cheongnyongdam (Blue Dragon Pool 靑龍潭) and Baengnyongdam (White Dragon Pool 白龍潭) are also included. Given the proliferation of these dragon-named pools, Manpokdong was frequently imagined in terms of the form and force of dragons; coupled with the resounding roar of cascading waters, expressions like “wrathful dragons” and “the dragon’s roar” came to dominate premodern discourse. The notion of a “quiet” Manpokdong emerged only with the advent of colonial rule.

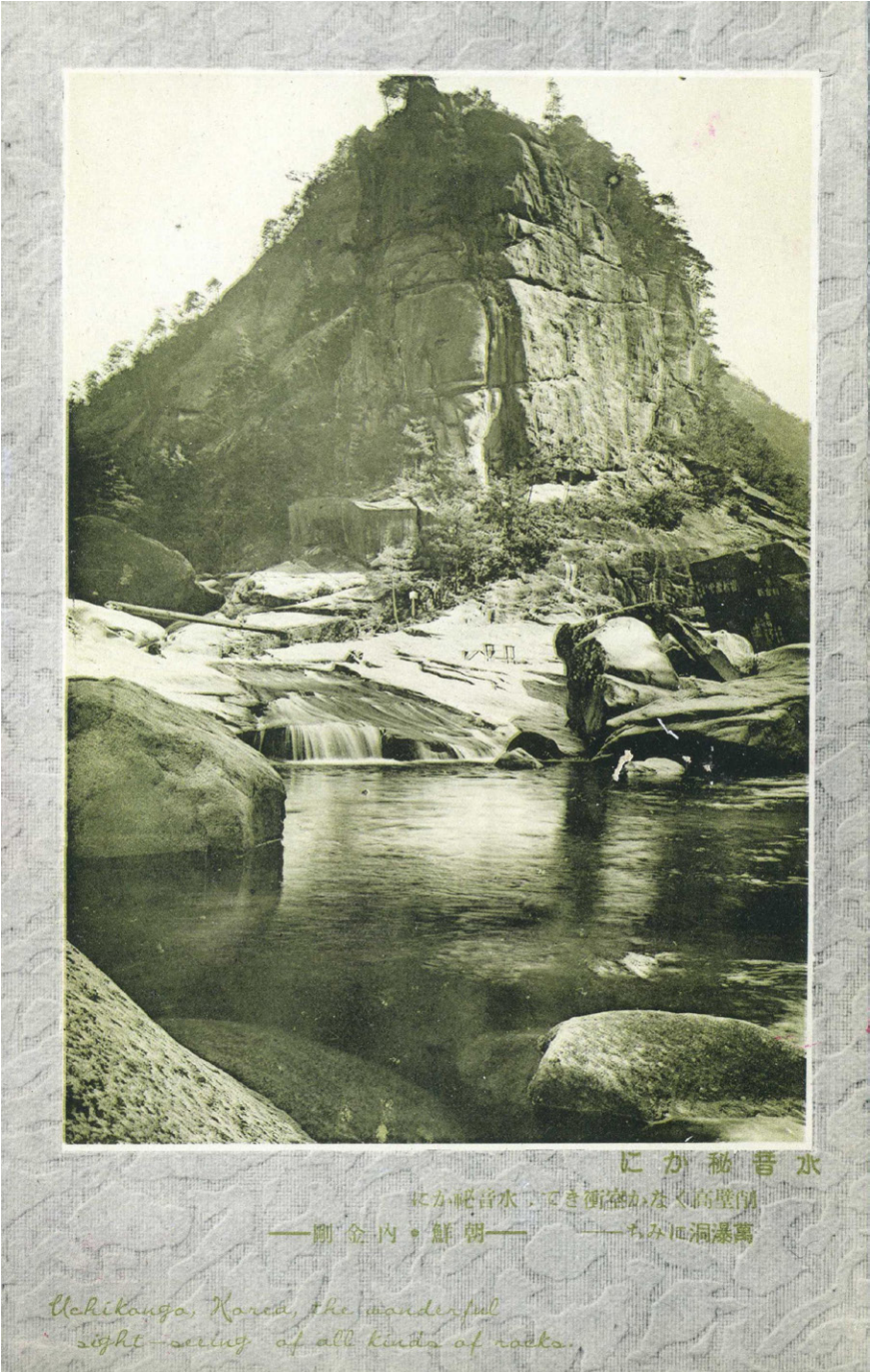
In some cases, a site’s toponym appears to have played a role in elevating it to the status of a representative scenic attraction, as exemplified by Jinjudam (Pearl Pool 眞珠潭). Among the eight waterfalls and pools of the Manpokdong valley, Jinjudam emerged during the colonial period as the site most frequently mentioned and visually reproduced. As the perception took hold that the landscape of Inner Geumgang did not measure up to that of Outer Geumgang, the entrance to Manpokdong was rarely rendered in the early twentieth century.

