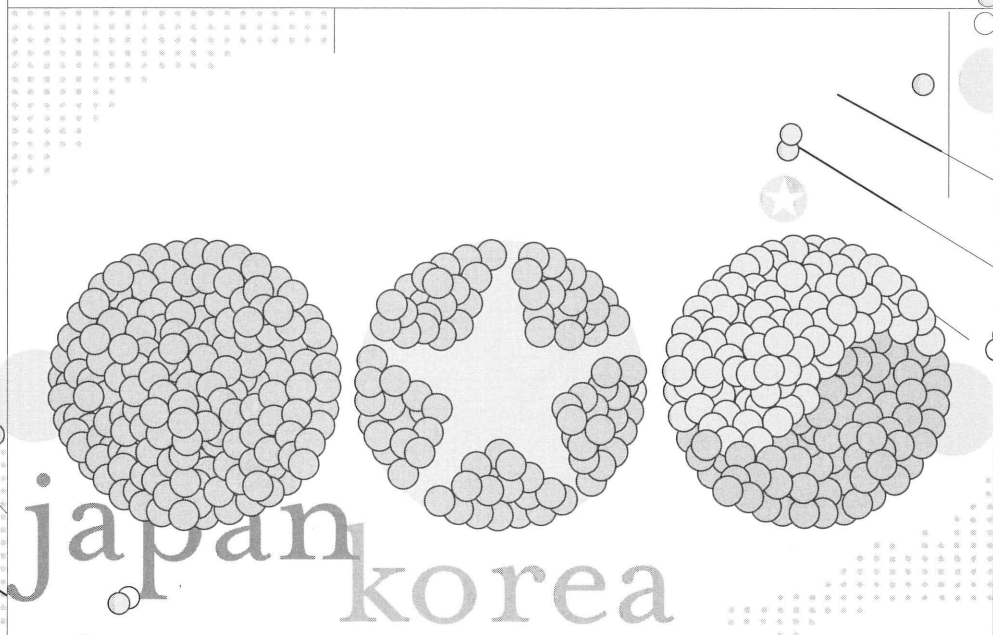


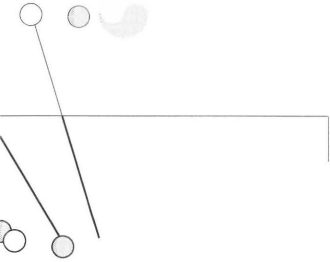
MAPPING A GRAPHIC  
GENOME :

*A cross-cultural comparison  
between Korean and Japanese designers*

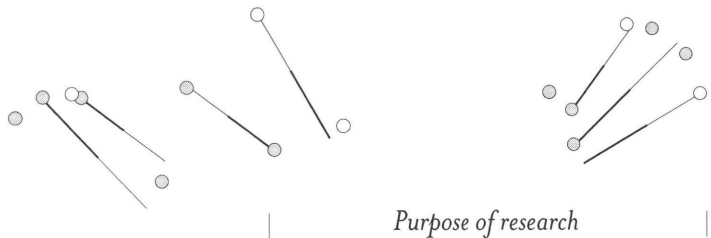
*Min-Soo Kim*



In this paper, the author proposes substitution of the biotechnical term genome for the aesthetic term style. The author does so in order to argue that a graphic designer's style is not purely an independent representation in visual form of factors interacting with free will, individual beliefs and personal talents. His or her style is also influenced by tacit knowing, to use Michael Polyani's words, by the phylogenetic factors imbued by a cultural context. The author posits that just as a map of genome — the collectivity of genes and chromosomes — explain the life structure and condition of an organism, it would be possible to trace a cultural genome by identifying designers' thoughts and actual works. What kinds of historical contexts, subject matters and inner logics are interwoven in the works of contemporary Korean and Japanese graphic designers? In what ways can such inter-related conditions and perceptions be compared and related to one another?



For specific analyses in this paper, the author uses selected works by designers who participated in the exhibition, "Contemporary East Asian Typographic Arts," held at the Seoul Art Center in late fall, 1999. The designers included in the exhibition are deemed well suited for this research, since the organizing committee of the exhibition carefully selected representative designers from Japan, China and Korea. Unfortunately no critical interpretation came out of this exhibit. The fact that it opened and closed without receiving criticism reflects the state of the field, which in Thomas Kuhn's words, remain in a pre-paradigmatic state. That is, it is a field of knowledge without a shared view of its concerns, common models of action and judgment and a baseline from which to evaluate particular exploration. From this missing inquiry, the issue of mapping a graphic genome emerges.



*Purpose of research*

The purpose of this paper is to consider the human graphic designer (a biological being) and his/her work as a genome, the collective grouping of genes and chromosomes as discussed in genetic engineering. By means of this conceptual ploy, this paper intends to provide some data for drawing a genome map of Korean and Japanese graphic designers.



KOREA:	JAPAN:	CHINA:	
Young-Jae Cho, 1935	Ikko Tanaka, 1930 Masayoshi Nakajo, 1933		193
Byung-Kyoo Chung, 1946	Katsumi Asaba, 1940	Taikeung Kan, 1942 Yungsung Hwang, 1943 Jingren Lu, 1947	194
Sang-Soo Ahn, 1952 Ki-Heun Shur, 1953	Kenya Hara, 1958	Alan Chan, 1950 Xu Wang, 1955	195
Joo-Sung Kim, 1960	Eiji Yamada, 1965	Jiaying Han, 1961	196

TABLE 1: |  
The Distribution of Designers according to  
Their Nationalities and Ages

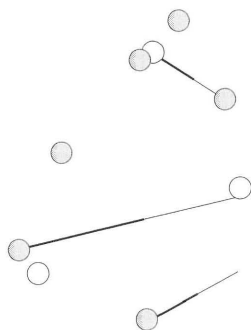
**Background:**  
the sampling method and delimitations

On September 4, 1999, an exhibition titled "Contemporary East Asian Typographic Arts" opened at Seoul Arts Center, Calligraphy Hall. Included in this exhibition were seventy works of typographic design, fifty visual art works and fifty works of calligraphy; they collectively embodied the ecology of East Asian graphic design. While offering a good opportunity to appreciate from a comparative point of view the present progression of contemporary graphic design in the Northeast Asian region, the exhibition was regrettably under attended not only by the general public but also by insiders in the field of design. Under the theme of typography, the exhibition brought together rarely seen works by Korean, Japanese and Chinese designers. Some of the participating designers were: from Korea, Young-Jae Cho, Byung-Kyoo Chung, Sang-Soo Ahn, Ki-Heun Shur, Joo-Sung Kim; from China, Taikeung Kan, Jingren Lu, Alan Chan, Xu Wang, Jiaying Han, Yungsung Hwang; from Japan,

Ikko Tanaka, Masayoshi Nakajo, Katsumi Asaba, Kenya Hara, Eiji Yamada. Seen altogether, however, it was clear that grouping the displayed works together under one theme of typography was not appropriate. Rather, the list of works encompassed diverse genres such as posters, calendars and book design, besides typography. An unexpected result of this oversight on the part of the organizers was that the diverse works provided a good sample, with which one could broadly analyze the historical, cultural chromosomes and genes of individual designers within the larger genome of East Asian graphic design. Table I shows the distribution of these designers according to their nationalities and ages.

Although it partially misses certain generations of designers, table I does thoroughly embrace five generations born in the twentieth century, from Eiji Yamada in his thirties to Ikko Tanaka in his seventies. It shows that the exhibition brought to one place the thoughts and works of the five generations. If we were to divide the twentieth-century by its most dramatic moment — i.e., World War II — the designers can also be split into prewar and postwar groups. Korean Young-Jae Cho, Japanese Ikko Tanaka, Masayoshi Nakajo and Katsumi Asaba, and Chinese Taikeung Kan and Yung-sung Hwang belong to the prewar group. These are also figures, assisted by their subsequent generations, that led postwar graphic design in Northeast Asia. In the historical context of the Japan-Korea relationship, especially, the prewar-generation Japanese and Korean designers were in a colonizer-colonized relationship during the period of the occupation of the latter by the former. On the other hand, we need to remember that the prewar generations in China experienced, while in their youth, Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, a socialist movement that sought fundamental change, i.e., the Cultural Revolution. The reason I am drawing this historical line is not in order to argue that a human designer and his/her work exist necessarily in a fatalist situation of limits. Rather, my intention here is to emphasize the mutual effects which a historical time-space and an individual or a group have on one another.

This paper deals with a relatively small group of samples, and thus is clearly too limited to make generalizations from it on the total genome of Northeast Asian graphic design. Since the exhibition, "Contemporary East Asian Typographic Arts," (if we can safely assume that the very premise of the exhibition was not fallacious) intentionally selected representative Korean and Japanese designers, whose stature merits public discussion, one can presume that they are sufficiently qualified as legitimate samples. Generally speaking, when the qualitative aspect, rather than the quantitative size of a sample, is emphasized, some truth can be deduced from it. In social scientific methodology, this sort of research is called a qualitative research or a case study. In the following, by focusing on individual cases, I provide evidence that helps us compare and examine the character of Korean and Japanese graphic designs as well as the working logics of individual designers that cannot be explained conceptually. The focal point of this essay is on Japan-Korea, and thus, an analysis of the genome of Chinese graphic designers is unfortunately left out of the discussion. Suffice it to say here, however, that recently having joined the WTO (World Trade Organization) and now preparing for the 2008 Summer Olympics, China is very likely to exercise much influence on the cultural ecology, not to mention on the politics and economy of Northeast Asia.



| *Definition of terms* |

### Graphic Design

Until recently, the term primarily meant design that deals with two-dimensional flat images produced through printing media, e.g., posters. Of late, it has been officially replaced by another term, visual communication, at the October 2000 Seoul Conference of Icofrada, in order to include various connotations that include "image, text, space, movement, time, sound and interaction." "A Manifesto for the Education of the New Millennium" adopted at that time declares that graphic design has become a dead expression that does not adequately address today's design practices. The reason I am insisting on the term in spite of this recent shift is because this essay considers the specific historical contexts in which these designers worked and produced and it is accurately defined as graphic design.

