

Article

Binding Perceptions: Images of Korea in Japanese Colonial Documentary Photography*

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Introduction: The Photographic Spectacles of Modern Japan

One of the defining features of Meiji Japan (1868-1912) was the dual use of photography as an instrument of nation building and a means of imperial subjugation. Known as *gojunkō*, perhaps the most spectacular event during the early Meiji was the emperor's journeys throughout new Japan—a mythic ruler who had previously remained hidden from public view came out of his shadowy castle to forge visual relations with his subjects. By the second decade, the costly production of the imperial tour came to be replaced by official imperial portraits which proved to be equally, if not more, effective (Kim 2012, 116-17). The first shooting of the Meiji emperor's portrait was by Uchida Kuichi 内田九一 in 1872, in which the emperor was dressed in a traditional kimono (Rousmaniere and Hirayama 2015). The second portrait was produced in 1873, by the same photographer. This time the emperor wore a western-style military suit and a sword (Taki 2002, 100-03). While the Meiji government did not pay great heed to the circulation of *nishikie* woodblock prints of the emperor, his photographic images were tightly controlled, from production and circulation to their end use (Taki 2002, 99). Paparazzi were prohibited from photographing the emperor, the unauthorized possession or use of his portrait was outlawed, and the sale of his portrait was a criminal act (Taki 2002, 109). The imperial portrait was to carry the symbolic authority of a new nation and would serve as a proxy for imperial sovereignty in diplomatic exchanges and governmental administration (Taki 2002, 117). To his subjects, the imperial portrait would embody an awe-inspiring gaze that visually summoned their loyalty and obedience (Taki 2002, 113).

For the masses, photographic images reified Japanese imperial designs by “documenting” the colonial expansionist project. In much the same way as reportage, picture postcards commemorated the acquisition of colonial

territories such as Karafuto, Taiwan, and Korea, along with other newsworthy events (Sato 1994, 58). By the third decade of the Meiji, the boom in the picture postcard market peaked; it was a time when lines of fanatical citizens would snake around postal buildings in order to purchase newly released photographic images (Sato 1994, 45). In addition to overseas events such as the Russo-Japanese War and the annexation of Korea, images of female beauty and of the exotic natives of New Guinea could be found on popular postcards (Sato 1994, 56-59). In large part, the picture-postcard boom fueled the production and circulation of commoditized photographs, but more importantly, it fostered what Sato Kenji has called, *kiwamono kangaku* 際物感覚, an appetite for journalistic coverage of current affairs (ibid.).

For a Meiji public thirsty for the pictorial delivery of newsworthy events, photographic albums (*shashinchō*) and collections (*shashinshū*) sponsored by state organizations were designed to deliver compelling visual images of Meiji accomplishments in newly-acquired territories. For example, photography played a pivotal role in weaving narratives of *kaitaku*, or a developmentalist rhetoric in Hokkaido, the first official colony of Meiji Japan (Mason 2012). One of the largest official photography collections produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century was a volume entitled *Hokkaido kaitaku shashin* (*Photography of Hokkaido Development*), exceeding 10,000 images (Nagano, Iizawa, and Kinoshita 1999). As a national project, these photos were mainly intended as a means of reportage from Hokkaido-based officials to government authorities in Tokyo. Outside the main islands of Japan, such as Taiwan, for example, a monthly photographic collection, *Taiwan shashinchō* was produced by the Taiwan Photography Society from November 1914 to December 1915; its purpose was to document and publicize Japanese colonial construction of Taiwan to a wide audience.¹

Photography proved to be versatile, especially in the emerging field of anthropology.² By the very conventions of its discipline, anthropology entailed fieldwork and data collection, tasks for which photography was perfectly suited. Japan's rise as an imperial power at the turn of the twentieth century

* This work was supported in part by the Yonsei University Research Fund of 2011-1-0230. I would like to thank friends and colleagues who read earlier versions of this paper and provided insightful comments. In particular, I would like to extend my thanks to the members of the East Asian Studies Workshop at UIC—Henry Em, Clara Hong, Astrid Lac, Tomoko Seto, and Alvin Wong. A friend and colleague at Yonsei, Jun Yoo also read an earlier version of this paper and gave constructive feedback. The comments from the two anonymous reviewers were helpful in fine-tuning the paper. This paper was a section of a long chapter in my Ph.D. dissertation that examined both colonial newspaper and documentary photography. Without the support of friends and colleagues, the reworking of this paper would not have been possible.

1. This monthly photographic album was published in Taiwan by Taiwan Photography Society, Taiwan Shashinkai from 1914-1915.
2. In 1893 the department of anthropology was added to the Tokyo Imperial University where Tsubouchi Shogoro took in Torii Ryūzo.

widened access to the “fields” of scholarly investigation for the ethnocentric anthropologist Torii Ryūzo (1870-1953), among many other Meiji elites, and his survey trips yielded abundant photographic reproductions of other Asian cultures. In 1896, a year after Taiwan came under Japan’s colonization, Torii Ryūzo embarked on survey trips to Taiwan and photographed the physical attributes of its indigenous people until 1900. In colonial Korea, Torii conducted six anthropological surveys over the years spanning 1911 through 1916, during which time it is estimated he produced approximately 5,000 photographs of Koreans and Korean customs (Sun 2003, 23). Most of Torii’s Korean photographic data were similar to those gathered in Taiwan, where his primary attention was given to the detailed documentation of Korean body measurements and photos of specific parts of the body such as the head, hair, eyes, and ears (Yi 2010, 139). Under the academic banner, Torii Ryūzo’s photographic reproduction of the Asian Other lent itself to racial indexing and categorization, ultimately showcasing the backwardness of the colonized ethnicities. The spectacular display of the barbaric Asian Other by way of photography, oddly similar to the imperial portrait in its function, legitimized the sovereignty of the Japanese empire on the one hand, and reinforced the rationale for colonial subjugation on the other.

