A Study of Kwon Kisoo's Paintings : focused on The 'Four Gracious Plants' and 'Dongguri'

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ABSTRACT

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초 록

권기수는 한국의 가장 촉망되는 화가 중 한사람이다. 그의 작품에는 많은 동양 예술의 비유들과 철학이 담겨져 있다. 화가로서, 권기수는 그의 그림에 동양적 사상과 현대적 사상을 모두 채택하였다. 그의 주요 주제들은 '매화꽃, 국화, 난초 그리고 대나무'이다. 이 식물들은 한국에서 '사군자'라고 알려졌으나, 영어로 '네 개의 품위 있는 식물' 또는 '네 개의 온화한 식물' 번역되기도 한다. 또한 이 식물들은 네 개의 계절을 나타낸다. 그들은 각기 다른 환경에서 자라나고, 동양 미술에서 이 식물들의 품격과 지성은 매우 중요하게 여겨진다. 권기수 역시 그의 작품 속에 사군자를 소재로 많이 사용하고 있다.

그의 모든 작품에는 '동구리'라는 캐릭터가 나온다. 2002년에 빠른 붓 스트로크에 의해 고안된 동구리는 권기수의 작품에서 주요한 캐릭터이다. 동글동글하고 귀여운 인상의 동구리는 많은 사람들에게 칭찬과 사랑을 받는다. 동구리는 보통 '사군자' 가운데 살고 있다. 바위와 산과 같이 특색 있는 지역에 있는 '사군자'는 동구리가 살고 있는 곳이다. 동구리는 또한 등산, 달리기, 앉기 등과 같이 다양한 동작을 취하고 있다. 이 모든 동작들이 이번 과제에서 해석되어온 은유를 묘사한다.

주제어 : 사군자, 동구리, 은유, 모티브, 캐릭터

I. Introduction

Oriental art depicts objects and motifs which convey a different meaning beyond what is seen. This way of representing objects symbolically is known as metaphor. Kwon Kisoo is one of the most famous painters in Korea today. His paintings are full of rich visual motifs and metaphors. Oriental art is rich in metaphors. These metaphors represent philosophies and virtues. Some of these virtues describe the nature of human beings. Kwon's work is an expression of his unique aesthetic qualities, which were gained through his education in oriental art and other forms of art. His paintings are full of interesting interpretations. His paintings are a blend of oriental and modern art. The use of 'The Four Gracious plants' or 'The Four Gentle plants' and 'Dongguri' are dominant features in Kwon Kisoo's paintings. These two main features form the basics of Kwon Kisoo's paintings. The development of 'Dongguri' can be described as his best achievement in his paintings. 'Dongguri' is an icon which is unique to only Kwon Kisoo. This study is based on how Kwon Kisoo adapts the 'Four Gracious Plants' and 'Dongguri' to convey metaphors.

1. Purpose and Scope

Following the development of the icon 'Dongguri', Kwon Kisoo's paintings have become very popular in Korea and overseas. It is for this purpose that this research has been done to find out about his concepts and how he uses metaphor to convey meaning in his work. This research seeks to find out the answers to the following:

1. Influences and Philosophies of Kwon Kisoo
2. Metaphors of the 'Four Gracious plants'
3. Character Analysis of 'Dongguri'

2. Methodology

The method used in this research paper is an interpretation of information collected from various sources, including Kwon Kisoo himself. In finding out about Kwon Kisoo's metaphors, which is the focus for this study, it is relevant to know the history of the 'Four Gracious plants' and 'Dongguri'. The first procedure, therefore, finds out some of the philosophies that influenced Kwon Kisoo.

The next procedure is how the 'Four Gracious plants' have been represented in his paintings. This will be done by showing figures and tables. The metaphors are explained in detail using clearly elaborated paragraphs of text.

In seeking to know how 'Dongguri' came about, this research provides information on the development of 'Dongguri' and its meaning both from the view of the artist and the researcher.

II. Influences on Kwon Kisoo's paintings

Kwon Kisoo's art is almost impossible to classify according to the artist himself. This emanates from the fact that he takes inspirations from a variety of art concepts. His paintings are usually a mixture of different philosophes embedded in traditional and modern art. Among some of the philosophes he adapted are found in Chinese, Japanese and Korean art etc.

