Chinese and Other Asian Modernisms: A Comparative View of Art-Historical Contexts in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

Using a comparative analysis approach, this article examines the development, characteristics and issues concerning the discourse of modern Asian art in the twentieth century, with the aim of bringing into picture the place of Asia in the history of modernism. The wide recognition of the Western modernist canon as centre and universal displaces the contribution and significance of the non-Western world in the modern movement. From a cross-cultural perspective, this article demonstrates that modernism in the field of visual arts in Asia, while has had been complex and problematic, nevertheless emerged. Rather than treating Asian art as a generalized subject, this article argues that, with their subtly different notions of culture, identity and nationhood, the modernisms that emerged from various nations in this region are diverse and culturally specific. Through the comparison of various art-historical contexts in this region (namely China, India, Japan and Korea), this article attempts to map out some similarities as well as differences in their pursuit of an autonomous modernist representation.

Keywords: Modernism, Asian art history, Postcolonialism, Comparative studies

1. Introduction: The Argument for Non-Western Modernist Authenticity

Many countries in Asia are associated with the history of Western imperialism, and most of these nations started to undergo modernization because of colonial contact with Western powers. A term used to denote the process and impact of the more advanced nations, with particular reference to Western Europe, on the less advanced nations, is accordingly coined "Westernization". Although colonized nations may generally share some similarities in the process of colonization, there are as many differences in the specific experiences related to each of their individual histories. Yet, discourses of colonialism and modernization often overlook the specific realities of various colonized countries, and fail to take into account the importance of individual cultural particularity. Some scholars, such as Partha Mitter, have argued that the discourse of colonial studies tends to have a "monocular vision of the destiny of nations and overlooks the specific cultural expressions of Westernization" (Mitter, 1994, p.6).

This article argues that, while certain assumptions about colonialism may exist, every nation's individual experience still has to be rooted in its specific socio-cultural and political history. In the field of art, it would be misleading to generalize the diverse responses of artists from various colonized nations in their processes toward achieving modernism. The emergence of modern art practices in Asia – their forms, functions and contents – needs to be studied in relation to specific, complex realities of individual nations and cultures. Not only does it concern aesthetic experience and personal expression, art plays a role in the formation of social existence. Art contributes to the continuity of traditions and unity of peoples, particularly during times of oppression and depravity. The artistic products of colonized peoples can be considered their variegated responses to Westernization. Major styles or important schools of thoughts in art arose in Asia from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century as reactions to or as a result of Westernization (Refer to Table 1). These schools of art sought to create new types of artistic expression and many artists incorporated techniques borrowed from Western painting to rejuvenate traditional art forms. However, many of these objectives and artistic contents remained deeply rooted in each individual culture and some were nationalist-inspired.

In understanding the richness and complexity of individual Asian cultural and national histories, this article argues for a rethinking of the prejudiced colonial attitude: that the white colonizers were different from and more superior to their subject peoples. The white colonist' perception of difference was intimately linked to imperial political ambitions and embedded in relations of power. This article reveals the tangible existence of autonomous

native creations as opposed to the white European "original. Cross-cultural understanding of many routes toward achieving modernism will also reveal the implications of the intricate relationships between modernism, imperialism and colonialism. Before proceeding to the analysis, I will first explain a few key ideas relevant to this study, which are: the use of the comparative studies method, the concept of being modern, and situation of Asia in the twentieth century.

1.1 Methodological Framework: The Use of Comparative Studies in Art History

Little comparative work has been undertaken by historians specializing in Asian art, such as by paralleling the art movements of countries within Asia or, with that of the Euro-American world. This article demonstrates that a comparison of various Asian countries' modern art movements will bring out each nation's culturally specific character. While modernization and modernity were common to China and other parts of Asia, this article reveals that their differences were equally distinct. The study of Asian art history includes examining changing values in the fields of visual culture within Asia. The discourse of modern Asian art also raises a variety of issues vital to the study of social sciences and humanities in this region, such as understanding non-Western modernization and modernity. Third World processes of change, and more contemporary subjects like decolonization, globalization and postmodernity. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the study of art history requires the integration of other branches of learning such as critical theory, cultural studies, history, gender studies, sociology and philosophy. By addressing issues such as resistance and reconstruction, postcolonial theories are particularly useful in the ways we interpret cultural origins of art-historical practices, theories and language. Thus the structural and subjective dimensions of this article adopt the incorporation of a cross-disciplinary approach and body of theories.