In the latter decades of Japan’s colonial rule and its eventual involvement in wars, photography served as an indispensable tool for instigating public sentiment, mobilizing village associations, and recruiting soldiers and migrants to the frontlines of the empire. Manchuria became the centerpiece of colonial endeavors in the 1930s, a land of promise that was to serve as the “lifeline” of the expanding empire (Young 1994, 88-95). From the new bullet train, *Asia*, and the grandeur of the Yamato Hotel in Dailian, to the steel factory and the mining sites, even the recruitment ad for Manchuria Railway (Mantetsu) employees, all were communicated via photographic images (Kobayashi 2004, 22-23). Photos of military activities with troops demonstrating their prowess at the battlefield, together with images of tireless support at home, crystallized jingoistic zeal. Especially during all-out wartime beginning in 1938, photographs were to serve as the single most effective means of communication, where the *Photographic Weekly Report* (*Shashin shūhō*) released by the Cabinet Information Bureau would dominate the Japanese press in an attempt to bring the masses on board (Earhart 2007, 13).

This paper employs an archival collection of Japanese colonial photography

of Korea as a primary focus of investigation in order to discuss the photographic composition of colonial Korea in relation to the structures of power. On the photographic canvas, the colonized were locked into fixed images, but at the same time they were allowed to be transformed. Once cropped and framed, photography marshaled a set of appropriated images of the colonized, yet revealed a slippery ground for varying interpretations and meanings (Landau and Kaspin 2002, 142). Colonial photography that was admitted to the tightly controlled circuits of distribution was to convey authorized information and the intentions of the state, intimately binding viewers’ perceptions to navigate the visual experience of the colonial reality. In the discussion to follow, I argue how power is disguised in the photographic representations, but through close scrutiny of its mechanisms power is also revealed.

Picturing Colonial Korea

On April 28, 1920, just a short year after an eruption of colonial dissent, Koreans learned that they shared a bloodline with their colonizers. This knowledge was delivered by a photograph. *Chōsen shimbun* (*Korea Newspaper*), a Korean-language paper operated by Koreans under Japanese censorship, dedicated its front page to an image combined of two separate photographic portraits—one of the Korean prince attired in full military uniform, the other of the Japanese princess in her royal wedding kimono. The paper’s congratulatory article explains this marriage as the opening of a new era in which Koreans and Japanese, transcending all social strata, must work together to achieve *naisen yūwa* (Japan-Korea in harmony) by recognizing the affinity of bloodlines (*ketsuzoku no shinkin wo motomete*) and striving for spiritual assimilation (*seishinteki no yūwadōka nari*).

The 1920s is understood as a decade of cultural rule that saw somewhat relaxed restrictions and increased opportunities for Koreans compared to previous colonial years. The wedding photo (Figure 2) of the royal couple indeed was supposed to signal a new era in the colonial regime, possibly a new beginning of harmonious assimilation between Japanese and Koreans by tying the knot to materialize *getsuzoku no shinkin*. While not yet thoroughly assimilated as one entity, the image prefigures the assimilationist amalgamation in the works as it depicts two royal figures with equal stature coming together

as partners. Reading deeply into this festive image, however, reveals that the conception of assimilation was already premised on erasure, a deliberate erasure of anything that is distinctly Korean. In the hairstyle and attire of the crown prince of Korea there is no trace of *Chōsen*-ness. If anything, the crown prince's portrait is reminiscent of those photos taken in 1907 when he was a ten-year old boy in the custody of adult Japanese colonial officers (Yi 2010, 31-37). In this photo (Figure 1), the crown prince of Japan, Yoshihito, stands tall next to the little crown prince of Korea, Yi Eun. To the right of Yi Eun is Takehito, royal kin of Yoshihito and Ito Hirobumi, Japan's first prime minister who became the first Japanese Resident General of Korea in 1906 (Yi 2010, 32). While male adults in the photo pose in a posture, the young prince's clumsy bent pose toward the left shows a lack of balance, perhaps due to the sword he is holding in his left hand. In the wedding portrait taken more than a decade later, the adult crown prince of Korea is dressed in a similar military jacket as in the 1907 photo, and his slightly bent left arm suggests that he might be holding the sword as he did as a boy. These compelling resemblances between two portraits, or the unchanged composition of the crown prince from his boyhood to adulthood indicates the high level of imperial control—in both the nature of the image's production as well as the adult crown prince's temperament. In contrast, the royal princess of Japan has her hair arranged in a most traditional fashion, even going against the tonsorial trend of wearing less volume during Taisho Japan (1912-1926). The backdrop surrounding the portraits shows the embroidered patterns of the *sakura*, crane, and lotus—all of which are familiar in Japanese kimono textile. Although the royal wedding reified the colonial government's efforts to implement the assimilationist rhetoric, at least on an institutional level, the memory of the 1919 grass-roots rebellion by Koreans against Japan