1. Chinese art

Chinese art is one the oldest art forms in the world and accounts for early forms of oriental art and full of metaphorical concepts and beauty. Literati painting in chinese art was conceived as a mode through which the Confucian 'junzi' (noble person) expressed his ethical personality¹⁾ This form of painting is based on the fact that brush strokes reveal the inner character of the painter and communicates through the representation of human figures and nature. This concept is comparable with Kwon Kisoo's paintings which began with brush strokes. Among the painters who inspired Kwon Kisoo are Huang-Gongwang, (황공망) Ma-hapa (마하파), Sokdo(석도), Wosechang(오세창), Je-beksok(제백석) to mention but a few²⁾. Below are examples of their works.

Fig 1. Examples of chinese paintings³⁾

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1) Indiana University, Traditions of Literati Painting, EALC E232, R. Eno, Spring 2008

2) Kwon Kisoo's art development was influenced by the study of philosophies in Chinese art. He stated in the email received dated 2015/05/07

2. Japanese Wood block

Kwon Ki Soo's paintings were also greatly influenced by themes in Japanese Wood block prints (Ukiyo-e) which he described as 'stunning'. Japanese wood block prints have detailed compositions, intricate patterns and vibrant colours. A critical look of Kwon Ki Soo's paintings reveal the use of bright colours and bold composition of the Japanese Wood blocks. Famous among the Japanese woodblock artists is Katsushika Hokusai⁴⁾. The wood blocks were mainly landscape paintings with natural rivers, grass, portraits, oceans and trees.

Fig 2. Examples of Japanese Woodblock prints⁵⁾

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3) Google, www.google.com Keywords: Literati Painting, images

4) Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hokusai>, Keywords: Katsushika Hokusai

5) Google, www.google.com Keywords: Japanese Woodblock

3. Korean Art

Another source of inspiration for Kwon Kisoo is Korean Art during the Choson dynasty (1339-1910). Before the Choson dynasty was formed, Korean was also heavily influenced by Buddhism; however in the Choson period most of the paintings focussed on Confucianism. Notable painters of the Choson kingdom are 안견(Angyeon), 정선(Jeonsong), 김홍도(Kim Hong-do), 신윤복(Shin Yukbok), 김정희(Kim Jeong hu), 강희안(Kim Hui-an), 이인문,(I-anmun), 강세황(Kan Se-hwong) and 전기(Jogki).etc

Fig 3. Examples of Korean paintings during the Choson Dynasty⁶⁾

Kwon Ki Soo's work has been described by some critics as Pop art⁷⁾. His paintings have been classified by some

6) Google, www.google.com Keywords: 안견, 정선, 김홍도, 신윤복, 김정희, 강희안, 이문, 강세황

analysts as Pop art because they become very popular in Korea. Pop art means art of popular culture. One of the most famous Pop artists is Keith Haring; whose use of elements has some similarities with Kwon Ki Soo's works. Although not a major influence to Kwon Kisoo, he also employs the use of bold outlines and vibrant colours. Pop artists make use of symbolized and distorted characters to convey their meanings; however Kwon Kisoo has developed his own character which runs through his paintings⁸⁾. In the examples below, we see the use of bold outlines by Keith Haring and Kwon Kisoo.

Fig 4. Examples of Keith Haring's bold outlines in comparison with Kwon Kisoo⁹⁾.

7) Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_art. Keywords: Pop Art

8) Kwonkisoo, <http://kwonkisoo.com/xs/Text/2431>, Keywords: text

9) Google: www.google.com, Keywords: Pop Art

III. The 'Four Gracious Plants'

The 'Four Gracious plants' are popularly known as 'The Four Gentle plants'(사군자). They have been used in Chinese painting since the time of the Chinese Song Dynasty (960-1279) because of their refined beauty. Later, they were used in East Asia by artists in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam¹⁰⁾. The term compares the four plants to Confucianist junzi, or "gentlemen". They are most typically depicted in traditional ink and wash painting and they belong to the category of bird-and-flower painting in Chinese art¹¹⁾. The artist's favourite motifs, such as plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemum and bamboo are drawn from traditional sumi painting¹²⁾. These four plants, fundamental artistic motifs in sumi painting, are also symbolic representations of a scholarly life and literati culture ¹³⁾

Kwon Kisoo simplifies the drawing of these plants and creates his own motifs which characterizes his paintings. The use of these plants is a chinese idea of comparing human character to the four plants. They are also used not only as realistic objects but metaphor. In the use of the four gracious plants, he expands his knowledge of traditional folk painting and western art to create symbolic meanings in his paintings.