### Genome, Gene, DNA, Chromosome, Hereditary Character

In the following paragraphs, these terms are not used for their strict scientific definitions but rather as literary expressions — more specifically, as metaphors. That is, I consider the total characteristic of a (human) designer and his/her oeuvre as a genome, as the collective sum of genes and chromosomes. In genetic engineering, it is generally said that "there are 100 trillion cells, and within the nucleus of each cell are contained 23 pairs of chromosomes. Within each of the chromosomes, there are 100,000 genes. Each of these genes consists of 3.1 billion permuted pairs of four bases — Tyminine (T), Guanine (G), Cytosine (C), Adenine (A). A gene is composed of a double-helix pair of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA), and depending on how the pairs of bases are combined, the hereditary characters that constitute the human being's physical traits are determined."<sup>1</sup> The terms borrowed from this scientific definition, chromosome or hereditary character connotes the comprehensive style of a designer's work. And, a gene or DNA stands for the specific working logic and constitutive characteristics of imagery in his/her work.

<sup>1</sup>

Hwang, Chang-Ho. 2000. The Completion of a Draft for the Genome Project and Its Prospects. *Ohmynews*, June 27.

The double-helix structure of the genes  
of Japanese graphic design

2

Some of the prizes he has received include: Mainichi Industrial Design Award (1954, 1966, 1973), Tokyo Art Directors Club Medal (consecutively from 1957 to 1961, 1963, 1965, 1967-70, 1973, 1985, 1986), Japan Advertising Artists Club (1959), International Council of Industrial Editors Award (1964-65, 1969), Warsaw Poster Biennale Award (1968, 1970, 1972), Art Directors Club of New York (1986) and many others.

The only septuagenarian in the exhibition was Ikko Tanaka (1930-2002). Appropriate to his advanced age of 71, his reputation has been widely recognized. Not only in his native country (Japan), but also internationally, he has been praised as the representative star of Japanese graphic design. It is probably extremely rare to find someone other than Tanaka, who has swept practically all the prizes given in the field.<sup>2</sup> He graduated from Kyoto City College of Fine Arts (1947-1950), and worked for Kanebo Fabrics as a textile designer (1950-52), then for *Osaka Sankei Newspaper* as graphic designer (1952-57). After co-founding Nippon Design Center and serving as art director (1960-63) there, he established his own design studio Tanaka Design Atelier (1963-76) and changed its name in 1976 to Ikko Tanaka Design Studio, Tokyo,<sup>3</sup> this lasted until he died in 2002.

FIGURE 1: |

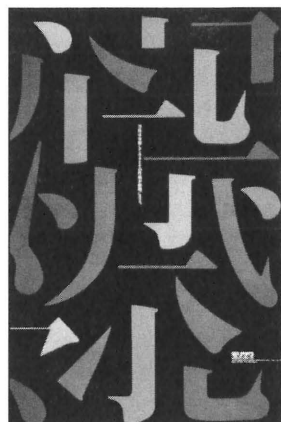
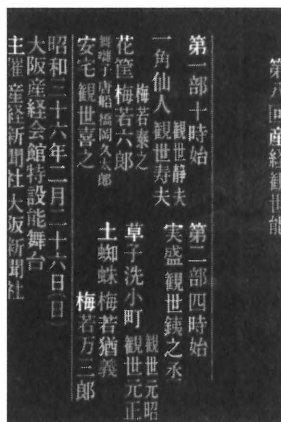
*Ikko Tanaka. Poster for the 8th Performance of the Kanze School of Noh Theater in Osaka, 1961.*

FIGURE 2: |

*Ikko Tanaka. Poster, Imagination of Letters, 1993.*

FIGURE 3: |

*Ikko Tanaka. Poster for the 28th Performance of Noh Theater in Osaka, 1981.*



One of his representative works "Poster Series for Sankei Kanze *Noh* Play (from 1954)" is an instructive example of his *oeuvre*. The chromosomes of his graphic design contained in the posters may be better analyzed once we understand the real identity of *Sankei Shimbun* (Newspaper), a supporter of Tanaka's work for forty years. Unlike other newspapers such as *Asahi* and *Mainichi*, which opposed the activities by the Coalition for a New History Textbook and Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (dedicated to the war heroes), *Sankei Shimbun* has submitted ultra-rightwing viewpoints, supporting and justifying these problematic political gestures and movements. It is because Tanaka's work possesses a particularly Japanese feel from the standpoint of ultra-rightwing politics, that *Sankei* has consistently supported the designer. Since 1953, with *Sankei Shimbun's* backing, Tanaka has produced a poster series promoting *Noh* Theater, the traditional Japanese stage drama originating in Osaka. The main characteristic of these posters is that the image, in most cases, feels like a 'stage of the traditional drama.' The background is often in a stark black like the stage backdrop of a *Noh* or *Kabuki* performance (FIGURE 1). This tendency is also found in the title covers and editorial design of the book *Japan Design*<sup>4</sup> for which Tanaka was a co-editor and art director. In other words, all the Japanese traditional images manifested in Tanaka's designs are placed on the stage like actors, moving surreptitiously (FIGURE 2).

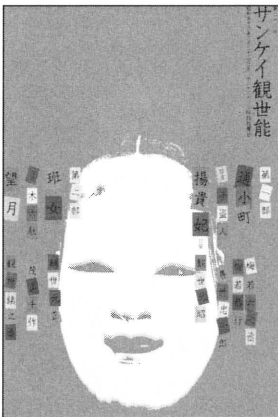
The typographic elements composed of diverse hues and Chinese characters resemble the brilliant and luxurious costumes in the traditional drama. Their 'brightness in the dark' enhances the visual tension — not unlike the histrionic contrast between a dark stage and the intensely-colored costumes in *Noh* (a widely popular dramatic performance since the medieval period). Evoking a decidedly Japanese ambiance, the image-effect of Tanaka's darkened backdrop controls visual elements, and by doing so, works as an apparatus that performs a dramaturge of 'theatricalized situation.' This is why he customarily uses black or single-toned, deeply saturated background colors (FIGURE 3).

3

Pendergast, Sara, editor. 1997. *Contemporary Designers*. New York: St Jones Press, 810.

4

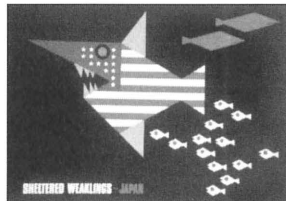
The book introduces Japanese crafts, art, forms, colors and imagery of design within the basic frame of Japan's four seasons. On the cover, Japanese traditional sweets of various colors and similar sizes are arranged with Seiko wristwatches. See Ikko, Tanaka and Koike Kazuko, editors. 1984. *Japan Design: The Four Seasons in Design*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.



We need to discuss more in depth the usage of black for background effect in Japanese graphic design. This aspect of Japanese design signifies that it has superseded the purely constructive pictorial surface achieved by Western abstract painting and graphic design. In terms of typography, the pictorial surface is what media theorist Walter J. Ong calls 'typographic space.'<sup>5</sup> Japanese typographic space, however, not only is a stage coded with tradition — as seen in the work of Tanaka — but also becomes a space of meditation that embodies the aesthetic of Zen, an especially Japanese world-view. In short, it frames a consciousness of existence or the universe of self. Here, some other examples relate — the work of Takashi Kono (born 1906), who is a respected first-generation designer, along with Hiromu Hara (1903-1986). Having served in the army in China and Indonesia during the Asia-Pacific War, after the end of the war Kono created a poster titled "Sheltered Weaklings—Japan" (FIGURE 4). In it, the black background signifies the international politics surrounding Japan in the early 1950s and Japan is represented by a school of pathetic fish docilely trailing an enormous shark (the United States). The tiny fish have diminutive white bodies and red circles for eyes. In the top right corner, two red sharks (the U.S.S.R and P.R.C.) are swimming in the opposite direction.

FIGURE 4: |  
*Takashi Kono. Poster, Sheltered Weaklings—Japan, 1953.*

FIGURE 5: |  
*Takashi Kono. Poster for Magazine Tanko, 1995.*



It appears that Kono, as a Japanese, had especially acute feelings towards the Cold War that began in the 1950s. He seems to have felt a certain self-hatred and boiling rage; even in the poster the red eyes of the tiny fish fittingly hold its designer's emotions. Those red circles are no longer the *hinomaru*, the blazing sun with radiating rays, which gloriously emblazoned the flag of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere flying high during the war. Instead, the postwar-version *hinomaru* fell from its prewar glory to the fate of the bloodshot eyes of the thirteen pitiful fish breathlessly trundling along under American guardianship. Furthermore, by making the number of the fish thirteen, Kono seems to code even the death of Japan with the numerological meaning of that particular number. That he intended to signify death by using the number 13 (according to the Western superstition) is clandestinely corroborated by the title written in English, not Japanese, "Sheltered Weaklings—Japan." Such a Japanese-style worldview embodied in the typographic space of this poster is also employed in symbolizing a space of Zen meditation in the "Poster for Magazine *Tanko*" (FIGURE 5). The persimmon, with a leaf still attached to its stem, is a traditional image of enlightenment, and often appears in Zen paintings. As Tanaka evokes the theatrical tension of the traditional stage performance, the black backdrop Kono employs here provides a dramatic contrast against the white shape of the persimmon — into which a moment of awakening is crystallized — and emphasizes that this is a space of meditation. The image is paired with the Sino-Japanese phrase in the lower half — it reads "Monthly Magazine of the Art of Tea, *Danko*" — and the image and text together delivers the message of the magazine that it is a world of meditation and tea ceremony.