Figure 1. Crown Prince Yi Eun

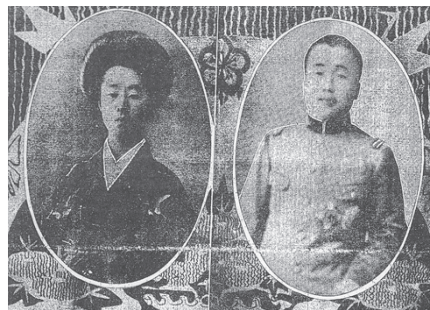


Figure 2. The Korea-Japan Royal Wedding Portraits

continued to project an irreconcilable colonial reality that haunted both the policymakers and settlement communities at large.

This paper primarily makes use of photographic images of colonial Korea from documentary photography collections that previously belonged to the Government General of Korea (GGK, hereafter). Until the late 1990s, before the era of digitization, these publications still had tattered catalogue cards in pockets, and each volume, sometimes each photo, was stamped with a seal that read *Chōsen sōtokufu toshokan* or the Library of the GGK. At the time of my archival research, this collection was housed in the basement of the National Library of Korea, catalogued under a special collection of rare archives that had survived half a century. The old GGK archive of documentary photography yielded fruitful investigation due to the ability of photography to open itself to multivalence. In documentary photography, the images are presumed to concentrate on fidelity with minimal intrusion on the part of the photographer. In other words, by the very conventions of its form, documentary photography implies an elevated expectation of truth.

Contrary to such expectation, I argue, documentary photography constructs rather than simply portrays reality. As evinced through the royal wedding photo, analyzing against the grain of documentary photography reveals ambiguities, anxieties, and contradictions at the confluence of its production and projection. In the archive, we will explore technologies of visual imaging, strategies of governance, and ideologies of imperial expansion that structured and communicated the approach to the image. We will examine what photography sought to reveal and to hide, as well as the regime of visibility, or the rules or structure of the scene that enabled photography to come into being in the first place. This means we first have to historicize the photographic images and understand photography at the historical moment to which it belonged.

Documenting Colonial Progress

In the early twentieth century, state-funded photography collections began to chronicle colonial progress by making available photographic evidence of Japan's "civilizing" of colonial Korea. A few years after the 1910 official annexation of Korea, the 1914 photography collection entitled *Kyōgensen shashinchō*

(*Photographs along the Keijō-Gensan* [the Gyeongseong-Wonsan Railway Line in Korean]) was published by the GGK to celebrate the completion of the rail line. This collection consists of snapshots of major events, railway stations, government buildings, construction sites of bridges and other works, scenic spots, and historical architecture such as temples and palaces that can be observed along the railway line connecting Keijō with Gensan. The organizational principle of the collection—the railway—opens up parts of the landscape that were not previously accessible for viewing. Scenes unfold along the Keijō-Gensan railway line in a compressed space-time, as the panoramic colonial landscape opens up like a blank canvas onto which the imperial “interiority is projected and discovered” (Shin and Robinson 1999, 248-87). The intimate relationship between landscape and interiority, to borrow Karatani Kojin’s (1993, 11-44) argument, is symptomatic of modernity which posits a discovery of inner man as a priori of a condition that enables objectification and discovery of landscape. To draw on Kojin’s theorization, the Kyōgensen railway line affords an aerial overview of the landscape and maps the new colonial territories to aid colonial administration which is required to penetrate and govern it. Tucked away in the midst of the construction and submerged as part of the landscape are the native lives that are subjected to the forceful process of being opened up and civilized.

Most photographs are images of life in the colonies in which the people are orderly, the landscape is seductively peaceful, and the “developmental” projects are transforming the land. In only a few photographs do we see Koreans, most performing menial service jobs such as those of A-frame transporters assisting their Japanese patrons. One of the most immediately