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10) Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Gentlemen, Keywords: Four Gentlemen

11) Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Gentlemen, Keywords: Four Gentlemen

12) Kwonkisoo, <http://kwonkisoo.com/xen/Text/2431>, Keywords: text

13) Kwonkisoo, <http://kwonkisoo.com/xen/Text/2431>, Keywords: text

Motif	Metaphorical meaning
PLUM BLOSSOMS	winter, beauty, undying love, hope
CHRYSANTHEMUM	autumn, courage, endurance, vitality
ORCHIDS	spring, modesty, elegance
BAMBOOS	summer, strength, longevity

Table 1. Visual Motifs: The Four Gentlemen or Four Gracious Plants

Plum blossoms represents winter, beauty¹⁴⁾. This is because Plum blossoms produce fruits in the unproductive season of winter. They are the first to bloom in the spring. During winter the colour of their flowers creates a contrast between the sky and snow. This makes it the most beautiful flower among other flowers during the winter; hence a sign of undying love¹⁵⁾. Kwon Kisoo's use of plum blossoms metaphorically represents the winter and a sign of hope and beauty. In his paintings, there is a constant display of beauty by the use of plum blossoms in a variety of colours.

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14) Kwonkisoo, <http://kwonkisoo.com/xs/Text/2431>, Keywords: text

15) Zhiyan Cong, Qi Baishi, The Soul of Chinese Painting, Center for Chinese Art, William Paterson University
<http://www.wpunj.edu/dotAsset/200192.pdf>

Fig 5. Plum blossoms ¹⁶⁾

Chrysanthemum is also a strong plant and represents courage and endurance¹⁷⁾ because it is the last flower to bloom in mid-autumn. Autumn is a season when most plants shear their leaves; however this is a time chrysanthemum begins to grow. Chrysanthemum also represents vitality because of its fragrance. When Kwon Kisoo began his work, he persisted in his quest to develop his paintings until it became popular in Korea and overseas. His persistence to develop his concept can be compared to the strong character of this plant which blooms in mid-autumn.

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16) Google, www.google.com. keywords: plum blossoms

17) Maningning C. Miclat, *The Visual Poetry of Chinese Bamboo: Some Notes on Traditional Chinese Xieyi Painting*, *Humanities Dilima* Vol 1, No 1 (2000) Pg, 29-30

Fig 5. Chrysanthemum¹⁸⁾

Orchids were grown in deep mountain valleys, orchids are one of the top ten well-known flowers in China because of its elegance. Orchids are known to grow under rocks or under the root of trees. This character of is a metaphor of modesty in service and elegance¹⁹⁾. The orchid shapes are formed by the free flowing fountains in Kwon Kisoo's illustrations especially in his painting titled 'The Fountain, 2008'. Kwon Kisoo use of orchids also represent water waves.

Fig 7. Orchids²⁰⁾

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18) Google, www.google.com. keywords: Chrysanthemum

19) Zhiynan Cong, Qi Baishi The Soul of Chinese Painting, Center for Chinese Art, William Paterson University
<http://www.wpunj.edu/dotAsset/200192.pdf>

20) Google, www.google.com. keywords: Orchids

Bamboos are very strong vertical plants and have a lot of uses. The use of bamboo is also a well-known tradition in Chinese paintings representing art for the educated people. A bamboo is a plant that grows all year round. Even in the hardest weather conditions it remains green; hence a metaphor of strength and longevity²¹⁾ He illustrates bamboo forests in his works by the use of vertical poles with flowers (plums, orchids, chrysanthemum) around them. Bamboo can also be linked to the strength and vitality of the 'Dongguri'²²⁾.

Fig 8. Bamboos²³⁾

Lines and shapes are used to represent the 'Four Gracious Plants' in Kwon Kisoo's paintings. They are also portrayed in vibrant colours. Visual motifs and backgrounds all take distinct colours that make easily identified.