The marriage of a tradition based on strict conservatism with modern sensibilities in techniques and expressions, found in Ikko Tanaka's work, has earned him a widely recognized, world-celebrity status. That is, the defining characteristic of his work, as exemplified by the "Imagination of Letters" (FIGURE 2), can be found in his bold patterning of Chinese character brush strokes and also in his modern abstraction of traditional Japanese visual elements, such as the *Noh*

5

Typographic space means the visual space that determines type-ness under the control of printing and encompasses not only the issue of composition of words into a text on paper but also the problem of placement of words and relative location amongst words. See Ong, Walter J. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Methuen.

or *Kabuki* stage, kimono clad women, masks and *ukiyo*e prints. The 1981 "Poster for UCLA Asian Performing Arts Institute" in which a woman in a kimono and a traditional hairdo is reduced to a drastic geometrical abstraction, is a particularly good example of his distinctive working method. This example, furthermore, bears out the argument that Tanaka is the Japanese designer, whose methodology most faithfully adheres to representing the Japanese identity which began to be formulated since the late nineteenth century in the early stage of modernization after the 1868 Meiji Restoration. In his work, one finds an unmistakable presence of 'Western technology, Japanese spirit' (和魂洋才, *Wakon, Yōsai* in Japanese; *Hwahon, Yangjae* in Korean), the watchword of modern Japanese art and culture industry. *Wakon, Yōsai* was a strategy of production that modern Japanese design adopted, in order to secure the identity of Japanese art and design in the brave new world by embracing the value systems and techniques of expression in Western art.<sup>6</sup>

6

Kim, Min-Soo. 1999. "The Roots and Shadows of *Hodori*: The Identity of Korean Graphic Design." *The Journal of Design Culture and Criticism*, 1, 59.

In the field of Japanese design, while sharing the spirit of *Wakon, Yōsai*, many graphic designers display quite distinctive individual styles of design. The interesting fact is that those authorities that represent today's contemporary Japanese graphic design unmistakably trace their lineage back to the generation born in the early 1930s, such as Ikko Tanaka. The list also includes Kiyoshi Awazu (born 1929), Mitsuo Katsui (1931), Kohei Sugiura (1932), Shigeo Fukuda (1932) and Tadanori Yokoo, born slightly later in 1936 but nonetheless firmly and inimitably established in the field. Their modes of expression are quite diverse: Awazu's utilization of the traditional brush painting technique, Katsui's pioneering use of cutting-edge computer graphics, Fukuda's contemporary humor and parody and Yokoo's pop art-ish popularism. In stark contrast to this illustrious roster, Kohei Sugiura stands alone, like a Zen monk. Although he was not included in the exhibition under consideration, his reputation in various fields — including graphics, editorial work, book design, etc. — is legendary. I personally consider the omission of Sugiura in the exhibition a fatal mistake and error. For the hereditary characters of all the designers in the exhibition, with the exception

of Ikko Tanaka — Masayoshi Nakazo, Katsumi Asaba, Kenya Hara, Eiji Yamada — partake of the double helix-structured DNA of Tanaka and Sugiura.

Sugiura's design style is quite removed from that of Tanaka's. It is a style of 'secular and dramatized modernization.' His work perhaps quietly argues that the project of modern Japanese design that has been advancing under the banner of *Wakon, Yōsai*, is actually a theatrical fiction. Instead of *Wakon, Yōsai*, — i. e., conjoining the Japanese spirit to modern technical processing — Sugiura's work seems to be a personification a (non-dialectic) monistic philosophy — 和魂和才, *Wakon, Wasai* (*Hwahon, Hwajae*) fusing Japanese spirit and technology together. And going one step further to a religious level, it embodies a pan-Asian spirit. This is precisely the point of departure in Sugiura's philosophy that is distinctive from that of Tanaka's. Sugiura has largely avoided commercial projects and instead focused on cultural posters and publishing projects. This distinctive self-positioning seems to partially originate from possessing unique genes that differ greatly from other Japanese graphic designers of the same generation; in his genes, one would find those of an architect. In 1955, he graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts with a degree, not in graphic design but in architecture. This educational pedigree is unfolding in diverse fields ranging from exhibition space, poster, catalog, magazine editing, as well as book design.<sup>7</sup>

Coincidentally, the very first work of Sugiura's I witnessed personally was an architectural space. At the 1985 exhibition "Tokyo: Form and Spirit" at the IBM Gallery in New York, I was impressed by the exhibition space designed by Sugiura in collaboration with the architect Toyo Ito. Supported by many organizations in the United States and Japan, this exhibition first opened in New York to start its long itinerary. At the time of my visit, I encountered the sight of many spectators lost in the work "The Reflecting Space," which Sugiura and Ito installed. Entering through an entrance in the shape of the seated Buddha silhouette, the spectator was led into an interior illuminated from below by countless mandalas — symbolizing the Bud-

7

Although Sugiura's prize-winning record isn't as spectacular as Tanaka's, he has still received quite a few important awards in his fields of speciality: Mainichi Industrial Design Award (1961), Kodansha Publishing Award (1970), Gold Medal at Leibzig Book Fair (1978, 1982), Minister of Education Industry Award (1982) etc. He worked as art director for many magazines, and once also served as a visiting professor at Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, a school reconstructed by former members of German Bauhaus (1964-65, 1966-67). After having been a professor at Tokyo Zokei University, since 1993, he is currently a professor at Kobe University. See Pendergast, *Contemporary Designers*, 795.

Friedman, Mildred, editor.  
1986. *Tokyo: Form and Spirit*. New  
York: Harry N. Abrams, 197.

I have argued that the flattening of line forms originates in *Japanisme* that catered to the Western taste in modern Japanese art in the era of Art Nouveau in the late nineteenth century. The tradition has been continuing through the Japanese term *zuan* (図案, a technique of stylized patterning). In Korean, the term *doan*, a transliterated usage of *zuan* has been used since the liberation (1945) and signifies such stylized design. See pages 54-55 in "The Roots and Shadows of *Hodori*."

dhist universe. S/he treads on a bridge composed of the geometric shapes of a square, a circle, a triangle and a half-circle — the four shapes each signifying earth, water, wind and ether (air)<sup>8</sup> Like this, Sugiura's work differs from the so-called Japanese tradition of stylized design<sup>9</sup> and the function of two-dimensional space in visual communication. Rather, it calls to mind a certain 'taste of deep existence' produced by meditation and enlightenment in an encounter with a three-dimensional space.

The seated Buddha's silhouette used for the entrance in "The Reflecting Space" was originally an experimental image from a poster design from the previous year. In 1984, the image was created in the "Poster for *Les Ateliers*, Paris," where an exhibition titled "Tradition and New Techniques" (*Tradition et Nouvelles Techniques*) took place. The work crystallizes the working method through which the designer's philosophy and logic of space were transformed into a representation (FIGURE 6). Produced via the technique of gold-color gradations printed in gravure on aluminum foil paper, the poster represents the hierarchical structure of the Buddhist universe according to a mathematical ratio. Two rows of mandala designs, five on each side, are placed on the side margins, flanking the main image. And vertically interspersed with the mandalas are also two rows of Sino-Japanese characters that read Tradition And (right) Modern Techniques (left). Here, the effect of the word message is highly minimized. Inscribed in the centrally placed radiant Buddha, is a turtle propping up a lotus flower and a Buddhist pavilion, all in turn placed on top of a square pedestal, depicted in three-dimensional perspective view. The position of the turtle is precisely where the Buddha's hands are; the hands are placed where the two ankles meet in the cross-legged meditation posture. The hands form the *mudra*<sup>10</sup> of meditation — two hands are interlocked by fingers and the ends of two thumbs meet. In other words, the visible shape of the turtle contains the invisible *mudra* of meditation — an absolute contrast between the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the culminating pagoda on top of the pavilion sparkles like a jewel at the pivotal point of the Buddha's forehead. In this poster design, Sugiura

elevated a rather hackneyed subject of the exhibition to the enlightenment of the meditating Buddha, i.e., the order of the universe that embraces all the tangible and the intangible.

In this way, in a departure from the predominant two-dimensional approach to design employed by most Japanese graphic designers, Kohei Sugiura seeks to represent a higher level of the spiritual world structured in three dimensions. His design exercises even more remarkable enduring power in editorial and book designs, since he considers 'the book as architecture.' As demonstrated in *A Collection of Tibetan Mandalas* published in limited edition by publishing house Kodansha in 1983, Sugiura's book design does not look at the book as a mere accumulation of flat surfaces of individual pieces of paper. This approach is well corroborated by a statement recently made at a symposium in Korea by book designer Hitoshi Suzuki, who had been Sugiura's assistant. Suzuki recalled that Sugiura "regarded a book as a certain solid object, rather than an accretion of flatness. He went beyond the cover design and dealt with the structure of the main body of text, thus controlling the whole book as one unit. He intended to transcend the common practice of considering the binding as only a matter of cover so that the outside of the book can interact with the inner pages."<sup>11</sup> To rephrase, Sugiura deems a printed and completed book an organic totality, a solid structure

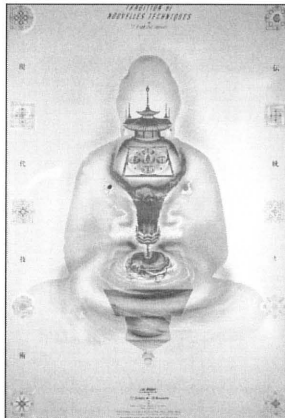
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*Mudra* (手印, Su-in in Korean) refers to the hand gesture seen in the images of the Buddha. Especially, the gesture of two hands one on top of another in the seated Buddha is called *Sun-jung-in*; the left palm is placed at the center of the body and the right palm is placed on top of it, while two thumbs meet at the ends. The *Mudra* signifies the Buddha's meditation under the Bodhi tree.