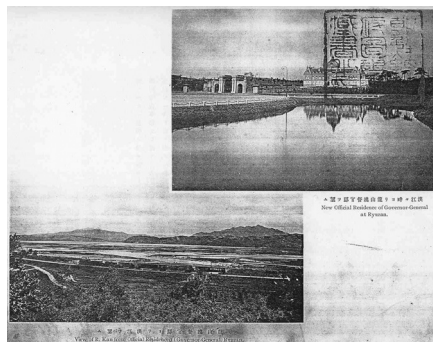


Figure 3. New Official Residence of Governor-General at Ryuzan

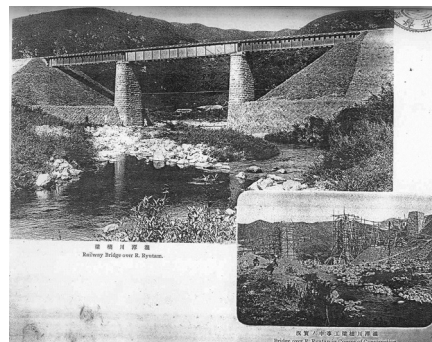


Figure 4. Railway Bridge over River Ryutam

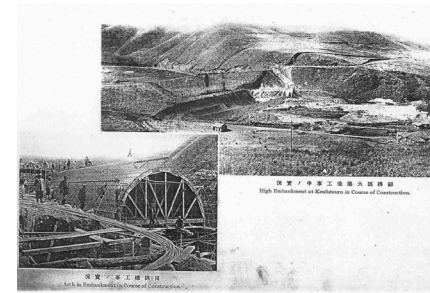


Figure 5. Bridge over River Ryutam in Course of Construction

discernible and overarching themes of *Kyōgensen shashinchō* is silence that tends to empty-out colonial space, as if Korea was unoccupied land simply awaiting the arrival of the Japanese. For example, photographs of famous sites such as natural landmarks, palaces, notable stations, and government buildings are cleared of any human faces. Let us examine some examples from

this collection, which provided captions in both Japanese and English, clearly indicating the colonial intent to advertise these images to domestic as well as foreign viewers.

The subjects of these photos are engineering achievements meant to convey monumental weight; in the scene of the magnanimous colonial building (Figure 3) and the construction sites of bridges (Figure 4) no human is present; when Koreans do appear in the photographs, as in the River Ryutam photo in Figure 5, they are not posed as “interfering or resisting elements,” but are portrayed as “willing participants” or “tacit collaborators” in the colonial projects. Still the focal point of these photographs is not the human presence but the exhibition of Japanese technology. The only photo where Koreans are shown en masse depicts their supportive role to the Japanese cadastral survey which was one of the most important administrative accomplishments in the early phase of governance. The photograph in Figure 6 depicts the launching of a cadastral survey. To the left are men in military uniforms and western suits. Lined up neatly in a separate row are Korean laborers with A-frames on their backs. While the photo marks the momentous occasion and a ceremonial function it also reveals the hidden dimension of labor from the colonial side that the historical documentation has not sufficiently illustrated. What is striking in this photo is the clear spatial division between the cargo carriers in the middle of the road and the well-dressed men on the left, most of whom were Korean engineers hired for the task. This staging of spatial separation unambiguously underscores the hierarchy among Korean men, where one group is indeed posing for the event and the other placed on exhibition. The men on the left stand tall and dignified, while the cargo carriers lean forward, and look like



Figure 6. Survey Party of Gensan Division Ready to Start, April, 1911

hunchbacks. Although the camera angle is frontal, the viewer's focus is drawn not on the cargo carriers but on the men posing on the left. If the eye is attracted to the individual faces of the spectators, while blurring the faces of cargo carriers lined-up in a row the orderliness and rationality of the colonial survey is conveyed. Veering away from the spectators and redirecting the eye to the A-frame carriers enables a

contradictory reading of the same photo; the denigration of locals supporting the civilizing mission demonstrates a clear oppression. Other than these colonial subjects who are included in the photograph as they assist and partake in official colonial tasks, this collection features no Koreans except those few who *accidentally* appear as part of the landscape.

The absence of natives that persists throughout *Kyōgensen shashinchō* is brought to the fore in this photograph. While viewing the images in a volume that consistently writes out the natives, the viewer is led to ask the question: Where are the natives? Through this one single photo, viewers are finally permitted to meet the natives, face-to-face, where one group is being mobilized to serve the imperial agenda while the other is aiding as A-frame transporters. This photograph has brought out the silenced natives and placed them on center stage—all consolidated in a servile position. If the rest of the photographs delineate silenced and tamed Koreans, the colonial violence speaks loudly in this image through the lined-up A-frame porters in hunched posture and their inability to refuse partaking in the colonial project of “surveying” the land, which was a precursor of usurpation and exploitation of Korean resources. At the onset of the land survey, all parties involved and interested have come to pose for a ceremonious moment, a moment that will prove unceremonious, even self-destructive, for the natives whose livelihood will soon fall prey to the colonial administration. Here, the virtue of the photo lies in the fact that it not only brings out the Koreans, but more importantly, it creates an unintended effect of rupture in the volume by unwittingly disclosing what it meant to hide or disguise: the technologies of power that govern the

production and circulation of the visual narrative of quiet, peaceful Korea under Japanese colonial rule. Behind the staged silence of colonial Korea presented in the photographic images—as viewers of the volume confront—are the disempowered colonial laborers who have fallen to the hands of the colonial master, as they must tread the path of aiding the colonialist undertaking in their very homeland.