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21) Chinese Symbols, British Museum ,

Pg 1 http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Chinese_symbols.pdf

22) Y. Shim Chung, Ki Soo Kwon' s Being with Plum: In the Space of the Ideal and the Real, <http://kwonkissoo.com/xs/Text/2431>, 2010

23) Google, www.google.com. keywords: Bamboos

Visual Element	How its use	Visual Meaning
Lines	Spiral, bold, thick, thin	movement, mood
Shapes	circles, squares, rectangles, squares	2D and 3D space,

Table 2. Lines, Shapes

The use of lines is also very important to note. The lines are carefully rendered in spiral, bold, thick and thin. All these lines form the contour of the various elements eg. flowers, fountains, towoo, bamboos, etc. The lines also show various movements of 'Dongguri' and mood. eg. smile on the face of 'Dongguri'.

Among the shapes created in his paintings are squares, circles, squares, rectangles, ovals, and occasionally three dimensional cubes which he uses to represent rocks. All these shapes are painted in different ways to create artistic impression. It is very clear to see the round shape of Dongguri head and the shape of its body. The use of shapes in combination with lines are also use to show 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional space.

Fig 9. Application of Visual motifs in Silver Pond in Red Forest and Sky high Pilgrimage, 2011²⁴⁾

IV. Character Analysis of 'Dongguri'

This chapter will analyse 'Dongguri' as a character and icon of Kwon Kisoo. 'Dongguri' also presents a lot of metaphors. Before Kwon kisoo developed 'Dongguri' and its features, he drew with fast brush strokes. These initial paintings of 'Dongguri' were not very smooth in nature. This was because Kwon Kisoo was still trying to explore his creativity. 'Dongguri' came in being by summer in 2002.

Fig 10. Character development in 2002 and 2003 ²⁵⁾

24) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

25) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

Fig 11. Development of Paintings in 2003²⁶⁾

In <Fig 11> above are examples of paintings in 2003. In 2003, Kwon Kisoo made paintings of 'Dongguri' with less details in the background. it must be noted that by 2003, 'Dongguri' had become a complete and standardized icon.

In Fig 12. below is one of Kwon Kisoo's famous paintings namely: 'Four seasons 2007'. It is very clear to see that the depiction of 'Dongguri' in a more vibrant environment than paintings in 2003.

Fig 12. Four Seasons, 2007, Development of Paintings 2007²⁷⁾

26) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

27) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

	Features	Metaphors
	1. Placid Smile (Warm and Gentle)	1. Hope, Reflection
	2. Movements (Running, climbing, Standing, Resting)	2. Human traits Friendliness, Dialogue, Everyday activities, Restlessness, Carefree life, Freedom

Table 3. characteristics of 'Dongguri'

Fig 13. The Placid smile of the Korean Buddha

The placid smile of 'Dongguri' is an evident feature. Placid smile is the warm and gentle facial expression unique to Koreans²⁸⁾. This placid smile can also be seen on the face of Korean buddhist statues²⁹⁾. Kwon Kisoo has tried to represent a placid smile on 'Dongguri'. A placid smile is a metaphor of reflection and hope. In life people give a faint smile when they reflect on their lives. 'Dongguri' is a

28) Dongguri: <http://www.dongguri.com/UntitledFrame-6-english.htm>

29) Kwonkisoo: <http://kwonkisoo.com/xo/Text/2425>

reflection of Kwon Kisoo's thoughts and state of mind. Kwon Kisoo reflected on a lot of issues regarding his paintings. Fig. 13 above shows the 'Unification Buddha' in South Korea which represented hope for the Korean people during the reunification of the North and South.

'Dongguri' is also a metaphor of human traits³⁰⁾. This can be seen in the movements of 'Dongguri' like running, climbing, sitting, standing and resting. All these actions are metaphors. 'Dongguri' is always seen around with another character which looks like a pet; usually called 'Towoo'. This action of 'Dongguri' describes a metaphor of friendliness and dialogue.