Many art historians are concerned with the study of artists or art production categorized or defined by nations, rather than researching on possible systems of signs that could lead to certain historical or structural formations of art. The case-by-case approach, while allowing detailed, intensive examination of cases, contributes less to theory building that can be important for the formation of objective and critical judgements. Not marked by opposition, relation or exclusion, the case-by-case study method cannot be used convincingly as indicators of distinctions or symbolic power. Other social sciences disciplines, including political science, economics and even literature, have frequently utilized the comparative studies method to tackle various research problems. With regards to the importance of the comparative method, political scientist David Collier writes, "Comparison sharpens our powers of description and can be an invaluable stimulus to concept formation. It provides criteria for testing hypotheses and contributes to the inductive discovery of new hypotheses and to theory building" (Collier, 1991, p.7). Not just interested in the development of art in Asia, this article is also concerned about the formation of cultural and national identities in this region, the relation between politics and cultural practices, and the transformation of power relations globally. A uni-dimensional analysis, such as focusing on the artistic development of one country, would be inadequate to tackle these concerns.

While comparing the different Asian countries, this article strives to maintain a sense of cultural and historical specificity as much as possible. This article attempts to highlight some similarities as well as differences in the ways that these societies have responded to the challenges of modernization and Westernization, and how artists of these nations seek new forms of representation to reflect socio-political changes. This article has limited the scope of comparison to four main countries, namely China, India, Japan and Korea, but the evaluation might have useful implications to the cultural realities of other Asian nations. Due to diverse, complex particularities of individual nations, it would be problematic to systematically compare each variable for every country. This article thus attempts to resolve this problem by only comparing nations that show up certain patterns useful for evaluation under each variable. The variables for comparison used in this article include political interventions from ruling authorities, the emergence of modern art schools and movements, extent of nationalist feeling, formation of art associations, and modernization efforts of ruling governments. While analyzing with these variables, this article will continue to consider carefully the particular background of the nations by illustrating with examples of specific socio-cultural and political situations. By juxtaposing the historical development of various nations, this article offers a comparative approach that combines detail analysis of specific situations (micro) with a broad analysis of structures (macro), which will be helpful to explain why the modern art movement of nations within Asia may differ. Cross-cultural examination will reveal various intricacies and complexities of the nations' responses to Westernization.

1.2 The Concept of Being Modern

The term "modern" has been used to denote certain characteristics of a contemporary period and/or society. It was first used in Latin since the sixth century and later in English and other languages, and as C.E. Black wrote,

"by the seventeenth century, 'modernity', 'modernism' and 'modernization' were employed in a variety of more or less limited and technical contexts" (Black, 1966, p. 5). Within recent history, "modernity" has been widely employed to describe particular characteristics common to those countries more advanced in political, socio-cultural, economical and technological aspects, while the term "modernization" refers to the process by which these nations acquire these qualities. "Modernism" has been used to describe the cultural tendencies and artistic or literary movements that arise due to the changes caused during the process of modernization. The movement of "modernism" started in mid and late nineteenth-century Europe as a reaction against dominant Western attitudes and traditions in literature and other forms of arts. Ever since the modernist movement first started to challenge dominant European sensibilities, it has travelled to other parts of the world throughout the twentieth century and influenced perceptions and practices of other societies in various forms of the arts.

Because being "modern" was closely associated with the advanced West right from the beginning, modernism is often implicitly known and understood from the "Western modernist" perspective and history. The West has thus acquired cultural hegemony in the discourse of modernism, and modernisms of the non-West are often perceived as derivative of Euro-American modernism. Many critical books and literature on the subject of modernity do not consider the contribution of the non-Western world in the modern movement. The classic book of modern literary criticism and theory, *Modernism 1890-1930*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in 1978, fails to consider the participation of the non-West peoples or the influence of non-Western cultures in the discourse of modernism. In his highly acclaimed work on cultural modernity, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1983), American scholar Marshall Berman also did not address the ways in which formerly colonized nations may have contributed to the Western experience of modernity.

Not only justifying itself as dominant and centre, Eurocentrism sanctions the way Western modernism overlooks the influences and contributions from non-Western cultures. A historian researching in Indian modernity, Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, "a third-world historian is condemned to knowing 'Europe' as the original home of the 'modern,' whereas the 'European' historian does not share a comparable predicament with regard to the pasts of the majority of humankind" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p.42). Another historian specializing in non-Western modernity and modernism, Shu-mei Shih writes, "That modernism was the agent of cultural power over non-Western sites necessitates a geopolitically situated critique of cultural imperialism" (Shih, 2001, p.2). In the biased perception of the imperialist discourse, modernity and modernisms of non-Western nations can only be perceived as inferior and derivative after the Western model, and thereby marginalized.

As a concept used in visual arts, modernism came from those Western artworks produced from the nineteenth century with styles and philosophy questioning prevalent artistic traditions in a spirit of experimentation. The widely acceptance of the European modernist canon as universal and authentic raises questions concerning the qualities of modernism as pursuing innovation, questioning orthodoxy and as an international movement. Great modern Western masters such as Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse had travelled to minor cultures, such as to Tahiti and Algeria, in search of a rejuvenating inspiration. Since the start of Western artists' interactions with minor cultures, modern art took on new qualities and meanings. Indeed, many modern Western art and literary works produced in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were influenced in part from the artists' and writers' exposure to Eastern arts.