The minimal presence of Koreans in other photos, or more accurately speaking the strategic staging of Koreans (along with the absence of any hint of colonial violence), should be understood as part and parcel of the colonial effort in transforming the land into a “picturesque” landscape. By “picturesque,” postcolonial scholar Zahid R. Chaudhary (2012, 110) means a shifting moment in perception that signals modernity, including colonial modernity that “converts the world into a picture in order to experience it.” This transforming process, or the “practice of landscape,” is closely intertwined with “political practices of imperialism” that deploy deliberate interventions in the making (Chaudhary 2012, 109-10). Transparency of photography, as is scrutinized by Chaudhary, has been called into question by other theoreticians including Susan Sontag (1977, 19) who reveals the complicity between political domination and photography. The technologies of representation we see in *Kyōgensen shashinchō* also illustrate what W. J. T. Mitchell calls imperial dreamwork that reorganizes “parts of natural scenes” to come together by excluding or suppressing “what cannot or should not be represented” (qtd. in Chaudhary 2012, 110). In other words, the primary purpose of these documentary photos was not necessarily to communicate the reality per se, but rather to shape the visual communication of what needed to be understood. The photographic images in *Kyōgensen shashinchō* guide viewers on a visual journey that opens up selected events and landscapes that are to be discovered. A close viewing of the photograph, as is seen in Figure 6, however, betrays its political design, strips off the ceremonial display, and unmask the unequal power relations between the photographer/executor of the event and the photographed cargo carriers.

Interrogation of the transparency often attributed to photography, according to W. J. T. Mitchell (1994, 282-83), begins in the practice of viewing that which he sees as a site of resistance. Ron Burnett (1995, 42-47) builds on Mitchell's argument, complicating the relationship between viewer and photograph by addressing the importance of viewer participation in the process of making meaning of a photographed object. Burnett (1995, 44) places a

decisive power on the viewer by arguing that a photographed object “does not exist unless the viewer of the photograph is ready to both agree with and confer some reality upon” it. Unless the viewer of the photo in Figure 6, for instance, agrees with the photographed event, the weight of the event may not communicate anything at all—the two parties in the photograph, the Japanese patrons and Korean cargo carriers, do not even seem to belong to the same world, and the social space they are portrayed to “share” is revealed as a temporal production. The irony in this photograph is the astounding disparity in bringing the two parties to “picture.”

If the documentary photography communicated the colonial reality through the visual tropes of emptiness, docile subjectivity in the colonized, and the hierarchical separation between the colonizer and the colonized in the 1910s, the photographic representations in the 1920s communicated the themes of grandeur and discipline. Rather than including supplementary texts that explain each photo, these volumes use photographic series and sequences to demonstrate the well-worn theme of Korean assimilation into the empire (Moran 1974, 14-15). The 1920 collection, *Chōsen no gaikan* (*A General View of Korea*), and the 1921 collection, *Shashinchō Chōsen* (*A Photographic Collection of Korea*), both juxtapose photographic images of old and new to contrast the “backward” customs of Korea with that of the “civilized” Japanese way of life being imposed on the Koreans. The following photographs are a few examples from *Chōsen no gaikan* that not only depict the old and new, but also arguably attempt to draw the viewer’s consent by highlighting the fruits of the colonial enlightenment projects. The short captions simply state “old postal office” and “new postal office” in Figure 8; “old court” and “new court” in Figure 9; “old prison” and “new prison” in Figure 10; and “old medical exam” and “new

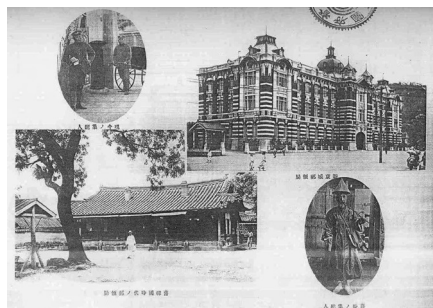


Figure 7.

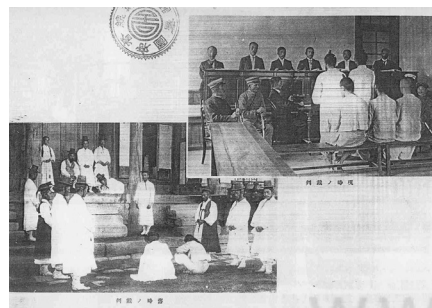


Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

medical exam” in Figure 10. The underlying theme that organizes the sequence and placement of the photographs is the consenting appraisal of Japan’s colonial project in Korea. And the collection is intended to invite the viewer’s agreement with the sweeping changes in colonial Korea that have reconfigured the cosmetic appearance of the place and the people, a façade signaling Korea’s entry into the “modern” empire.

The old court scene (Figure 8) is in a patio setting and two figures squat before the court authorities in an untamed, unruly posture. The man on the right, in particular, gives an air of a recalcitrant misfit who cannot even sit in an upright manner. The use of extreme lighting emphasizes the court’s activity to its openness. The image of the new court on the upper right exhibits even-toned lighting and choreographs a solemn ambience suggested by the body postures of the criminals, who are uniformly seated or standing in their stations. The clear distinction in attire marks the sartorial hierarchy in this orderly space; the arrested criminals are clad in Korean costumes while the police officers, court clerks, and judges are in western suits. The power and authority of the state are in the hands of men garbed in western suits.

In Figure 9, the photo of the old prison in the lower right is taken from an angle that intensifies the depth of the shadow emitting darkness, an eerie sensation hinting at even deeper darkness within. Rather than choosing the frontal view, the camera angle is taken from



Figure 11. Old and New Courts



Figure 12. Old and New Prisons

the side, with the sun coming from the right. This framing presents an oblique view of the structure, in which the entrance to the building is shrouded, and the rough and uneven texture of the wooden structure is visibly heightened. The new prison on the upper left

also uses the sun; but this time, in order to underscore the functional interior of the new facility that avails a panoptical surveillance mechanism, the imagery is aided by natural light coming from outside. The camera angle from the fork in the corridors opens up the view to both wings that are brightly lit, hence penetrating with an all-seeing eye that extends to the end of each corridor, and the light in the interior brings out the smooth, cemented surface of the facility.