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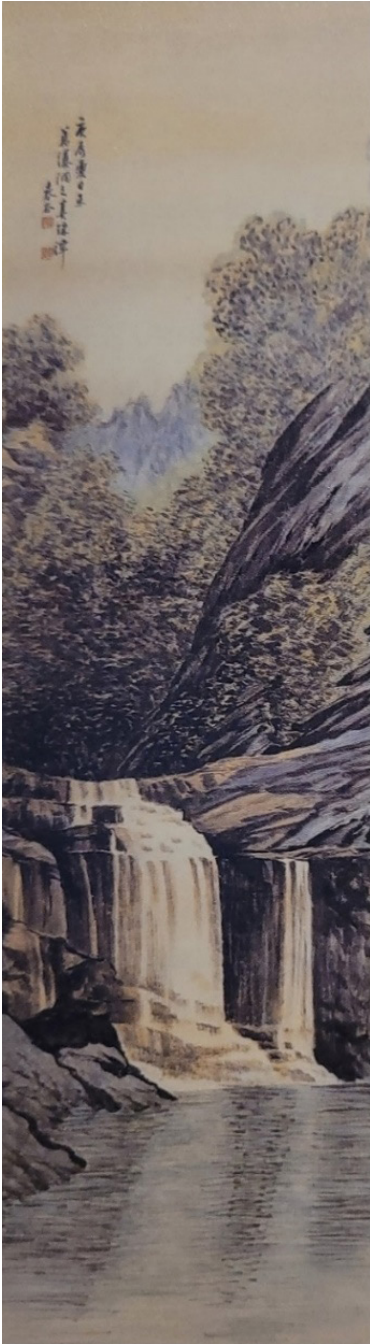
8 The poem reads as follows: “Fleeting foam—vanishing, vanishing again, small ripples stir. A gentle breeze gathers above the pines; jade-like dew glimmers on the tips of the boughs.”



**Figure 2.** Manpokdong Postcard (*The Glistening Touch of Clear and Delicate Dew*), 14 × 9 cm, DMZ Museum.



**Figure 3.** Manpokdong Postcard (The Hushed Sound of Water), 13.8 × 8.7 cm, Suwon Gwanggyo Museum.



**Figure 4.** Go Huidong, *Jinjudam*, 1940, color on paper, 140.3 × 42.5 cm, Sun Moon University Museum.

When Manpokdong was visualized in artistic productions, selected views instead foregrounded its character as a valley. As the aesthetic value of clear and tranquil pools came to the fore, Jinjudam was most often framed through close-ups of the lowest tier of the waterfall and its basin. The site was thus treated less as a waterfall than as a serene, secluded pool. Moreover, it was said that the name “jinju” (pearl 眞珠) derived from the white spray produced when the rushing water struck the rocks. The feminine connotations of the noun “pearl” readily converged with the reconfigured sense of place attributed to this waterfall.

These tendencies can be seen in the works of Go Huidong 高義東 (1886–1965), who portrayed this site in at least three paintings.<sup>9</sup> As the first Korean student to study Western painting abroad, Go sought to transform Korean painting through vivid coloration and naturalistic representation. His painting *Jinjudam* reveals a close affinity with photographic modes of vision (Figure 4) (S. L. Kim 2016, 66). A short horizontal stroke at the lower edge of the canvas renders the reflection of water, emphasizing the pool’s transparency and stillness.