11

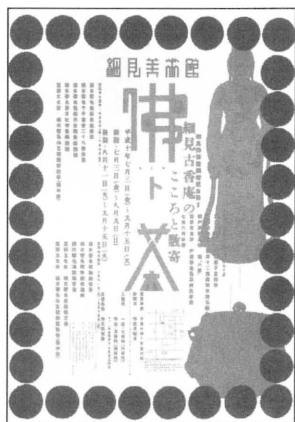
Suzuki, Hitoshi. 2002. "The Environment and Characteristics of Japanese Book Design," *Proceedings of the Symposium Japanese Book Design and the Identity of East Asian Design*. Seoul: Seoul Arts Center, Calligraphy Hall, September 2, 17.

FIGURE 6: Kohei Sugiura. *Poster for Les Ateliers Paris, 1984.*

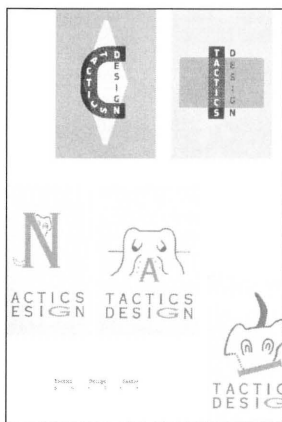


commensurable to an architectural construction. The completeness of a book should be assessed, thus, in a similar way to the way in which the success of a building is measured; according to its interaction with its users. If I were asked to describe Sugiura's book design, I would call it an architecture of cosmic meditation. It goes beyond design and reaches into the realm of philosophy.

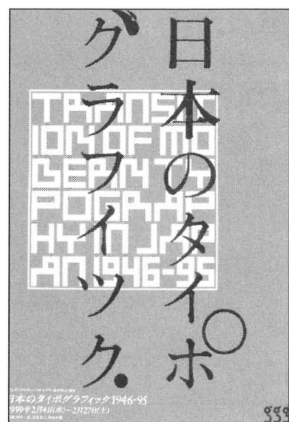
If we recognize Tanaka and Sugiura as the two axes of Japanese graphic design, the other designers from Japan included in the exhibition under consideration can be better analyzed. At first glance, the poster design by Masayoshi Nakajo, at age 68, belongs to the same generation as the other two and seems rather unlocatable. In it, one can hardly find Tanaka-style daring modernism, which severely condenses traditional elements down to an abstraction or the high-level spirituality one witnesses in Sugiura's work. Instead, Nakazo seems to gaze at traditional and modern contexts in separation from each other. What makes his work intriguing is that he employs different methodologies for treating the traditional and the modern. That is, one finds in his designs on traditional themes a trace of the Japanese design technique of 'stylized patterning,' and in those on modern themes, one finds the techniques used in contemporary Japanese character designs. For instance, take two posters, first for the exhibition "The Buddha and the



| 7: |



| 8: |



| 9: |

Tea” at Hosomi Museum (FIGURE 7) and, then, for the exhibition “Kyoto—the Ancient Capital and Art” (1998); in these examples, the traditional elements are simply arranged as patterns in the larger designs. On the other hand, in “Poster for Tactics Design” (FIGURE 8), which deals with a modern theme, a dog plays with letters in various ways; simplicity and playfulness are deployed here, in a more distinct context than in the two previous examples.

In contrast, Katsumi Asaba (age 61) approaches Tanaka’s end of the spectrum. While sharing the Tanaka-style treatment of the traditional, Asaba’s work displays certain differences. The former often adopts an artificially somber and darkened stage as the backdrop of many of his posters and treats typographic elements (FIGURE 9). The latter treats the whole pictorial space in natural, bright and evocative ways, by substituting the background with photography. In his famous work, “Delicious Life, A Poster for Seibu Department Store” (FIGURE 10) and “Poster for the 70-Year Anniversary of the Founding of *Shaken*” (FIGURE 11), each has, respectively, American actor-director Woody Allen and a nude female torso as the backdrop. Especially, the phrase Delicious Life (*oishii seikatsu*), which was the catchphrase used by the public relations campaign by Seibu, is traded on by the messy calligraphy by Allen himself. He is clad in a kimono, seated in a half-perfect Asian style, and holding up the calligraphic piece

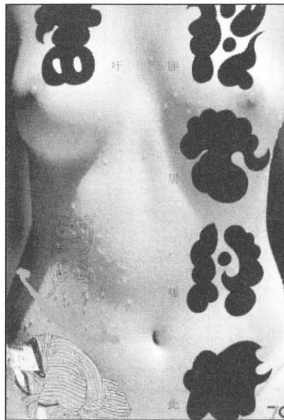


FIGURE 7: |  
Masayoshi Nakajo. Poster for Exhibition,  
“The Buddha and the Tea”, 1988.

FIGURE 8: |  
Masayoshi Nakajo. Poster for Tactics Design.

FIGURE 9: |  
Katsumi Asaba. Poster for ‘Transition of  
Modern Typography in Japan 1946-1995  
Exhibition’, 1999.

FIGURE 10: |  
Katsumi Asaba. Poster for ‘Delicious Life, A  
Poster for Seibu Department Store’, 1982.

FIGURE 11: |  
Katsumi Asaba. Poster for the 70-Year Anni-  
versary of the Founding of Shaken, 1995.

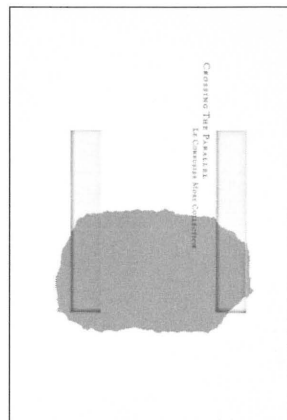
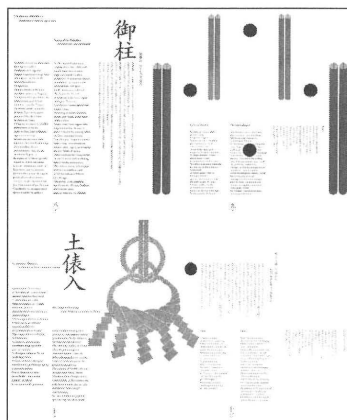
he drew, rather solemnly. Emerging here is a mysteriously paradoxical message somewhere in between seriousness and laughter. Besides these instances, in his “Poster for World Heritage Exhibition, 1997,” he took a photograph of an ancient epitaph rubbing as the backdrop and used the brushwork of the ancient calligraphy to its maximum expressive power.

The work of Kenya Hara (in his forties) provides a successful example in which the Tanaka and the Sugiyura genes effectively interfuse in the dimension of everyday communication. His editorial design spatially explores the relationships between textual contexts and compressed traditional image elements. The “Official Program of the Opening Ceremony for the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics” consists of various images symbolizing the opening ceremony and introductory texts in three languages: English, French and Japanese (FIGURE 12). The designer decided on the symbols and titles of a variety of ethnic celebratory rituals and placed them in a well-controlled interrelationship with the main texts explaining them. Particularly, the Raising of the *On-bashira* ceremony — a local festival that has been performed for several centuries in Nagano prefecture — on pages 8 and 9 introduce the portion of the ceremony — setting up eight 10-meter-long wooden pillars at four cardinal points in the main stadium. Matching with the lengths of the image of the red pillars, Hara accordingly adjusts the lengths

FIGURE 12: |  
Kenya Hara. *Official Program of the Opening Ceremony for the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics*, 1998.

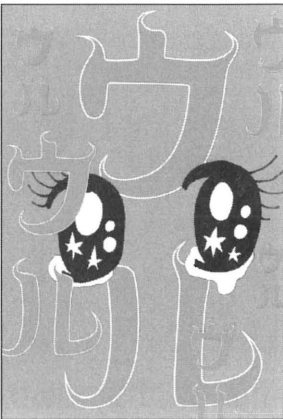
FIGURE 13: |  
Kenya Hara. *Pamphlet for Crossing the Parallel: Le Corbusier Mori Collection*.

FIGURE 14:  
Eiji Yamada. *Poster for Ultra Graphics*, 1988.



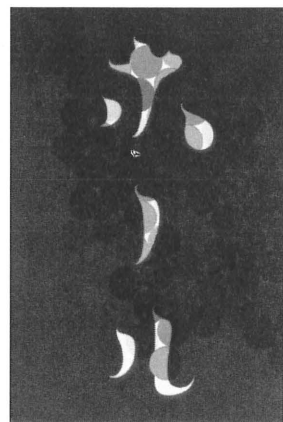
of the main texts. The interesting point here is that he manages to secure the visual integrity of each of the texts of three different languages, while maintaining the horizontal writings of English and French and the vertical writing of Japanese. More specifically, the Chinese character title read in Japanese as *onbashira* located at the visual focal point of the text, and the image of the pair of red pillars are perfectly matched with the vertically written Japanese text. And the French and English texts to the left also wonderfully correspond to the lengths of the Japanese and the pillars. In a similar fashion, the *Dohyoiri* Festival is introduced on pages 10 and 11, through a combination of an image of *kesho-mawashi* — the decorative waistband the sumo wrestler wears when entering the arena — and its explanation. The style of editorial design exemplified here originates from his exploration of three-dimensional typographic space in printed materials. Another good example of his working method is found in a pamphlet “Crossing the Parallel: Le Corbusier Mori Collection” (FIGURE 13). Hara cut two vertical rectangles out of the cover page, creating a light-and-shadow effect, and with a big blotch of red ink spreading between the rectangles and beyond, he invites the viewer to realize the meaning of the design as fitting for the given subject. In this case, design is not simply a delivery of communication of meaning, but a kind of discovery.