Published only a year after *Chōsen no gaikan*, the 1921 *Shashinchō Chōsen* also includes familiar images of historical sites, government buildings, and famous Korean landscapes. Some of the photographs are reprints from *Chōsen no gaikan* and borrow the same method of juxtaposing “old” and “new.” The old court scene is an exact reprint from the 1920 collection (Figure 11), though a bit smaller in size, and cropped in an oval shape. It is compared to an image of the new court that opens up the camera angle much wider than the previously juxtaposed image. This widened camera angle into the new court offers the full scale of the interior of the courtroom, and adds a striking authoritarian presence to the judicial activity.



Figure 13. Old and New Stores



Figure 14. Keijō Higher Common School

The comparative prison photos, too, recycle the exact reprint of the new prison from the 1920 collection, but the photo of the old prison has brought the inmates to the front of the detention facility and placed them on exhibition in a kneeling position. If the old prison photo in the 1920 collection conveyed the unknowable darkness of the facility, the photo of the presumably same prison in the 1921 collection shows the unyielding control the authorities had over the arrested subjects, so much so that they positioned a number of inmates to appear in the photo.

The volume also includes images of schools, libraries, hospitals, an orphanage, a reservoir, and factories that collectively construct an image of a Korea civilized under Japanese rule. A significant number of images are devoted to representations of Koreans at various work sites such as markets, farms, classrooms, and laundries. All Koreans in these photographs seem to be neatly positioned in their work places, where order and compliance rule the day. For example, the students in Figure 14 are supposedly in the midst of a lab experiment, but their body movements look stiff and robotic. The teacher is not immediately noticeable, but when closely examined, he stands in front of the blackboard, looking motionless and lifeless. He does not attend to student activities, and his eyes look at neither the camera nor at his students. In this image, not a single student is looking at the camera. An oppressive air weighs down the lab room, which forbids the return of curious adolescent eyes. That

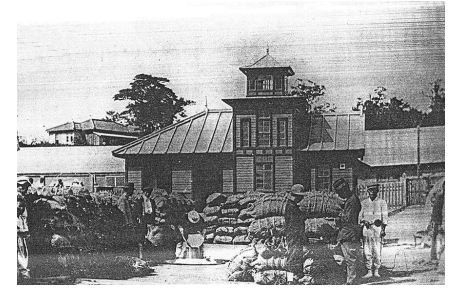


Figure 15. Rice Inspection (North Jeolla Province)



Figure 16. Korean Wives at Their Laundry



Figure 17. Muan Credit Union's Town Hall Meeting (South Jeolla Province)

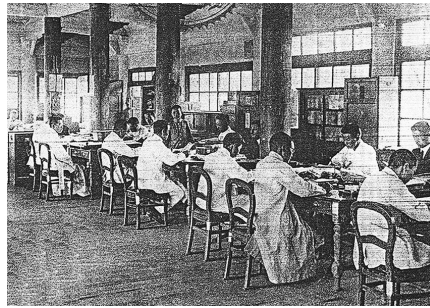


Figure 18. Korean Public Servants at the County Office

is to say, the photo does not document the lab experiment; rather, it seems that all activity has come to a halt for the sake of a photo shoot. Ironically, the photo intends to capture a lively snapshot of colonial life, but it ends up depicting a moment of forced, staged, and lifeless activity that reveals relentless colonial governance.

It is evident that the 1921 *Shashinchō Chōsen* attempts to weave a narrative of assimilation through the strategies of selection and omission, staging and production, and the serialization and sequential placement of photographs. Of particular interest is the “staging” of these images (except for the laundry scene), in which no single individual faces the camera but all are instead “posed” as a unified collective earnestly and attentively engaged in their work—despite the presence of the camera. While other photos suggest lifeless bodies, fixed gazes, and tamed subjects, the laundry site of the Korean wives differs by not being a state-controlled colonial space, hence the latitude enjoyed by women who stopped work to chat with each other at a leisurely pace. Its use seems calculated

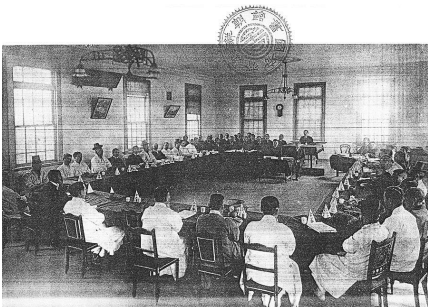


Figure 19. The Provincial Council Meeting (South Gyeongsang Province)



Figure 20. Keijō Textile Factory

to convey the continuity of some mundane practices and of colonial community content under foreign rule. Interestingly, snapshots such as the laundry scene which depict the everyday life of colonized subjects outside state control has the unintended effect of highlighting the forced and temporary nature of the state-controlled colonial space marked by Korean subjects in disciplined “poses” found in other photos. It is this subversion of the politically-intended effect that speaks to the theoretical claims laid out by scholars such as Sontag, Mitchell, and Burnett.