<sup>9</sup> Go Huidong also went to Japan to study in the Western Painting Department of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (present-day Tokyo University of the Arts), thereby graduating in 1915. After returning to Korea, he was active in modern art associations and art education.

## A Mirror for Women: The Imperial Gaze at Myeonggyeongdae

Another Inner Geumgang site that attracted particular attention during the colonial period—vividly revealing the feminized sense of place attributed to Inner Geumgang—was Myeonggyeongdae. Located near the famous temple of Jangansa 長安寺, Myeonggyeongdae towers are approximately sixty meters high, presenting a flat rock face like a monumental stele or massive mirror. As Kikuchi (1918, 90) described it, Myeonggyeongdae was seen as “a mysterious otherworld hidden within dense forests, imbued with a gloomy atmosphere” and thus preserving the raw qualities of a primeval landscape.

Surrounding Myeonggyeongdae are peaks that were originally associated with figures from the Buddhist underworld: Siwangbong (Peak of the Ten Kings of Hell 十王峰), Jijangbong (Peak of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva 地藏峰), Joeimbong (Peak of the Sinners 罪人峰), and Sajabong (Peak of Executors 使者峰). Flowing gently before Myeonggyeongdae was a clear and tranquil tributary known as Hwangcheondam (Pool of the Yellow Springs 黃泉潭), with Hwangcheon 黃泉 being another term for the underworld. Myeonggyeongdae, as a mirror-like rock formation, alludes to the Buddhist eopgyeong 業鏡, the mirror believed to reveal the deeds of the deceased before the Ten Kings of Hell; indeed, the site was at times known as Eopgyeongdae (Mirror of Karma 業鏡臺). The full significance of Myeonggyeongdae can therefore only be understood in relation to its surrounding peaks. Yet during the Japanese colonial period, these associations were severed in visual depictions. Myeonggyeongdae was isolated from its broader topographical and religious context and promoted as an independent scenic attraction, which facilitated the transformation of its name meaning. As the religious associations were effaced, one of the earliest guidebooks to Mt. Geumgang described Myeonggyeongdae as “a mirror like that used by a beautiful goddess for her adornment” (Railway Bureau of the Government-General of Joseon 1915, 14).

An extreme example of this transformation can be found in a pictorial postcard accompanied by a *kouta* (Japanese popular song 小唄) (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> At the top of the postcard is a black-and-white photograph of Myeonggyeongdae

10 A portion of the song (*kouta*) may be translated as follows: “O jewel-like pictorial album, Mt. Geumgang is a bridge between heaven and earth. Through the pale-violet passage of countless years, who is it that is awaited?”



Figure 5. Myeonggyeongdae Postcard (Mt. Geumgang Kouta), 14 × 9 cm, Busan Museum.