In the late nineteenth century, the writings of ancient Chinese poets such as Li Bai, Tao Qian and Qu Yuan were examined and carefully translated by English and American writers. Literary studies scholar Zhaoming Qian has highlighted the paramount influence of pre-modern Chinese poetry on important Western modernist poets such as Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens (Note 1). Qian points out that the Orient (in this case, the Far East) has attracted great Western poets with their rich cultural heritage, possessing characteristics such as "objectivity" and "visual clarity", which he considers are "key elements of Modernism itself" (Qian, 1995, p.3). In his analysis of Western modernists' works, Qian thus argues for a different "Orientalist model" (in contrast to Edward Said's meaning of "orientalism"), in which the influence of China and Japan "are seen not as foils to the West, but as crystallizing examples of the Modernists' realizing Self" (Qian, 1995, p.2). Qian's analysis underpins the idea that cultures do not develop in separate capsules, but that there were cross-cultural movements in both directions across the Eastern and Western world long before the twentieth century.

While modernism has been participated by many other cultures, which validates it as an international movement, the movement is still often viewed as exclusively Western. Yet, the experimental attitude of Western modernists themselves had emphasized characteristics such as perspectivism (Note 2), subjectivity, plurality and other ideas that challenged authority and sought to break boundaries in traditions. It is highly possibly this revolutionary aspect of the modern as antagonistic to orthodoxy and authority that has made it welcomed by many artists of peripheral cultures. Speaking of his personal experience as a postcolonial subject seeking to challenge dominant

modernist traditions, Pakistan-born artist Rasheed Araeen wrote, "My entry into and taking up a radical position in the history of modernism was due to my experience of myself as a free subject. But this created a problem for the dominant cultural theory and Western art institutions. They could not accept the idea that a person from outside Western culture could be a free agent of history and could, in fact, intervene by challenging prevailing ideas in a particular time in modern history and produce something that may represent a historical breakthrough" (Araeen, 1999, p.242). Fuelled by Third World nationalisms, particularly after the Second World War, the interventions of non-Western artists can be seen as an indomitable force that has been shaping, rethinking and reclaiming terrains of the intellectual and representation from biased colonial perceptions.

1.3 The Situation of Asia in the Twentieth Century

Many major developments in the world took place in the twentieth century. It was a critical era in which many traditional civilizations underwent remarkable transformations to become modern nation states. Many of these transitions started in the nineteenth century and continued to be ongoing and evolutionary throughout the twentieth century. Asia, the world's largest and most populous continent, is bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the south by the Indian Ocean, and on the north by the Arctic Ocean. For the first half of the twentieth century, the history of imperialism and its socio-cultural influences created a reality that was principally monolithic. During the era of Western imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and even when the region was wrestling with problems of decolonization after 1945), Asia was continually associated with Third World backwardness in Western perceptions. Following the end of World War II, the world experienced a momentous era of decolonization. As previously colonized societies in Asia regained their independence, many quickened their pace of modernization. The historical shift towards decolonization and the transformation of the nation-state system after the Second World War and during the Cold War caused a new global outlook, where multiculturalism increasingly became the norm. This article thus considers from a multicultural viewpoint the position and development of Asia in the modernist movement.

The global meaning of "Asia" has since undergone major shifts in the postcolonial period of the twentieth century. A generally consistent economic success towards the latter decades of the twentieth century transformed the region. In addition to the successfully modernized nation of Japan, newly industrialized economies such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, which have been referred to as the "Four Asian Tigers", also propelled the growth of the region in the seventies and eighties. This necessitated a changing historical perspective to understand modern Asia. By the end of the twentieth century, the economic success of many Asian nations captured the attention of the world in what has become known as the "East Asian Miracle" (Berger, 2004, p.3). Increased scholarly research in the field of East Asian studies by prominent scholars, such as John King Fairbank and Edwin O. Reischauer, framed the success and modern development of the region in terms of Asian values, such as Confucianism. This helped to sanction the significance of traditional East Asian values.

The economic prominence of Asia has produced a corresponding rise of international interest in their cultures. Influenced by recent theories such as postcolonialism, postfeminism and postmodernism, curators, artists and art historians of non-Western origins have begun to emphasize distinct voices and developed forms of representation that seek to validate their own modernism in art. Art writer Thomas McEvilley points out, "as previously colonized societies come to experience themselves as their own centres, their arts will serve the function of both integrating them around expressions of their own selfhood and evincing new attitudes toward the West" (McEvilley, 1996, p.59). As they deal with and confront their "other" position, non-Western artists are attempting to transcend their peripheral situation by redefining and pushing boundaries in contemporary art. Many are increasingly stressing their cultural integrity. By re-historicizing the position of Asian artists, the previous order of their subservience calls for a review and a more complex understanding of artistic production than the dichotomy of periphery versus the centre is enabled.