As seen in the photography collections published in 1920 and 1921, Koreans under assimilation policies were photographed as well-governed and “properly placed” subjects under Japanese supervision. Be it at a town hall meeting or a district office, Koreans are stationed in their workplaces in an orderly manner helping to reify state control. The images emblazon these photography collections in the 1920s create a certain reality built upon the misrepresentation of colonial life as experienced by both Koreans and Japanese; the photographs of the newly wedded Korean Crown Prince and Japanese Princess, the tidy and peaceful landscape of rural Korea, or the tamed and harmless-looking Korean peasants all serve to displace the harsh colonial reality that is fraught with conflict, struggle, tension, and animosity.³ Life outside the tightened state control involved “undesirable” mixing and hostile encounters the colonial authorities could hardly stomach.

“Fidelity” in Documentary Photography

Photography, like all other forms of representation, is not “images of objective evidence” or “pictorial honesty,” and it is critical that we examine photography in popular cultural production as a “politically motivated text” or a representative narrative (Brody 1997, 66-67). In his study of the U.S. colonization of the Philippines (1898-1902), David Eric Brody shows how American visual cultural production, ranging from “oriental” interior decorations to photography of the Orient, participates in orientalizing the Philippines and representing it as a location to play out American orientalist fantasies. Drawing

3. In my previous works I discuss a colonial reality experienced by working-class Japanese settlers in Korea in which presumed colonial hierarchical relations confront subversive moments. See Lee 2007, 2008.

from Abigail Solomon-Godeau's *Photography at the Dock*, Brody succinctly summarizes the function of documentary photography into three major points: "The documentary tradition is rooted in a specific historical need for visual communication; all documentary photography contains superficial and/or subtextual agendas; and all documentary work is 'spoken within language and culture,' and it is culture which controls the manner in which the documentary image is constructed and construed" (ibid.).

Solomon-Godeau's (1997, 161) argument comes from her study of a French photographer, Auguste Salzmann, in which she reveals how Salzmann's mid-nineteenth-century photographic images of Jerusalem belie the intended objective of "documenting" the holy city. By showing Salzmann's framing, cropping, and lighting strategies when deploying his lens, Solomon-Godeau demonstrates how Salzmann's images suppress the "visual signposts that help judge scale, terrain, distance, placement, and context" (ibid.). The effect Salzmann thus creates is as follows: "... an abstract vision of textures and surfaces in which the ostensible subject is engulfed or submerged, either by a plentitude of overall surface detail or an overwhelming landscape. By frequent use of high horizon lines or the elimination of horizon altogether, the image is pushed toward the surface plane and all suggestion of spatial depth negated" (ibid.). As an example, it might help us to look at how Solomon-Godeau compares Salzmann's image of the Gate of Damascus to that of another photographer, de Clercq, taken five years after Salzmann. Solomon-Godeau points out how Salzmann chooses an oblique view to frame the gate more tightly, eliminating the view of the city in the background, while de Clercq's image indicates the placement by including the minarets on the left and domes on the right. Further, de Clercq's image of the gate shows its spatial composition that is "recessed and several feet deep," whereas Salzmann's image uses the "extreme contrasts of light and shadow to depict the portal as another of his black voids" (Solomon-Godeau 1997, 165).

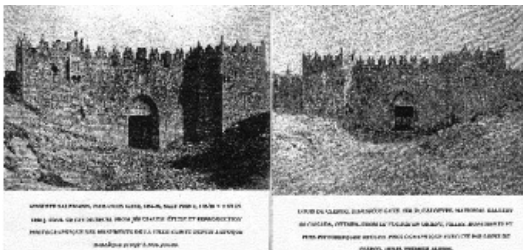


Figure 21.

What Solomon-Godeau problematizes in Salzmann's photography is the unquestioned objectivity or scientism shared among his contemporaries of the mid-nineteenth century, and how photographic images were appropriated to justify French imperial expansion in the Middle East. Despite Salzmann's intended commitment to produce documentary, not artistic, "representation"—demonstrated by the facts that his images appeared under the title *Study and Photographic Reproduction of the Holy City* and that he did not sign his negatives—Salzmann's photography nevertheless reconstructs Jerusalem in miniaturized images that are "attainable" by French imperial expedition. Such image manipulation is orchestrated by the photographer who is in the position to control methods of representation, such as the use of light, angle, and depth, which helps reproduce an object in the intended manner. Thus Solomon-Godeau concludes by questioning whether we can draw a dividing line between aesthetic and documentary photography.

Solomon-Godeau's examination of documentary photography is especially relevant to analyzing *Mokpo Shashinshō (Collection of Photographs of Mokpo)*, a collection published by Mokpo Newspapers in 1932 to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the opening of Mokpo harbor to Japan. This commemorative documentary collection stresses the impressive growth in Mokpo since the beginning of Japanese governance, and details positive changes by making available only the images that reiterate colonial progress and assimilation.

The tree in the old coastline view (lower left) interrupts the panorama and at the same time heightens the dominance of nature which stretches out to the rice paddies far in the distance. The contrasting photo of the new coastline view (upper right) is not taken from the same location: the mountains are more visibly defined, which indicates a closer shot than that of the older image. The familiar theme of nature versus culture in colonial discourse becomes evident in the new image of the coastline that includes a person overlooking the new urban development, hinting at a fully populated civilization.