Eiji Yamada (in his thirties) won the grand prize at the recent “ACC Open Competition for Logo Mark” as well as “the best newcomer award given by JAGDA” (Japanese Graphic Designers’ Association) in 1998. He is a highly promising designer in Japan. It appears that the field of Japanese graphic design is valuing Yamada’s work highly because it perturbs the rules of orthodox Japanese design. He is indifferent to seriousness, strict orders and interiority privileged by the tradition of modern Japanese graphic design. The Japanese *katakana* typeface — *uru* — used in the poster for “UlTRA Graphics” means to sell (FIGURE 14). Repeated six times, in differing dimensions, the word becomes a screaming sound — a visualization of oral/aural impressions of an explosive emotion from the heart. In addition, the black eye shapes in the center are seemingly wet



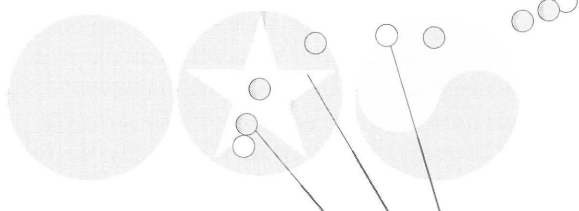
with tears, adding to the image of scream. Yamada's typefaces follow Western traditions such as the Italian Futurists' words-in-freedom or dadaists' sound poems that sought to visualize fractures and breaks in the human voice. They are as free as an expressive human voice, or sometimes are reminiscent of the shamanistic, primitive emotions and instincts one feels in the traces of stone carvings left by anonymous ancient artists.

Another poster design by Yamada titled "Hole" (FIGURE 15) pronounces an end for the serious performance of typefaces placed on a heavy, sober stage in Ikko Tanaka's poster series for the Sankei Kanze Noh Theater. Now the stage is the busy street in Tokyo's Shinjuku or Harajuku District, and the letters have transformed into out-of-control, disobedient teenagers enacting a *cospre* — a contraction of the Japanese transliteration of the English phrase, costume play. This refers to a recent cultural phenomenon of young teens making and dressing up in the costumes they see in popular animations/cartoons. It is still questionable, however, whether Yamada's work is the latest extension of the incomplete project of Japanese modernity and graphic design, or a deconstructive anti-modernity. Of course, I still believe that Yamada's design is related to the directions in which contemporary arts and culture are moving. Looking at his posters again, one realizes that all the elements are derived from the DNA of the Ikko Tanaka family. That is to say, what was expanded from Tanaka's work is a substitution of somber typography with, to borrow my own metaphors, a dancing primitive or a fashionable modern-day cityslicker. The only thing that has been deconstructed of Tanaka is his solemnity. I find the fact that the Japanese graphic design field is extremely sensitive to these sorts of small changes is itself very Japanese. And I make a careful presumption that such sensitivity may be one evidence with which we can understand the current politico-cultural impulses that have caused an empty and insecure socio-economic psychology of modern-day Japan. For the Japanese have rarely experienced a life in which the center of society and culture was radically off its pivot.



| FIGURE 15: |  
Eiji Yamada. Poster for 'Hole,'  
1988.

| FIGURE 16: |  
Young-Jae Cho. Poster, Uh-  
byun Sung-ryon, 1999.



| *Inbreeding of Korean and Japanese genes and its mutants* |

In contrast, the Koreans have experienced a turbulent history; they survived the loss of their country and a drastic de-centering and forcible shift/rearrangement of their culture. The tradition and spirit in Korean modern history have been deconstructed by Imperial Japan. Since the accounts of distorted colonial legacies have not been liquidated even after the liberation in 1945, a need to fundamentally weed out the remnants of Japanese Imperialism still persists. The grotesque history still marches on. Paradoxically speaking, post-colonial Korean life is itself a deconstruction. And one finds the genetic codes with an unflagging and enduring life force in the work of Korean designers who participated in the exhibition.

In the exhibition, Young-Jae Cho — a sexagenarian, whose station lies above and beyond all other Korean designers — was represented by his poster designs. Many call him “the person who opened the door for Korean modern design,” “the first-generation professional designer,” “Paul Rand of Korea.”<sup>12</sup> His recent works — posters of seemingly newly designed typography, for the 2002 World Cup Games and for a work by poet Yi Sang — urge us to reconsider this godfather of Korean modern design. When considered purely from his work, Cho’s genes are unfortunately composed of the chromosomes of the Japanese godfathers; he shares homogeneous genes with the following Japanese designers — previously mentioned Ikko Tanaka,

12

Cho, Young-Jae. 1995. *The World of Young-Jae Cho's Graphics: A Harmony of Ideal and Reality*. Seoul: Ahn Graphics, 8-25. The book was published five years before Cho's retirement from College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University. The introductory comments include personal recollections and assessments, formed through Cho's intimate relationships, by Yusaku Kamekura of Japan, alongside Professor Shi-Hwa Chung of Kookmin University in Seoul, and Professor Thomas Ockerse of the Rhode Island School of Design.

along with Shigeo Fukuda, Yusaku Kamekura and Hiromu Hara, all of whom are older, well established figures in the Japanese design world.

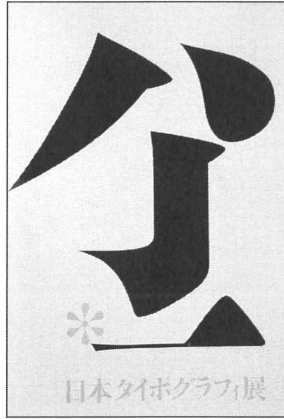
Consider first Cho's poster "魚變成龍, *Un-byun Sung-ryong*" (1999), which consists of a predominant black backdrop, a thickly dragged diagonal white brush stroke, stylized fish and geometric patterns and a final touch of his signature CHO '99 (FIGURE 16). In the bottom section of the poster is the title written vertically in a small font. There is a strange ambiguity — previously not seen in his works known for a concise and lucid message-effect — created in between the title (which means a fish metamorphoses and becomes a dragon) and the actual visual effect of his design. This ambiguity, on one level comes from the problem of communication, and on another level, from a collision among diverse codes produced by many individual styles of Japanese designers. There is a fissure between the title and the pattern-designed image of the poster. More specifically, the relationship between the intended Chinese character-phrase of *Un-byun, Sung-ryong* and the actual shape of the type, which seems like a geometric patterning of another character 忠, *Chung* (loyalty). As a host of complex patterns intervene in the original form of the character, the former dissolves the overall image and causes a visual confusion in the delivery of the message.

13

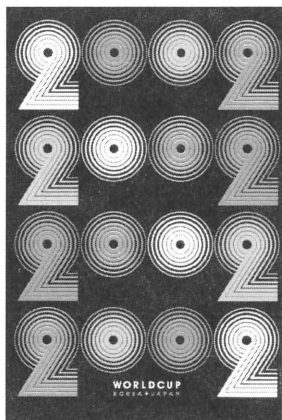
By the late 1920s, Hiromu Hara had already read and comprehended the practices as well as the theories of Jan Tschichold, who had been deeply influenced by Bauhaus typography and graphics. In 1927 at the age of 24, Hara translated and published out of his own pocket Tschichold's *Die Neue Typografie*.

One finds another kind of inbreeding with the Japanese genes. More than anything else Cho's typographic design is reminiscent of earlier examples of poster works by Ikko Tanaka (refer to figure 2) or by Hiromu Hara. In Japan, one finds the origin of the hereditary line in Tanaka's genes and the chromosomes of typography posters produced in the late 1950s by Hara, who was also an enormous influence to Tanaka. The 1959 poster Hara designed for Japan Advertising Artists Club (JAAC) had a considerable impact on Japanese graphic designers at the time (FIGURE 17). For in a way redolent of the logic of artistic production formulated and realized at the German Bauhaus in the 1920s and 1930s, he structurally tears apart then reassembles typographic elements like machine parts. More specifically, Hara breaks down the Chinese char-

FIGURE 17: |  
 Hiromu Hara. Poster for Japan  
 Advertising Artists Club, 1959.



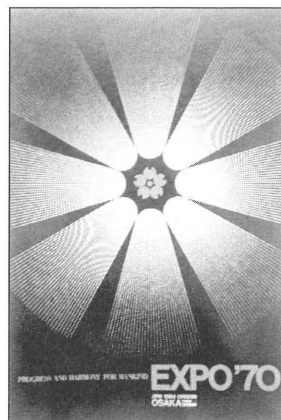
acter 少 meaning little; so in Korean pronunciation, and *shō* in Japanese to its individual brush strokes, and finally reconstructs them into an image of the human face.<sup>13</sup> Also, he places a stylized Japanese-national flower next to the brush stroke that now signifies the mouth area in the reconstructed image of the face; in this way, he evokes something like an image-message of a Japanese smile. We now realize that Cho used the brush strokes that constitute a character like 心 (meaning heart, or mind; *shim* in Korea, *shin* in Japanese), and that he crossbred a structural interpretation of Chinese characters, *a la* Hara, with Korean traditional decorative patterns. These patterns, in turn, can be said to be a geometric transformation of 'leather-brush painting' (革筆書), one genre/technique in Korean traditional folk painting. Unfortunately, this element collides with the refined visual message which the designed brush strokes deliver in Hara's work. A certain pedestrianism of popular 'leather-brush painting' cannot be easily recreated through a geometric simplicity. When placed in Cho's artificially compressed Japanese garden, it loses its original vitality. The genre of painting is best realized in its original mode of production as a sort of 'word picture,' painted in a colorful palette, with a thick leather brush in uninhibited and refreshing calligraphic lines, depicting traditional imagery such as ten creatures of longevity or flowers and birds. We can then conclude that Cho imitated Hara Hiromu's regard for typography only on the level of technique, while extracting from



18:



19:



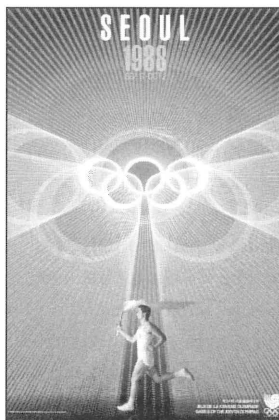
20:

FIGURE 18: |  
Young-Jae Cho. Poster for the  
2002 World Cup Games, 1999.