During the 1980s, the emergence of the globalization project started to challenge the legitimate role of the "state" as key authority in the development of a nation. International social relations started to change with the rise of new realities, in which individuals and communities live and have experiences that go beyond the boundaries of the state. The effects of diaspora, transnational communities and cultural dislocation further shifted the nature of cultural identity and complicate the understanding of culture and its political implications. Postcolonial globalization is no longer "a one-way process in which oppression obliterates the oppressed or the colonizer silences the colonized in absolute terms" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2006, p.137). The blurring of a clear nation-state situation and the phenomenon of cultural hybridities in the increasing transnational world requires a rethinking of the original perspectives in modes of analysis. Art writer Vishakha N. Desai writes that "cultural hydridity - the mixing and juxtaposition of outside elements with indigenous forms and techniques - has been a key part of modern Asian art" (Desai, 1996, p.13). In fact, Desai points out that "it is

the clash between traditional Asian culture and modern Western influences that makes up an integral part of Asian life in this century" (Desai, 1996, p.13).

2. In Quest of Modernism: China's Cultural Specificity versus Other Asian Countries

It is essential for the understanding of modern China and other Asian countries to be examined across national and cultural boundaries, through which Asia has become connected to a modern world of global space. China's modernization process of the early twentieth century caused it to become intertwined, practically and conceptually, with the world around it. As Rebecca Karl, a scholar of Chinese history, writes, the early twentieth century "was the time at which China's participation in global systems of signification and power relations...came to be consciously recognized by Chinese intellectuals as at least incipient totalities" (Karl, 2002, p.97). A comparative analysis of modern Chinese art history and the recent developments of other modernizing Asian societies in art will bring to light the culturally specific characters of various Asian societies. Although India and China are two of the world's most ancient civilizations, and are next to each other geographically, the modernization of these nations has had developed differently in a number of ways. Besides dissimilarities in cultural and political ideologies, the development of modern art in both countries progressed differently.

This is largely due to the fact that, while India was subject to direct imperial control by Britain from the mid-nineteenth century, China was relatively less politically controlled by the West through a series of unequal treaties from 1842. The Chinese people continued to govern the nation themselves. In late nineteenth-century India, important art societies were originally founded by the white people for the benefits of British and other European amateur artists living in the colony. As Mitter writes, these art societies were "part of a larger process of the advent of European institutions" (Mitter, 1994, p.65). The art associations were taken over by native Indians only later for promoting the interests of a growing community of academic artists. In contrast, the emergence of modern art associations in China in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was initiated by Chinese artists themselves (Note 3). The formation of Western-inspired conceptual art associations were mostly founded by Chinese artists who had just returned from overseas training in the early twentieth century. Responding to the Republican government's effort to modernize China, these Chinese artists aimed to revive the Chinese art scene with their overseas experience. For example, the "Storm Society" (*Juelandshe*), a modernist art group formed by Paris-trained Lin Fengmian, strove to promote Western modernism and advocate a modernist art movement in China.

Despite some initiations by artists themselves, political intervention from the ruling government played an important role in the art scene of China throughout the twentieth century. When China's new Republican government was implementing measures to revive the nation in the early twentieth century, Western art was an attractive political measure to the cultural reformers. It was believed that the style of academic realism and its associations with science and progress was effective for the purpose of revitalizing China as a more scientific and advanced nation. When the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, the extent of political intervention in the arts was even more apparent, when many strict directives controlling the arts were implemented. After the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, the succeeding Chinese Communist leaders continued to exert a significant amount of control over the artistic development in China in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Political intervention in the Indian art scene during the years of the British colonial rule was relatively slight, although nationalist sentiments were very much felt in many Indian artists' works. After the Indian Rebellion in 1857, there were increasing levels of political awareness and public opinion amongst the locals. Indians began to take up more leadership roles at national and provincial levels. The lack of opportunities for educated Indians and the bleak economic situation created by British colonial rule intensified the rising nationalism amongst native Indians. Despite employing art as one of the means to articulate nationalism, apart from the early phase of the Gandhian movement at the turn of the twentieth century, there was no obvious revolutionary environment in which Indian artists could be actively involved. The majority of Indian artworks produced during colonial times therefore "did not serve any direct political ends" (Mitter, 1994, p.6). The inception of nationalist values in India during colonial and postcolonial periods only caused Indian artists to become more preoccupied with inherent cultural issues, such as creating images of an "authentic" indigenous culture, many of which were Hindu-themed. On the whole, it can be said that the development of art in India experienced less intervention from its political leaders during its years of nation-building in comparison to the Chinese art scene.

The emergence of modernism in art was often a direct consequence of the modernization efforts of a nation. Due to geographical proximity, Japan and Korea share similar historical and socio-cultural background as that of China. During the high of Western imperialism, these traditional Confucian societies struggled to reconcile their own heritage with invading Western values. Although Japan was never officially colonized, it, too, had to tackle

issues of national and cultural identity in the face of Western supremacy. A common response toward foreign threat of these East Asian nations was to accelerate modernization through the adoption and assimilation of Western ideas. The history of modern art in China, Japan and Korea could be seen as oscillating between "occidental" and "oriental" tendencies. As different countries in Asia embarked on the course of modernization at different times, the influence of Western concepts and practices on each nation's art developed differently and to varied extents.