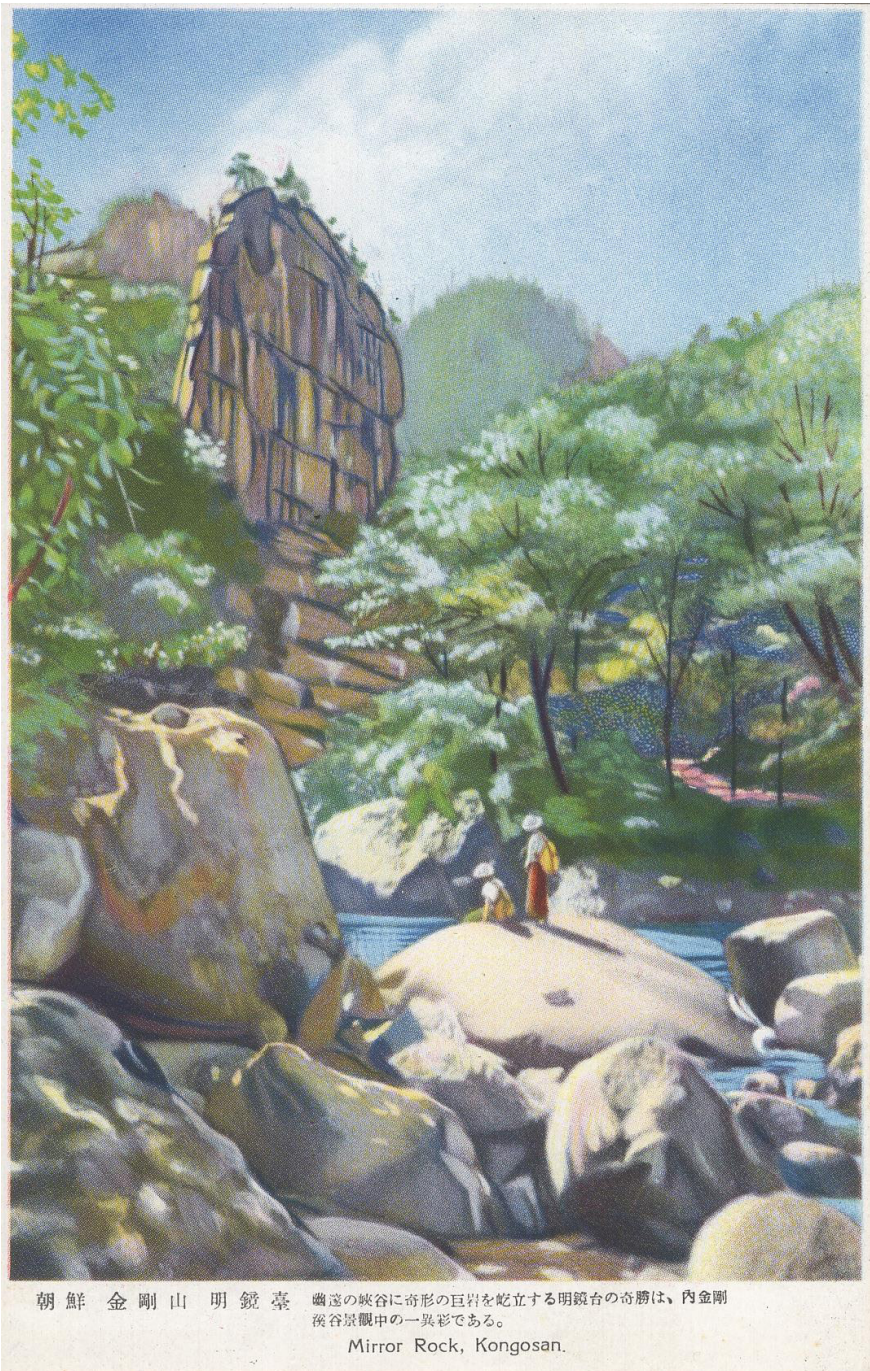


Figure 6. Myeonggyeongdae Postcard, 14.3 × 9.1 cm, private collection.



Figure 7. Inner Geumgang Inn Advertisement (Myeonggyeongdae)

Source: Japan Travel Association, Korea Branch 1939, 43

and Hwangcheondam. Tonal shading surrounds the image as if it were a framed picture or even a reflection in a mirror. The accompanying *kouta*, which tells of a Korean woman waiting for someone, visually and symbolically reconfigures Myeonggyeongdae as a mirror of feminine self-fashioning (H. Choi 2022, 347; S. Y. Kim 2022, 155).

A color postcard depicts a rear view of women enjoying the scenery before Myeonggyeongdae (Figure 6). Relatively faithful in its descriptive realism, this postcard was issued by the Railway Bureau of the Government-General and based on an oil painting commissioned from a Japanese artist. In the composition, Myeonggyeongdae is captured at some distance amid lush greenery, while some women sit and stand upon rocks in the foreground, gazing toward Myeonggyeongdae and Hwangcheondam. Dressed like young girls on a local excursion—wearing wide-brimmed hats, skirts, and small backpacks—

the women inhabit a world in which the names “Mirror of Karma” and “Yellow Springs” have lost their original associations with the realm of the dead.