Fig 14. Flame Flower 2008³¹⁾ is an example of how 'Dongguri' was created relationships with his pet

Dongguri's busy movements is also a metaphor of everyday

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30) Korea NewsFocus:

<http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/People/view?articleId=101481>

31) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

activities and restlessness. Kwon Kisoo tried to represent this idea in his paintings. He himself was restless because he was trying to create something unique. In real life, Koreans also engage in various activities during the day which makes them restless sometimes. All these actions of 'Dongguri' is a means through which Kwon Kisoo communicates his ideas to people.

Fig 15. Cube in the rain forest³²⁾ showing metaphors of everyday life activities and people

'Dongguri' can sometimes be seen climbing and running around in Kwon Kisoo's paintings. This is a metaphor of living a new carefree life³³⁾. As observed in the earlier paintings in 2003, 'Dongguri' was a very lonely character. From 2007, it can be observed that 'Dongguri' is expressing

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32) Naver: www.naver.com, keywords: 권기수

33) EVENTFUL:

<http://eventful.com/seoul/events/kisoo-kwon-reflection-gangnam-space-/E0-001-044629316-4>

a carefree life. Carefree life means a life of freedom. Some of these metaphors of carefree life can be seen in 'Red River 2010' as seen in Fig. 14 which depicts 'Dongguri' standing on a rainbow.

Fig 16. On the Red Rainbow, Red River 2010³⁴⁾

V. Conclusion

In this research, the author has been able to unravel some metaphors which are present in Kwon kisoo's painting. It should be noted that Kwon Kisoo's paintings presents lots of meanings which are subject to other interpretations.

Firstly, Kwon Kisoo uses plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemum and bamboos as metaphors. These plants are known as the 'Four Gracious Plants' or 'Four Gentle Plants'. The gentle character of these plants can be compared to the noble character of gentlemen. In chinese iconography, these plants represent noble character which is perfect to live a good life. They also represent the four seasons. As a young painter, Kwon Kisoo adapted the metaphors present in the

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34) Naver: www.naver.com, Keywords: 권기수

four gracious plants such as beauty, undying love, courage, endurance, modesty, elegance and strength. These qualities helped him to develop his creativity of the 'Four Gracious Plants' in his paintings.

Secondly, Kwon Kisoo's has developed a character called 'Dongguri'. 'Dongguri' is a metaphor of human beings and traits. 'Dongguri' is characterized by movements such as running, climbing, standing and resting. These movements of 'Dongguri' are metaphors of friendliness, dialogue, everyday activities, restlessness, carefree life and Freedom.

Lastly, Kwon Kisoo's paintings have contributed to a number of products such as wallpapers, bow-ties, eco- bags, etc. As a young artist, he has achieved a lot of recognition by participating in many exhibitions in Korea and abroad. His paintings are indeed, a source of inspiration.

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Painting, 황공망, 마하과, 석도, 오세창, Je-beksok, 안건, 정선,
김홍도, 신윤복, 김정희, 강희안, 이문, 강세황
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ABSTRACT

A Study of Kwon Kisoo's Paintings : focused on The 'Four Gracious Plants' and 'Dongguri'

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Kwon Kisoo is one of the most promising artist in Korea. His paintings portray a lot of metaphors and philosophies in oriental art. As an artist, he adapts both oriental and contemporary ideas to make his paintings. His main motifs are Plum blossoms, Chrysanthemum, Orchid and Bamboos. These plants are known as 'Sa-gonja' in Korean but translated as the 'Four Gracious plants' or the 'Four Gentle Plants in english'. These noble plants represent the four seasons. They grow in different weather conditions. In oriental art, these plants are considered very important for their qualities. These qualities are important attributes for gentlemen in literati painting. The drawing of the 'Four Gracious Plants' in Kwon Kisoo's paintings is simplified. He uses lines, shapes and colour to create contours of the motifs. In his paintings, there is another icon he calls 'Dongguri'. Dongguri is the main character in Kwon Kisoo's paintings. It was developed in 2002 by fast brush strokes. Dongguri is an admired character because it looks like very cute in Kwon Kisoo's paintings. Dongguri is always seen living in the midst of the 'Four Gracious Plants'. The 'Four Gracious Plants' with other landscape features like rocks and mountains are places 'Dongguri' lives. Dongguri is also often found performing a lot of actions like climbing, running, sitting etc. All these actions depict metaphors which have been unraveled in this study.

Key Word : The Four Gracious Plants, Dongguri, Metaphor, Motif, Character

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