Historians have observed that Japan was able to modernize more rapidly than China during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In their last traditional equilibrium eras, the late Edo period of Japan implemented technological and organizational changes much earlier than the Oing dynasty of China. The modernization of Japan accelerated during the Meiji Restoration. The Meiji authority (1868-1912) laid a solid foundation of an effective modern infrastructure. In addition to its rapidly developed modern transport and communications systems, Japan also greatly improved its educational system and achieved its national literacy goal. Despite some initial resistance, Western ways of learning were rapidly infused into different levels of the Japanese society, from political institutions to schools, with the ambition of transforming the nation into an international power. Through its aggressive modernization strategies, the Japanese economy achieved a significant breakthrough between 1894 and 1916. On the other hand, China struggled through frustrating phases of revolution one after another. The late Qing government of China was running annual deficits and the nation suffered from severe economic problems. In the dynasty's last years, revenue collected was used to pay off foreign loans and indemnities from defeats in wars, rather than to supply capital for industrialization. Although modernization efforts were made before 1911, most of them were obstructed. For instance, the Self-Strengthening Movement, which started in 1860, initiated military and industrial westernization but ended in failure during the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.

Japan thus overtook China to become the first nation in Asia that most rapidly and effectively modernized through its ardent embrace of Westernization policies. Early Japanese Western-style art was an important factor in the understanding of Japan's response to Western culture. Although China continued to be Japan's source of inspiration in its art and culture throughout the nineteenth century, Western-derived academic naturalism was effectively introduced into Japanese art curriculum and increasingly used in the foundational training of art students. Particularly from 1890s onwards, many young local artists increasingly looked to the West for inspiration and model. In 1896, modernist artist Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924), upon return from his studies in France, was appointed as the director of the Western Painting Department at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Seiki played a critical role in the development of modern paintings in the nation. The Western-inspired agenda for art complemented well with the Meiji government's political ambitions. It thus appears that modern Japanese art was implicated in a carefully planned political structure that based upon European-inspired attitudes toward national development. The early Japanese modern painting movement also reflected the nation's search and exploration of its own identity during the formative period of modernization.

After the Meiji era, the succeeding Taisho period (1912-1926) saw significant new developments in its arts and culture. With the ambition of the Meiji Restoration largely accomplished, the years of the Taisho rule witnessed a time of increased freedom where individual artists and writers sought distinct, individual styles of expression. From 1910 to 1923, the literary journal *Shirakaba* (or White Birch) was founded and published regularly by a group of liberal Japanese writers who stressed values such as humanism, freedom and individualism, and had a profound influence on the local art scene. By the late 1920s, the Japanese had already attained a certain level of maturity in their modernist art practice, in terms of styles and artistic perception. On the other hand, Western artistic concepts and practices were only beginning to influence the Chinese more profoundly in the 1920s. At a time when modern Japanese artists were already emphasizing distinct modern styles and individualism, most of the Chinese artists in the 1920s were only starting to seriously adopting Western ideas.

The introduction of Western art was met with more resistance in Chinese society, particularly from an older group of established traditional ink painters. Chinese ink painting, an important form of personal expression, not only provided the foundation of painting in China but also in the region of East Asia. Theories of Western academic art, which emphasized close observation of nature through life study of perspective, light and shadows, were too vastly different from the philosophy of literati ink painting. The focus on the expression of an individual's feelings, erudition and learning of the ink painting tradition was looked upon with favour as spiritual and noble by the Chinese throughout pre-modern China, and portraying reality was not an important concern for Chinese artists. Centuries of superiority and power in the East Asian region had resulted in an axiomatic cultural supremacy and complacency in the Chinese, who found it hard to accept foreign nations' cultures and systems. In fact, the rise of Chinese nationalism against Western imperialism in the early twentieth century had stimulated

a resurgence of fervour in the ink painting tradition amongst a group of Chinese painters. Although the introduction of Western art did encounter some resistance initially in Japan, the gradual turn to the West provided it with a form of liberation from the earlier cultural authority of China, which was increasingly viewed by the Japanese as an antiquated civilization, unable to defend itself against Western forces.

Progressing into the twentieth century, the relationship between China and Japan, as well as their positions in the region, changed significantly. While countries of the East Asian region previously looked upon China as the centre of world civilization, Japan subsequently became the superpower of the region. During the Second World War, Japan defeated and assumed control over many countries in eastern Asia, including its former inspiration and model, China. With the backdrop of this situation, Japanese art historian Chino Kaori has described Japan as having assumed a "masculine" identity, and imprisoning its subjugated neighbouring nations into a "feminine" role (Kaori, 2003, p.33). The Japanese authorities had a part in this by promoting masculine traits in its national image and representation. Japan, formally a Confucian patriarchal society, was inclined to associate strength and power with "masculinity", and weakness and subjugation with "femininity". For this reason, the quality of masculinity was emphasized and encouraged in the development of Japanese art during this period, while the representations of other Asian nations like Korea and China were put down as feminine by the Japanese.