These motifs of the mirror and the female figure were repeatedly reproduced across media. A highly similar photograph appears in the guidebook to Mt. Geumgang published by the Railway Bureau. The visual juxtaposition of Myeonggyeongdae with the rear view of hat-wearing young women was also employed in promotional images used to advertise local hotels (Figure 7).

The compositional strategy in which female figures sit with their backs to the viewer while gazing toward Myeonggyeongdae recalls the motif of the “woman before the mirror” and, by extension, the masculine gaze (Berger 1990). Griselda Pollock (1988) notes that the nineteenth-century Impressionist motif of a woman before a mirror does not simply depict self-contemplation but functions as a visual apparatus through which the feminine subject is positioned within the structure of the masculine gaze. Myeonggyeongdae’s monumental rock face was thus configured as a vanity mirror, while the female figure functioned to naturalize and reinforce its transformation into an object of adornment. While the “unmarked subject” who surveys this scene appears to occupy the position of a neutral and universal observer, this perspective emerges from a historically and politically specific position (Haraway 1988). The coupling of Myeonggyeongdae with the figure of a young colonial woman thus constituted a scene structured for imperial visual consumption, in which both landscape and the female body were rendered as objects of desire.

Importantly, Myeonggyeongdae and Inner Geumgang were also repeatedly represented as sites where history and legend lingered. One postcard featuring Myeonggyeongdae invokes the historical chronicle *Samguk sagi* (*History of the Three Kingdoms* 三國史記) and recounts the legend that, at Silla’s surrender to Goryeo, the crown prince mentioned above, indignant at the king’s capitulation, refused to submit and remained in exile for the rest of his life, subsisting on wild grasses (Figure 6).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, travel accounts, postcards, and photographic albums repeatedly emphasized that major temples of Inner Geumgang—including Jangansa, Pyohunsa 表訓寺, Jeongyangsa 正陽寺, and Mahaeon 摩訶衍—were founded during the Silla period. A similar focus can be observed

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11 This prince was said to be the son of King Gyeongsun of Silla (r. 927–935). After the fall of the kingdom, he allegedly donned hemp garments and lived in seclusion, thereby earning the name “ma ui taeja” (hemp-clad Crown Prince).

in representations of Mangundae and Manpokdong.<sup>12</sup>

Inner Geumgang thus came to be closely associated with Silla, a kingdom long regarded as the epitome of ancient Korean civilization. In modern discourse, Silla was construed as the historical period closest to “classical antiquity” (Hwang 2007, 354). Similarly, Gyeongju, the former Silla capital, came to be idealized as a picturesque ruin and a lost utopia. Silla itself thus emerged as a central theme of modern Japanese tourism in Korea, further reinforcing its symbolic linkage to Mt. Geumgang.

From an imperialist perspective, the Buddhist temples of Mt. Geumgang functioned solely as aesthetic spaces representing past glory. Although the institutional authority of Buddhism had already diminished by the Joseon dynasty, which preferred Neo-Confucianism, this was reinforced in new ways following Japan’s annexation of Korea. The Japanese colonial administration criticized Korean Buddhism as irrational and degenerate while simultaneously promoting Shintoism and facilitating the expansion of Japanese Buddhist sects into Korea. The status of temples was once more undermined. In the case of Mt. Geumgang, the development of the railway’s infrastructure, modern hotels, and similar facilities deprived temples even of their practical function as hubs for pilgrimage and travel. As their religious and historical significance was effaced, they were recast as mere sites of aesthetic contemplation within the scenery and vestiges of an ideal historical past.<sup>13</sup>

As Inner Geumgang was increasingly portrayed as a repository of the past and of nature, the notion of sublimity likewise emerged as a key mode of appreciating Myeonggyeongdae. Here, sublimity evoked a transcendental imagination and a nostalgic longing for mythologized time set apart from the secular present. Inner Geumgang, often described as an otherworldly realm nestled within dense forests, was thus framed as a landscape that preserved its primeval qualities, remaining a “virgin” space not yet penetrated by the profane world.