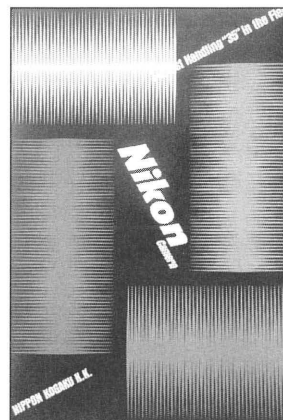
FIGURE 19: |  
Young-Jae Cho. Poster for Poetry  
of Yi Sang, Ogamdo, 1999.

FIGURE 20: |  
Yusaku Kamekura. Poster for the  
Osaka World Expo, 1967.

FIGURE 21: |  
Young-Jae Cho. Official Poster  
for the 1988 Seoul Olympics,  
1988.



21:



22:

FIGURE 22: |  
Yusaku Kamekura. Poster for  
Nippon Kogaku, 1957.

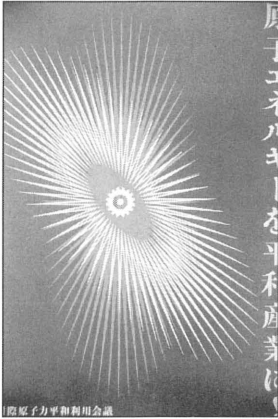
FIGURE 23: |  
Kazumasa Nagai. Poster for  
Nippon Kogaku, 1962.

FIGURE 24: |  
Yusaku Kamekura. Poster for the  
Conference of Peaceful Use of  
Atomic Energy, 1956.

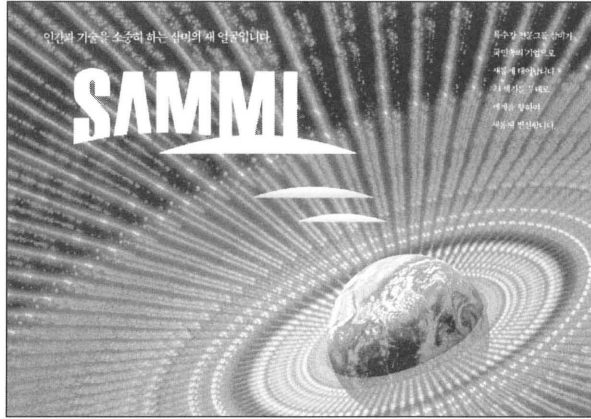
FIGURE 25: |  
Young-Jae Cho. Poster for Sammi  
Co., 1991.

the 'word picture' of traditional Korean folk painting not its flavor but only its mechanical patterns.

Such a technical borrowing, without apposite content, is also found in two other examples from the same period — posters for the “2002 World Cup Games” and for poet Yi Sang’s serial poems “Ogamdo” (FIGURE 18 and 19). While addressing two completely different subject matters, their technical repertoire and methods are identical; both against a black backdrop, repeated geometric shapes create selfsame forms of light. It is indeed rather incredible that the same image of a festival used to commemorate the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup can be applied also to poetry



24:



25:



23:

14

I have closely dealt with this connection in my Korean paper, "The Roots and Shadows of *Hodori*," 68-69.

which intellectually represents human existence in the 1930s' modern city. Where do these genes for this imagery come from? I would argue that the source lies in a work by Yusaku Kamekura (FIGURE 20), that became the prototype for Cho's computer imaging-aided work, "Official Poster for the 1988 Seoul Olympics" (FIGURE 21).<sup>14</sup> One may very well contest my claim, by pointing out that there is a subtle technical difference between Cho's computerized digital image and Kamekura's hand-drawn piece. Pay close attention, then, to Kamekura's analog poster (FIGURE 22) for the public relations of Nippon Kogaku (also known as Nikon). Through a combination of optical effect-inducing geometric patterns, brilliant colors and the company name, it symbolizes what the client stands for — light exposure and precise optics. In another poster for Nikon by Kazumasa Nagai (FIGURE 23), it is clear that Kamemura's graphic genes are preserved intact, with only the patterns changed into circles and rearranged. With these models revealed, the DNA codes contained in the chromosomes of Cho's "2002 World Cup Poster" can be better discerned. That is, in the 1957 "Nippon Kogaku" poster, the prototypical genes of forms of light in Kamekura's work — which would later become the designer's trademark — are being cultured (FIGURE 24), and via Nagai, the genes are inherited down to Cho. This sort of inbreeding has often manifested itself in Cho's other corporate public relations posters (FIGURE 25).

I have fully discussed Yi Sang's experimental poetry in my paper, "An Eccentric Reversible Reaction": Yi Sang's Experimental Poetry in the 1930s and Its Meaning to Contemporary Design, *Visible Language* 33.3, 196-235. In this paper, I argued that his strange and often incomprehensible poems from the early 1930s should be interpreted not in the context of textual or literary theory as often supposed, but in the context of visual texts found in such fields as architecture, graphic design and typography. His works transcended western dada's anti-tradition, and furthermore even transcended modern concrete poetry. In addition, his experimental poetry was the powerful text of visual arts that carried visual space and time toward deconstruction.

It is only reasonable that Cho should have distinguished the forms and color-arranging methods used for the "2002 World Cup" public relations poster from those for the literary work of Yi Sang (né Kim Hae-Kyung), an architect, graphic-typographic designer and the representative poet of early twentieth century Korean literature. Let us take a look at Yi Sang's submission in the open competition for the cover design of magazine *Choson gwa Gunchuk* (*Korea and Architecture*, 1929), for which he won the first prize (see my paper in *Visible Language* 33.3). Yi's graphic design easily transcends the Japanese design of the time, which was yet to break away from pre-modern design and build its own realm of modern typography.<sup>15</sup> Cho returns Yi's progressive graphics back to a mere design. One may very well argue that regardless of the similarity with the "2002 World Cup Poster," Cho's poster for Yi's poem "Ogamdo" abstracts/extracts the basic elements from Yi's design for the book cover. Yi's design, however, was not created for the context of his own poem, but rather for architects who were the magazine's primary readers. "Ogamdo" was a highly intellectual poem, which he serialized in *Choson Joongang Ilbo* (Newspaper) in 1934; the series ended after fifteen installments. Cho's work serves as a good example of how graphic design, without a rigorous analysis of the content to be communicated, can readily fall into the trap of decorationism.

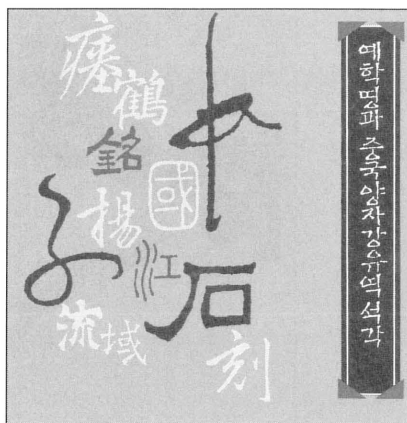
Although not included in the exhibition, Shigeo Fukuda's genes are also found mixed with those of Cho's ideation and methodology. Cho has been known for his works in which contemporary humor and wit are given form through techniques of bold condensation and omission. The examples I discuss here do not exhaust his large body of work, for Cho has taken on numerous projects that represent Korean graphic design. Especially, through a number of successful corporate image projects, he has raised design to the level of corporate management. But, what does he teach, as a first-generation Korean graphic designer, for the following generation with his works as presented in the exhibition?

FIGURE 26: |  
 Byung-Kyoo Chung, *Poster for  
 an exhibition of Byung-kyoo  
 Chung's Book Designs:  
 1977-1996, 1996.*



The life of graphic design begins at the point of printing. Unlike Cho's works, Byoung-Kyoo Chung (born 1946) presented printed posters, calendars and published books produced through actual printing processes. There is a rather uncommon history in Chung's genes. He was bred in the soil, not of design, but of humanities studies; he studied creative writing in Art and Literature at Suhrabeol College of Arts (1970) and graduated from Korea University, with a degree in French literature (1974). After graduation, he worked as chief editor for Minumsa publishing house in 1976, then as editorial director at Hong-sungsa in 1977. It was only after completing the 13th Tokyo UNESCO training course for editors in 1979, studying at Estienne Academy in Paris in 1982 and opening his own design studio in 1984, that he converted his hereditary characters into those of a serious editorial and book designer.

His "Poster for an exhibition of Byung-Kyoo Chung's Book Designs: 1977-1996" (1996, FIGURE 26) and the 1997 "Poster for VIDAK (Visual Information Design Association of Korea) Members' Exhibition" demonstrate his home-grown analytical ability vis-à-vis modern graphic design — rather hard to find in the field of Korean graphic design. That is, his 'exploration into basic principles' goes far beyond the first-generation Korean graphic designers' superficial



16

Russian architect, graphic and typographic designer and exhibition designer, Lissitzky, studied architecture in Darmstadt, Germany. In the 1920s, he started the Russian constructivist movement with Malevich.

17

Born in Leipzig, Germany, Tschichold studied book and typography design following in the foot-step of his father, a typeface designer. Strongly impressed by the first exhibition at the Weimar National Bauhaus in 1923, he embarked on organizing theories and principles of typography from 1925. The consequence of this work is the famous *New Typography*, the pioneering study of twentieth century functionalist typographic design. Realizing later that his theory was not different from national socialism, he changed his direction to the research of traditional typefaces.