China in the first decades of the twentieth century was plagued with wars. Not only facing invasions from Western imperialist powers and its ambitious neighbour Japan, the nation was divided internally. The modernist art that emerged in early twentieth-century China did not proceed much further and came to a standstill when the Communist party took control of the country in 1949. Increasingly in the 1930s, there was an ideological divide in Chinese politics between Western capitalist liberalism and Soviet-inspired Marxist-Leninism, and this culminated in a decade long civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT or Chinese Nationalist Party). The final victory of the Chinese Communists signified the people's disappointment with the traditional Chinese system as well as a gradual disenchantment with bourgeois Western visions of modernity. During their rule, the early Communist government promoted only those art works they considered would serve the political ideology of the nation, and bourgeois Western styles were looked upon with disdain. During the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, artistic development in China was subjected to influences from Soviet Socialist Realism, propaganda art and Chinese folk traditions such as New Year pictures and wood-engraving. It was only when China liberalized in the eighties that Chinese artists began to look into various European schools again. However, the effects of its socialist experience continued to play a crucial role in the development of its art throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. This influence strongly differentiates its modernist development in art from the other countries in Asia.

The situation of Korea differed from that of China and Japan. In the beginning, Korea went through Westernization indirectly through China and Japan, while the latter countries had direct contact with the West. In the eighteenth century, a small group of Korean literati, also serving as envoys, would bring back European books and materials from China. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when modern art in Korea was in its infancy, foreign concepts and practices continued to reach the nation largely through China and Japan. When *Joseon* Korea was under siege from Western nations in the late nineteenth century, Korean intellectuals were sent overseas to learn and observe from other countries as part of a modernization effort, but largely to Japan and China. When Korea was colonized by Japan (whose culture was in turn influenced by the West) in 1910, the development of its modern art took on peculiar characteristics under the influence of different nations – Japan and China (with their various influences and contexts of colonialism), and the West. Early modernism nevertheless emerged in Korean art amidst the problems during the colonial period. Building on the foundation established by first-generation (1910s) Western-style painters such as Ko Hui-dong and Kim Gwan-ho, a number of Korean artists (many of whom travelled to Japan to learn) actively promoted art with various concepts and modern styles, and organized several modern art exhibitions in the 1930s.

In search of a representative national identity in times of crisis, many Asian artists explored possibilities that the West offered while simultaneously looking into their own traditions for inspiration. After World War II, the weak economy of Japan made it difficult for its artists to survive professionally, as people were more focused on the practical aspects of life. Women artists were especially ostracized in local art circles, and were given a more respected position in society only when the economic situation improved in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Toeko Tatsuno was born in 1950 and grew up in a post-war period when Japan was still recovering from its wartime catastrophe. At a time when Japan was still regaining its self-confidence after its defeat in war and cultural self-respect was considered a high priority, Tatsuno struggled between Western modernist art practices and indigenous art traditions. Tatsuno thus tried to assimilate aspects of traditional Japanese aesthetics and philosophy into her modern abstract paintings, re-interpreting tradition and creating a style characteristic of her

own. Tatsuno's way of working was similar to the attitude of Chinese artists of the Lingnan School in the 1920s. The Lingnan artists sought to rejuvenate Chinese art by incorporating Western techniques into traditional ink painting, at a time when China was struggling with issues of cultural identity in the face of Western imperialism. In order to bring about a style that they felt was modern yet relevant to their identity, many Asian artists sought to integrate Western elements into their indigenous art forms as a solution. While embracing modern art forms, many were particularly conscious of their specific cultural background and national identity.

By the 1970s after recovering from war, a number of Japanese artists were already moving into abstraction and evolving a distinct modernist style of their own. In contrast, the development of Chinese art in the 1970s remained intricately tied to its socialist-influenced national and political ideology. Although veteran Chinese woman artist Nie Ou was born two years earlier than Tatsuno, she was not especially concerned about the issues of modernity (although over the years she has achieved a (deleted: her) distinct style in representation). This was largely due to her personal experience during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a national event that affected every individual in China of that era. Like a large number of Chinese artists of the time, Nie was sent to work as a peasant in a remote village of the Shangxi province during the Cultural Revolution. Primarily a figure painter with a focus on peasants, Nie admitted that her choice of subject and style was a result of her life experience. Consistently using subjects to reflect her rural experience even to this day, Nie explains, "what I saw and heard never escaped me...my memory of peasants and rural life naturally come back" (interview with Nie, conducted on 6 May 2008). During the Maoist period, representation of the human figure was considered an effective vehicle amongst art genres in conveying ideological messages. Heroes of the revolution, such as prominent leaders and hardworking labourers, were portraved so that they could be emulated. These realistic figure paintings were often propagandistic in tone and melodramatic in style. Social optimism was an underlying guidance for artistic representation, as life was supposed to get better in totalitarian states. China's distinct socio-cultural and political developments, particularly its communist background, thus make it difficult for art writers and historians to parallel its modernism directly to that of other Asian nations.