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12 The legend of “Bodeok gakssi” associated with Bodeogam in Manpokdong appears to have been accentuated in tandem with the perception of Inner Geumgang as an ancient landscape.

13 Under Japanese colonial rule, Silla was frequently portrayed as the pinnacle of Korea’s ancient civilization, particularly due to the flourishing of Buddhism and artistic achievement during the Unified Silla period. This framing isolated Silla as a perfected, self-contained past while depicting later periods as degenerate, thereby reinforcing the claim that Korea had lost its capacity for autonomous modern development and thus required imperial guidance.

## Conclusion

Positioning itself as a modern and civilized nation, Japan justified its colonial rule as a project of modernization grounded in the authority to redress cultural “backwardness.” In this context, Mt. Geumgang became a site in which meaning was continuously reconstituted through visual and cultural codes. It thus came to function as a space in which imperial authority could be sensed and internalized as the binary of modernity and premodernity was materially and symbolically crystallized.

Accordingly, modern perceptions and visual representations of Mt. Geumgang diverged sharply from the traditional Geumgang tourism and its pictorial tradition. This distortion was particularly pronounced as the Inner region was re-spatialized around valleys, with its numerous peaks demoted to the status of peripheral scenery. Even sites that retained their fame as scenic landmarks came into tension with their traditional meanings; detached from their broader context, they were feminized. Rather than the rugged terrain modern spectators sought elsewhere, Inner Geumgang was repeatedly imaged through tranquil, elegant scenes centered on streams and pools, as exemplified by the notion of a “serene Manpokdong.” Inner Geumgang was increasingly represented as a romanticized site of primeval nature untouched by civilization and suspended in an idealized vision of antiquity, transformed into a “virgin” landscape “discovered” by foreign empires. Myeonggyeongdae was likewise reinterpreted as a mirror for women’s adornment and recontextualized as a feminized site. The very process by which such scenic sites were visualized presupposed an imperial masculine gaze, through which the landscape—the female figures embedded within it—were rendered intelligible and desirable within colonial modernity’s visual order. This analysis, informed in part by feminist approaches to imperial-colonial relations, demonstrates that colonial power operated not only through political and economic structures but also through the aesthetic and visual ordering of landscape.

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**KIM Soyeon** (kimsosyeon@ewha.ac.kr) is an associate professor in the Department of Art History at Ewha Womans University, Korea. She received her PhD in the history of Korean painting from Ewha Womans University and previously worked as a curator at the Ewha Womans University Museum. She currently serves as a cultural heritage specialist in the Movable Cultural Property Division of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea. Her research focuses on tradition in modern art, the intersection of art and gender, and the relationship between the Korean and Japanese art worlds. Her recent publications include “A Study on Folding Screens of Jongjeongdo: Focusing on Design of Chinese Ancient Bronzes and Utilization of Epigraphy Books” (2023) and “The Accomplishments and Limitations of Nude Paintings in Modern Korea: Structural Study of Depiction, Display, and Censorship” (2023).

## Abstract

Following the onset of Japanese colonial rule, the Mt. Geumgang region was recontextualized within a new binary: Outer Geumgang came to symbolize modernity, while an idealized, romanticized notion of antiquity was projected onto the pristine landscape of Inner Geumgang. This study examines the sense of place of Inner Geumgang and its visual representations during the first half of the twentieth century. Once a major destination for premodern travelers, Inner Geumgang came to be redefined primarily through the beauty of its valleys, with tranquil streams brought to the foreground and its numerous peaks relegated to the background. Its most renowned sites were severed from their previous associations and reinterpreted through a feminized lens. Manpokdong was redefined as “serene” and Myeonggyeongdae was transformed from a Buddhist mirror of judgment into a vanity mirror associated with female adornment. By analyzing the interplay between colonial tourism and visual representations, this study demonstrates how gendered reconfigurations of Mt. Geumgang and its scenery reshaped the modern perception of its landscape and contributed to a new visual regime.

**Keywords:** colonial Korea, Diamond Mountains, feminization of landscape, gender and art, Mt. Geumgang