The Mokpo City that emerges in this collection is a place that has been completely Japanized. Street



Figure 22. Old and New Views of the Southern Coastline



Figure 23. Yamato Itchome (upper left) and the Mokpo Shōtengai (lower right)



Figure 24. Fukuyamacho Street (upper left) and Showa Street (lower right)

and store names and housing styles are distinctly Japanese. On the streets of the shopping district, the *shōtengai*, which are filled with Japanese stores, Korean men, women, and children, many on foot and some on bicycles, go about their business. In fact, the only marker informing the viewer that these photographs are taken in Korea is the traditional dress worn by people captured in the image. Without the Korean clothing, it is impossible to discern the city from those in the main islands, the *naichi*. By willfully steering clear of any scenes that may suggest the residual presence, not to say the resistance of Koreans, clearly hinted by Korean subjects in the photographs who are still clad in their traditional clothing and arrange their hair topknots, this collection represents Koreans as fully-assimilated subjects who are naturalized in the “Japan-ized” social landscape. Although the photograph in Figure 26 depicts a large crowd of Koreans gathered at a festive colonial government event, it is unknowable to the viewer what it is that these Korean spectators have come to watch, or what



Figure 25. A View from the Market Place (upper right) and a View from Muan Street (lower left)

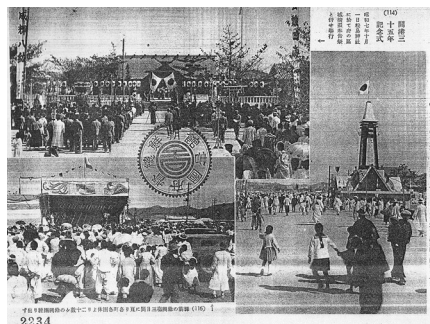


Figure 26. Celebration of the 35th Anniversary of the Opening of Mokpo Harbor

they are promised upon their attendance, largely due to the shooting angle of the camera. In contrast to the documentary photographs from the 1920s in which Koreans are presented as stiff, lifeless bodies, this 1932 collection shows animated Korean subjects fully immersed in colonial life. For example, the street images depict lively snapshots of a bustling town where shoppers busy themselves on errands, or jolly townspeople stopping to chat in a small group. These animated, proactive Koreans have gravitated toward the festivities in Figure 26, participating in the ceremonial function, yet the rear camera angle does not permit us full access to the event. Such images of a thoroughly “assimilated” Korea are strewn throughout the official discourse of heightened assimilation policies in the 1930s.

Conclusion

As Japan’s colonization of Korea underwent different stages of governance, photographic images of Korea showcased thematic changes over time. If the documentary photography in the 1910s emptied out the landscape of Korea in order to launch civilizing projects, the 1920s photography collections filled the colonial space with docile and assimilated Korean bodies. By the 1930s, the lifeless colonized subjects from the previous decade were reinvigorated as a fully animated citizenry in a thoroughly Japanized urban setting. The GGK’s photography collections, with minimal intrusion of the photographer and suppressed explanation rendered only by short captions, “document” a colonial reality to be communicated, by masking and unmasking, or by cropping and framing assemblages of images. Such images in state-sponsored publications went hand-in-hand with colonial policies by visually communicating a Japanese-Korean colonial amalgamation in a “picturesque” social landscape—for example, through a symbolic event like the royal marriage. Rather than use photography as cross-referential evidence or as a supplementary source to explain historical events, this study made use of documentary photography as a primary subject of investigation in order to reveal and interrogate what enabled or motivated the production of such visual images in the first place, or how those images can potentially betray their intended purposes to generate a subversion in the regime of visibility.

An archival collection of documentary photography previously owned by the GGK library navigates the viewer on a visual journey of Korea under

Japanese rule. The technologies of photographic representation, together with reconstructed scenes from that era inform a ready-made colonial reality for consumption. At the same time the same images beg a de-framing and unmasking of the colonial power structure. The fidelity claim inherent in documentary photography, especially during a colonial regime, has an effect of muting alternative visual narratives and meanings. As theorists of photography have argued, however, the image on canvas opens up to a multivalence of social effects, only if the informed viewer is willing to take on the onerous task of resisting the allure of photographic representations.

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Abstract

This paper examines imperial Japanese photography from the late 19th century to the 1930s, with particular focus on the state-sponsored documentary photography of Korea, which served to visually legitimize Japan's colonial expansion. By engaging with the GGK's documentary collection, I explore which photographic images were permitted to circulate in the media and, more importantly, how those images exerted power in ways that subjugated the colonized and legitimized the colonial hierarchy. If the colonial photography established and reified its power through irresistible and "transparent" photographic images, this paper's aim is to strip off that power by opening up the images to multivalence. As such, one of the primary concerns of this paper is to investigate the widely presumed transparency or validity of photography, especially in its use as historical evidence or as historical reference for understanding the colonial past.

Keywords: Japanese colonial photography, documentary photography, visual representations of colonial relations, colonial Korea in Japanese photography, visual culture