The socio-political revolutionary actions that erupted across the colonized world throughout the twentieth century evoked nationalist sentiments amongst the colonized peoples. As Edward Said pointed out, the coming of the white man always brought forth some form of resistance in all colonized nations, even right from the beginning. Said wrote, "Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was always some form of active resistance, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out" (Said, 1993, p.xii). Resistance from the natives appeared not only in political or military aspects, but also in the arts and culture. The search for a valid artistic representation through championing certain forms of artistic expression was, without doubt, one of the means for the previously colonized peoples to forge national unity. Even in the late twentieth century after the colonized nations became independent, many Asian artists continued to search for a distinct national identity in their works. Since the revivalism of the early Bengal School, there was a new surge of modern Indian art immediately before and after India's independence. In Bombay, a group of modern artists formed the Progressive Artists' Group and profoundly influenced the Indian art scene of the time. These artists incorporated modern Western styles into their exploration of Indian subject matter, and emphasized the need for self-awareness and individualism. This self-awareness, which constitutes the spirit of modernism, was a strong motivating force for achieving national unity and forming new, independent nation states in Asia.

After colonized by Japan for more than thirty years (1910-1945), the works of early modern Korean artists were said to be deeply embedded in Japanese styles and practices. It was thus a critical challenge for Korean artists to search for and attain a distinctively modern Korean style. Anti-Japanese sentiments were particularly reflected in the genre of Korean ink painting during the post World War II period. Resisting the idea that its ink paintings were often associated with *Nihonga*, a modern Japanese-style ink painting popular for its polychromatic scheme, a number of ink painters tried to reform Korean ink paintings by emphasizing a monochrome idiom. Shortly after World War II, the Korean (Civil) War took place in 1950 and disrupted all artistic activities in the country. After the war ended in 1953, many Korean artists resumed their art practice and sought to bridge the traditional and the modern so as to produce a distinctive Korean-style art. Parallel to the problematic socio-political situation of the country in the different stages of the twentieth century, Korean artists struggled to produce distinct forms of representation and sought to produce autonomous local artworks.

Prominent woman artist Kim Sooja was born and raised in South Korean after the Korean War in 1957. The emphasis of a distinct Korean and female identity is clearly reflected in her contemporary works. Kim ventured into the alternative genre of installation in the 1980s as she felt it would give her more room to voice her particular concerns. Choosing to work with Korean textiles, she collaborated with her mother in traditional

quilting. Kim made slip covers for blankets, an important household chore associated with women. Her famous piece, *bottari* (1992), was conceived out of childhood memories of her family moving with her father in the military from place to place like nomads. Kim has made reference to traditional Korean way of life in her choice of title and material. *Bottari* was a traditional Korean wrapping cloth which was commonly used for packing things by Koreans. Yet one might associate her method and concept of representation with the 1970s Western Feminist Art movement. The employment of modern, Western techniques and methods, while commonly seen in many contemporary Asian artworks, are often adapted into various specific cultural contexts. In many ways, Kim Sooja's work shares similarities with contemporary Chinese artist, Yin Xiuzhen's *Portable Cities* (2001-2004) series. The *Portable Cities* series was based on Yin's personal experience when she began travelling frequently to other countries due to her work in the 1990s. Yin collected used clothing from different people of various countries, which she cut and sewed into small structures and placed in different suitcases to symbolize portable items for travelling.

While Kim's *Bottari* was inspired from the artist's personal experience within her native land, Yin conceived *Portable Cities* because of her increasingly mobile, global experience. Besides employing similar materials such as textiles, the works of Kim and Yin are both concerned about current issues relevant to many Asian women, such as changing identity, memory and mobility. Like many Asian countries, China moved into a capitalist economy by the late 1980s and 1990s, and its people were exposed to the worldwide effects of postmodernism and globalization. Chinese artists like Yin are increasingly confronted with changing identities, made more complex, ambiguous and fluid in a constant process of transformation. Traditional ways of living and thinking were rapidly disappearing. As China emerged to be a world power at the end of the twentieth century, volatile realities of identities in the postmodern age prompted a further re-examination to the notion of "Chinese artworks are becoming more significant, these works, evidently of Western influence, are also being questioned as to their essential Chinese identity. The evolution of modern Chinese art, from the effects of its socialist experience to rapidly incorporating Western popular culture and modernist forms, has become a palimpsest of a wide range of influences.