18

Ades, Dawn. 1984. *Posters: The 20th Century Poster*. New York: Abbeville Press, 62.

comprehension. In other words, the spatial relationship between the background screen and typefaces in Chung's posters exhibits an 'ideology of modern graphic space' espoused by visionaries ranging from Russian constructivist El Lissitzky (1890-1941)<sup>16</sup> to designer-theorist Jan Tschichold (1902-1974).<sup>17</sup> Lissitzky attempted an architectural construction of abstract image elements in the graphic space. Tschichold criticized Lissitzky, asserting that the latter's design, "while unique and powerful, only adopts conventional typefaces,"<sup>18</sup> and he himself experimented with economy of expression and asymmetrical typography. It was this Western design tradition that strongly influenced Chung. If his own thinking and practice only remained at the level of a passive receiver of Western influence, however, he would have ended his career as a tardy late modernist at the end of the twentieth century.

As I briefly mentioned above, Chung's philosophy as a book designer was cultivated over a long period of time in the soil of humanities studies; he calls it an "ideology of one book, one type" (FIGURE 27 and 28). It is a belief that, like all living creatures, all books have their own individually distinct body and expression. That is, "since each book possesses different expressions, in order to give an adequate form to those expressions, one should invent the most appropriate typeface, rather than choose one." This belief arises



from his search for expanded visual language on the level of 'imagination of materiality,' a search he embarked on with an influence from the thought of French philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard. Chung thinks of a written language not simply as a conceptual medium of communication — *langue* (concept) as opposed to *parole* (speech) in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiological linguistics — but as itself an image that becomes *parole*.<sup>19</sup> In other words, a book composed of type is a body plus spirit itself, or going one step further, a being that contains spirit. The book, therefore, must not only be read visually, but should also possess a spiritual sound, tactile feelings of its pages, and even a smell of flesh, i.e., paper and ink. The phrase he habitually sings, "the culture of the book" is an expression that distinguishes between books produced through such an experimentation and those that are not. In short, a publishing industry without its own culture of the book is meaningless.

It is such strands of philosophical thinking that helped bring about diverse typefaces with their own expressions in his posters (see figure 26). In the 1996 poster he designed for a one-person retrospective exhibition of his works from over twenty years, Chung expressed the idea of the culture of the book, which must communicate diversity while sharing the basic system of modern design, through the word book written in a unique typeface. Looking closely at this intense title

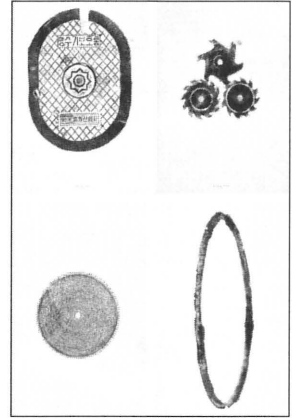
| FIGURE 27: |  
Byung-Kyoo Chung, *Poster for Seoul System's Royal Font*, 1997.

| FIGURE 28: |  
Byung-Kyoo Chung, *Editorial and Book Design*, 1996.

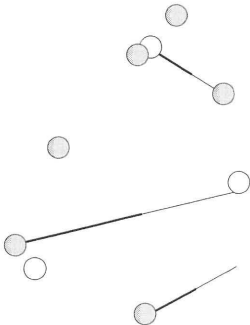
19

Interview with Chung,  
March 22, 2000.

| FIGURE 29: |  
*Sang-Soo Ahn. Letter Work, 1999.*



typography, we realize that it is not designed in the customary way ordinary graphic designers work on a flat surface. Rather, it is a 'spatial shape' that seeps out from the 'structure of a book' per se. On the book cover with a black piece of paper inserted underneath, Chung cut out the shape of the word Book with a knife and tore out the shape by hand. In the revealed black silhouette, he brusquely wrote the same word in white ink. The calligraphy shimmers like bunched wires or optical fibers in a skinned cable. Herein, we get to see contained in a book or a poster, numerous existential and processual philosophies. To put it differently, we witness various material beings and acts, such as an already present paper surface, an artificially constructed structure and things drawn and made on top of them. In this way, Chung's inimitable individual personal touch was completed. Let us look again at the subtle interstitial spaces between the knife-cut and hand-torn alphabet letters. Do we not feel the personal touch and trace of the presence of one sensitive and creative man who plunges into space? This is none other than Chung's aesthetic of graphics and world of book design that originate from the book. And knowing this, we realize commonalities and differences between Chung's work and the notion of book as an architecture of cosmic meditation of Koehi Sugiura. Both designers encompass the infinite space of the spiritual inner world. Chung's design, however, is not a sacred architecture in the style of Sugiura, but instead deals with book as a so-called Nietzschean



existential architecture. In this way, it is not through a master-slave relationship, but through a philosophical encounter that premises mutual differences, that a true cultural exchange amongst professional designers from both ends of Korea and Japan can be meaningful.

One in the extremely small group of Korean designers known internationally is Sang-Soo Ahn, born in 1952 and now entering his fifties. In the exhibition, Ahn exhibited his oeuvre of experimental typography under the title, "Letter Work" (FIGURE 29). Ahn's Letter Works are a collective attempt to visualize the typeness of Korean written characters in everyday objects found around us. For instance, the title of one letter work — [*Hangul* - <Seoul> - 1999 - Letter work - "ㅇ" x 3 - "ㄷ" x 1] — may seem like a complex table of random numbers, but as a matter of fact, it tells in what direction his experimentation is heading. Specifically, he is explaining here that he is manifesting the kinship he finds between the Korean alphabet letters, *Hangul*, such as the consonant ㅇ and the vowel ㅏ and objects found on the street in his 1999 letter work. This manifestation is specifically expressed through three images of the objects that morphologically constitute the consonant "ㅇ, ㅍ" (*Jung*, the name of the consonant), and one image of the object that relates to the vowel, ㅏ. In the letter work, "ㅇ x 3," which indicates the three selfsame constitutive consonants of the consonant's name itself — ㅍ — is manifested through three object-images (whose material characteristics are clear) — a lid for a water pump container, a three-cogwheel gear and a carpenter's circular saw blade. On the other hand, the material nature of the image corresponding to the vowel (indicated by ㅏ) is rather obscure — it is a vertically elongated elliptical object.

What he is attempting to do here is to image separate vowels and consonants, whose combination can form individual syllables — one characteristic of *hangul*. Morphologically, *Hangul* shapes can be expressed as syllabic units that own both consonants and a vowel and moreover, syllables can be broken up into disconnected vowels and consonants, which can function as individual visual signs. Especially, vowels provide sound and movement to consonants. The bottom right quo-

| FIGURE 30: |

*Sang-Soo Ahn. Poster for the First  
Front DMZ Cultural Arts Movement  
Exhibition, 1991.*

| FIGURE 31: |

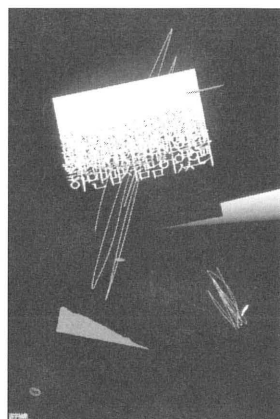
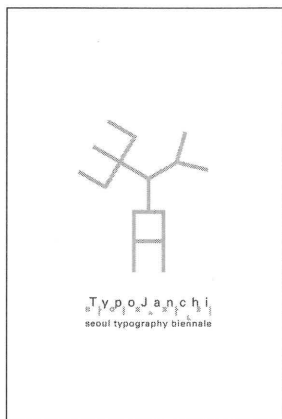
*Sang-Soo Ahn. Poster for Bogoseo-  
Bogoseo, 1997.*

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tient in the letter work, which corresponds to the part of the title — “ㅈ” x 1 — articulates this point. The shape of the object-image resembles that of a mouth uttering the sound for “ㅈ.” Ahn, then, has captured into an image the phonogrammic characteristic (that is wholly unlike ideogrammic written language such as Chinese) of *Hangul* letters. One can also say that this work, which is manifested through tangible material objects, is in one sense an attempt to traverse between the phonogrammic characteristics of *Hangul* and the ideogrammic characteristics of Chinese writing. A precedent in appropriation of *objets* in modern art can be found in the work of German artist Kurt Schwitters, a member of the dadaist movement in the 1920s. He invented what he termed *Merz* — a kind of relief-collage made out of junk and detritus; it was also a process of using all kinds of everyday matter and waste product, organizing them and building relations among them. Although not a multivalent appropriation like Schwitter’s, Ahn similarly encapsulates the typographic impression (typeness) through an appropriation of quotidian subject matter as *objets*. But it is necessary to study Ahn’s method of object appropriation a little more.

Although the object-images that signify the consonant, *lung* — a lid for a water pump container, a three-cogwheel gear and a carpenter’s circular saw blade — are themselves present-day everyday objects, the way in which he represents them somehow quite inexplicably





October 2001 displays a typographic image that exquisitely becomes an object. Reminiscent of the Choson Dynasty-period poured iron types, the three initials, ㄱ, ㅌ, ㅍ of *Suh-ul Taipogeurapi Bienalle* (Seoul Typography Biennale) are designed as if they have just come out of an iron mold (FIGURE 32).

Ahn's desire to expand typeness into graphics, joined by works by other typographic designers, is forming an axis in Korean graphic design. For example, such a tendency is observed also in the works of two other designers included in the exhibition, Ki-Heun Shur (born 1952) and Joo-Sung Kim (1960). Their works differ from Ahn's in that in a departure from the latter's focus on typography, the former tend to be quite painterly. Shur and Kim both similarly deal in relations with regards to typefaces and 'materiality.' But between the two designers, there is a difference that can be defined as analog versus digital. Whereas Shur has made works like "Typeface Look" (1999, FIGURE 33) through the materiality produced in creating shallow recessions and projections on a sheet of plastic gold leaf, Kim has made "Typeface Abstraction" (1999, FIGURE 34), through the digital immateriality of 0-and-1 binary digits. Interestingly, as the titles of their works indicate, they converge at the same point; they both identically sought to represent the aesthetic traits of abstract painting through typography. Although Shur's *Typeface Look* is reminiscent of ancient Buddhist sutras in its expression, just like

Kim's Typeface Abstraction, in its content, points towards abstract painting. Kim, especially, used a neologism Typographism, made from typography and graphism for another work in the exhibition, and in doing so, is expanding typefaces per se into the realm of graphics.

### Additional discovery and suggestion

Above, I have tried to show that the works of the generation of Japanese graphic designers in their sixties and above, ranging from Ikko Tanaka and Masayoshi Nakazo to Katsumi Asaba, share a selfsame frame of consciousness, despite minor individual technical differences. Their designs contain a clear sense of self-identity and world view. On the other hand, the work of Young-Jae Cho, the Korean designer of the same generation, manifestly reveals an utterly contrary case. Without an apparent identity and worldview, his work resembles only the genetic makeup of his Japanese counterparts and only on the level of techniques. In spite of the recent blow-ups in Korea — such as the Japanese textbook-in-distortion controversy<sup>21</sup> and the Japanese prime minister's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, when it comes to the relationship of Korean and Japanese graphic design, it remains one of master and slave from its very origin. It seems that Cho has never given a serious thought to what kind of influence such a relationship will have on the subsequent generation of designers. Take for an instance the following quote from the introductory commentary by Yusaku Kamemura in Cho's collection of works published in 1995. Presenting Cho as "the very first pioneer who launched Korean modern design," Kamemura reproduces expressions used by the Japanese colonial masters; he writes, "... because the crime the Japanese had inflicted upon the Koreans cannot be simply erased away. There were many cultured people at the time, however, who possessed deep affection and admiration

FIGURE 32: |  
Sang-Soo Ahn. Logo and letterhead for the  
1st Seoul Typography Biennale, 2001.

FIGURE 33: |  
Ki-Heun Shur. Typeface Look, 1999.

FIGURE 34: |  
Joo-Sung Kim. Typeface Abstraction, 1999.

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The Japanese history textbook controversy broke out on April 3, 2001, when the Ministry of Education was examining and authorizing the so-called New History Textbook. This governmental action repeats the several decade-long tradition of erroneous history-distorting statements publicly made by Japanese high-level bureaucrats. *New History Textbook*, based on the anachronistic war-time imperialist ideology, denies the history of Japanese invasion and oppression, and going one step further and justifying Japan's motivations, in effect denies the Asia-Pacific War itself. In addition, it downplays and withholds information about controversial issues such as Rape of Nanking and Comfort Women (sexual slaves drafted, or in fact, mostly kidnapped and forced into inhumane condition of servitude to Japanese soldiers in the war fields; most of the women were Korean). The *Textbook* problem caused much shock and furor in the countries formerly colonized and/or invaded by Japan—South Korea, North Korea, China, and Taiwan—as well as with the larger international communities and organizations such as United Nations Human Rights Commission. This most recent Japanese gesture towards their history of atrocities is especially striking in comparison with the German case; since 1945, Germany has acted with a far more responsible attitude towards the criminal acts it committed during the Third Reich (1933–1945), and has assiduously carried out consultations and discussions with its neighboring countries such as France and Poland in order to prevent possible controversies with regard to distortion of the history.

for Korean traditional culture and arts. They were especially enchanted by the ceramics of the Yi Dynasty and folk paintings. I was one of them.”<sup>22</sup> To recap, Cho chose to include this writing in the preface of his book, proudly displaying his intimate association with the godfather of Japanese graphic design, who held affection and admiration for Korea. In the mind of Kamekura, however, Korea is — I would not go so far as to expect him to think it the sovereign Kingdom of Choson — registered, not even as Choson, but instead as Yi Dynasty, the name given to the kingdom by the invaders. We need to inquire, again, about this bizarrely warm mutually affectionate linkage between the two countries. Is it really acceptable to overlook the offensive, historically charged oversight — calling the sovereign nation not by its own name, Kingdom of Choson but by Yi Dynasty that suggests a mere land ruled by the Yi family — just in order to receive from the Japanese godfather praise?

We must remember that Japan had already experienced a state of self-consciousness in the late 1920s. The Japanese realized modern design without sacrificing their traditional values and the qualities that they long held onto. Since the opening of its door through American Commodore Perry’s gunboat diplomacy and the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan embarked on a massive plan of modernization, absorbing and imitating Western civilization. The Japanese modernization of the late nineteenth century — accomplished in the form of rapid industrialization and exportation of art work — advanced graphic design only to the extent of surface imitation of Western design through the technique of formulization of designs. Nevertheless, reexamination and reflection on this shortcoming began to take place after the 1923 Kanto Great Earthquake. This movement was driven by the principle of Japanese Spirit, Western Skills, i.e., thoroughly understanding and accepting the technical background and philosophical tenets of Western design and conferring Japanese spirit on top of them. As mentioned, it was a result of such a consciousness that Hiromu Hara published a translation of Jan Tschichold’s *Die Neue Typographie* in 1927. In other words, the Japanese were

experimenting with new techniques while constructing new philosophical and knowledge structures.

In contrast, one can say, as I have tried to show above, that Korean design went through six decades in a vacuum and only reached a level of self-awareness only in the late 1980s. Since the liberation in 1945, many graphic designers in Korea sought to realize a distinctive Korean character — such as plain flat surface and lines, bright colors and a well-structured pictorial spatial composition — applied formally to traditional subject matter. In actuality, however, the contents consisted of a manipulated genome of Japanese graphic design. Some may maintain that such an identity does indeed arise from local specificities, though still falling within the Japanese sphere of influence. There is, of course, a justifiable need to take a look at the post-liberation situation from the perspective of cultural exchange. For design, or any cultural identity, for that matter, does not stand in isolation from the factors surrounding it, but rather undergoes constant changes in mutual interactions with them. Furthermore, it is not possible that cultural or environmental influences of a particular time are irrelevant to a graphic designer.

I am, thus, not interested in discerning the route of transmission of sensibilities — i.e., whether the influences have come from a detour through Japan or straight from the West. The issue here is the subjective eye and thinking. There is no doubt that we must examine design identities flexibly from multicultural perspectives, but this cannot mean that one relinquishes one's subjective consciousness per se. Design and culture without their own subjectivity, even if they consist of multiple cultural elements, can only be defined as a plagiaristic formation, not an identity formation. One may recall, as an analogy, the recent movie, *Being John Malkovich* (1999) by director Spike Jonze, in which we encounter a schizophrenic with no eye of his own but only with the eyes of many others.



Fortunately, since the 1980s, the genetic makeup of Korean designers has departed from inbreeding and been moving towards experimentation based on principles. For instance, take the case of Byung-Kyoo Chung. The genetic material of his design does not consist of mannerisms, but rather comes from different principles and philosophy. He aspires to an ideology of one book, one letter that is inspired by a variety of thoughts ranging from Russian constructivism to semiotics. The real face of his genome, therefore, is not form as a means of existence but an invisible principle. Another similar case is Sang-Soo Ahn, who introduced the thinking of Jan Tschichold by translating and publishing his *Asymmetrical Typography* in the early 1980s while working as artistic director for the magazine *Ggumim* (Decoration). Thoroughly comprehending theories of Western graphics and typography design, Ahn has been pursuing the development of *Hangul* typefaces and their graphicization.

The historical vacuum is creating a new problem to be solved, however. Although Korean graphic design has only recently begun to break out of the shadow of a Japanese stylistic connection, it now finds itself arrested by another anachronistic shackle of modern art, that is, 'a plasticity-centered tendency.' One can say that it is only natural that typographers or graphic designers are crossing back and forth between the boundaries of design and fine art. Today, however, the fine art which art for art's sake used to seek in the past has gone through the stages of 1960s pop art and 1970s and 1980s conceptual art, and in the process has begun to deal with everyday contexts just as design creates for everyday life and communication. It is my opinion that in such a context, there is no reason for design to orient itself towards plasticity-centered pure art. It is not that such attempts are meaningless, but that discoveries vis-à-vis quotidian communication tend to be missing in them. For instance, there exists a difference between everydayness and abstractness between Eiji Yamada's sensibility-filled posters and Joo-Sung Kim's letter abstractions. I remember one exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art on the Stenbug Brothers, designers of movie posters in 1920s Russia. Today's museums are letting

in as art those posters originally designed in the past for the street and treated as of no value. That sort of art is not art that is like art but instead art that is like life.

In the same light, it is still difficult to find a designer like Yokoo Tadanori, who in the past six decades has tirelessly explored the psychological dimension of popular culture. One may say, of course, that this is a matter of each designer's individual character and taste. Nevertheless, design is an art that operates within social contexts. Here the term social connotes not only that it is a mine in which a designer unearths precious materials (money), but also that a designer must be closely correlated to a consciousness about the context within which s/he is located. Is it not the inherent responsibility of design to observe a society-at-large and make statements about it as a subject? I have begun to discern some instances of this in the young generation of designers in Korea. I will avoid disclosure of these names and their genetic compositions. For it is my hope to sincerely wait and watch the next generation of designers who believe in themselves, while they continue their diligent labors.

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AUTHOR NOTE

*Min-Soo Kim, Ph.D.* is former professor of design history and criticism at Seoul National University. He received his Ph.D from New York University in 1991. He is the director of the Design Culture Laboratory (DCL) in Seoul and editor of *The Journal of Design Culture and Criticism (JDCC)*, first published in autumn of 1999 and the first Korean journal of cultural theory and criticism on design. Dr. Kim now serves as a board member of the Korean Society for Visual Culture. He is playing an active role as a design critic in digital media and visual culture. He has published three major critical books for Korean readers: *Criticism on Modern Design: Understanding Postmodernism and Deconstruction* (1994), *A Cultural Navigation on the 21st Century's Design: Dialectics of Design, Culture, and Symbol* (1997), *Thus Spake Yi Sang, the Multimedia Man* (1999), and *Kim, Min-Soo's Culture Design* (2002).