3. Conclusion

Beyond the study of South and East Asian story, the intellectual engagement of Asian modernity and modernism has also been expanded to the context of South-East Asia. The years of colonial domination in South-East Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, have compelled the previously colonized nations to re-examine their positions as objects of imperialism. During colonization, their cultural histories were constructed within the confines of the hegemonic discourse of their imperial masters. As discussed above, biased Eurocentric notions tend to prevent Western countries from viewing Third World art in the same way that the ex-colonized peoples perceive their own artistic traditions. This has raised concerns about the way art history in the region is defined. However, as we have discussed, forms of modernism that have evolved outside the West can no longer be simplistically interpreted because of their colonial histories and associations with the indigenous. Rather than treating Asia as an undifferentiated geographic mass, whose modern artistic production is perceived as mimetic and derivative, the development of modern Asian art discourse should be seen as involving appropriate adaptations of Western modernism and characteristics distinctive to each of the different national contexts.

This article demonstrates that modernism has had a long and complex history in Asia. The discussion also reveals the intricate links between modernism, modernity and modernization, and has implications of the complex relationships between modernism, imperialism and colonialism. As concepts and practices that originated in Europe became increasingly domesticated in different contexts around the world, the notion of centre/periphery and evolving postcolonial subjectivities should be questioned. As the notion of a universal European art canon and its historiography are increasingly challenged, the discourse of art and the definition of modernism should alter accordingly. The history of modern art thus has to keep relevant by including discussions on and communication with non-Western cultures. Many Asian countries have worked hard to transplant modernism into their own cultures. Cross-cultural understanding of the richness and complexity of various Asian modernisms in this article hopes to reveal the artists' articulation of their subjective histories in this region.

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Notes

Note 1. See Zhaoming Qian's The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens (2003) and Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams (1995).

Note 2. Perspectivism is a philosophical concept developed by Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche proposed that the conception of all ideas should take place from particular perspectives; that there are numerous possibilities and many conceptual methods that can determine the result of a judgment in truth. Given that there is no truth outside of a perspective, Nietzsche argued that the very idea of an absolute truth is incomprehensible. It is through Nietzsche's idea of perspectivism that the world of absolutes, as posited by some philosophers, becomes contradictory. See Friedrich Nietzsche (1990), *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books; and Clark, Maudemarie (1990), *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Note 3. In the late nineteenth century, a rising number of Chinese art associations or societies were founded, particularly in urbanized port cities such as Shanghai. Other treaty ports included important cities such as Nanjing and Guangzhou. The opening of the treaty ports in China resulted in the rapid development of financial and cultural arenas in these places. Examples of the art associations formed in late nineteenth-century Shanghai included the Duckweed Blossom Society for Painting and Calligraphy (*Pinghuashe shuhuahui*) and Feidan Pavilion Painting and Calligraphy Society (*Feidange shuhuahui*). These associations specialized in traditional ink paintings but adapted Western-style painting techniques to reform ink painting. See "Painting of China's New Metropolis: The Shanghai School, 1850-1900" by Shan Guolin, in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen.

Table 1. Some Major Art Movements that Emerged in Asia in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Cer	ituries.

School or Style	Period	Country	Description
Shanghai School of Art	1850-1900s	China	The Shanghai School built on traditional Chinese painting but introduced novel elements by incorporating Western styles, urban culture, calligraphy and folk art.
Lingnan School of Art	From 1890s, proliferated in early 1900s.	China	Based in southern China, Japan-trained founders of the school Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren sought to create a New Chinese Painting (<i>xin</i> <i>guohua</i>) style by adopting aspects of Japanese <i>Nihonga</i> and Western art.
The Chinese Western-Style Art Movement	From 1902, most active in 1920s and 1930s.	China	The 1902 educational reforms transformed methods of teaching in Chinese schools and introduced Western art education. The 1910s and early 1920s saw an increasing number of Chinese artists travelling to Japan and Europe for modern art training.
Yōga (Represented by the Technical Art School or Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō)	From 1870s (Technical Art School was founded in 1876).	Japan	$Y \bar{o} ga$ refers to those Western-style paintings produced by Japanese artists since the Meiji era to distinguish such works from indigenous traditional paintings. The Technical Art School was established by the Meiji government as Japan's first dedicated $Y \bar{o} ga$ art school. Foreign teachers, such as Italian artist Antonio Fontanesi, were hired to impart latest Western techniques.
(Neo-) <i>Nihonga</i> (Represented by the Tokyo School of Fine Arts or <i>Tokyo Bijutsu</i> <i>Gakkō</i>)	From 1870s (Tokyo School was founded in 1889).	Japan	<i>Nihonga</i> , a term coined in Meiji era, refers to Japanese-style paintings produced in traditional techniques and materials and with traditional artistic conventions. Later or neo- <i>Nihonga</i> artists transformed the style of painting by incorporating Western techniques such as chiaroscuro into traditional materials and formats.
Bengal School of Art	From 1907	India	During the British Raj rule, the Bengal School emerged as an <i>avant garde</i> and nationalist movement as atavistic reaction to academic art styles previously promoted in India.
Western-Style Painting in Korea	From 1910s	Korea	The introduction of Western-style painting techniques in 1910s attracted a number of Korean artists to pursue oil painting. Traditional Korean ink painting also began to incorporate certain elements of Western styles.