Member book: Hoffmann, Berlin Koreans and Pictured Koreans

Discussion published by Frank Hoffmann on Saturday, February 20, 2016

Book Announcement – Berlin Koreans and Pictured Koreans

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to announce that my book, *Berlin Koreans and Pictured Koreans*, is now available in print and in eBook (PDF) format. It is the first of three volumes in the series *Koreans and Central Europeans: Informal Contacts up to 1950*. All three are edited by Andreas Schirmer. The other two are multi-authored volumes and are expected to be published later this year.

Frank Hoffmann, *Berlin Koreans and Pictured Koreans*. Koreans and Central Europeans: Informal Contacts up to 1950, edited by Andreas Schirmer, vol. 1. Vienna: Praesens, 2015. (xii, 241 pages, 112 illustrations)

ISBN: 978-3-7069-0873-3 (print)
ISBN: 978-3-7069-3005-5 (digital edition)

About the book:
The book has three chapters, preceded by an introduction by the editor, Andreas Schirmer.

Table of Contents:

Editor's Note *ix*
Introduction (by Andreas Schirmer) *1*
The Berlin Koreans, 1909–1940s *9*
Modular Spectacle: The 1904 Liebig Trading Card Set on Korea *180*
Ultra-Right Modernism, Colonialism, and a Korean Idol: Nolde's *Missionary* *200*
Image Credits *237*
Contributors *241*

The book's first, almost book-length chapter, is structured as a series of twelve biographical sketches of Berlin Koreans: students, professionals, revolutionaries, and others living in Berlin in the Wilhelmine, Weimar, and/or National Socialist eras. While the chapter's structure is simple, the issues regarding cultural assimilation, identity, anti-Japanese political activities, collaboration (with the Japanese and the Nazis), and colonial modernity and modernism that are discussed are far more complex. The study exposes the cultural and political connections of these Berlin Koreans. These links and the insights resulting from them will likely be unexpected and disquieting for many readers. No one was more surprised than me, specifically about the close cooperation with and engagement in Nazi institutions of many Koreans during the 1930s and 1940s—even within the core NS institution for race research. In terms of a theoretical outcome, I am arguing and demonstrating in much detail that Korean *colonial modernity*, as we have named and defined it since the 1990s, could in fact also

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be found outside the Japanese Imperial Empire—in Berlin—even before the fascist German–Japanese cooperation began in the second half of the 1930s. What we have here is the creation of "social space" (in Lefebvre's terms) that replicates colonial modernity outside the confines of empire, without any institutional colonial framework in place, in the center of the Weimar Republic (which, in fact, still being a major Western power, brought into existence the first 20th-century postcolonial era in Europe). That again raises questions about the validity of the colonial modernity concept in itself.

The two shorter essays concern the 1904 Liebig trading card set on Korea and Emil Nolde's 1912 oil painting, *The Missionary*, which depicts a Korean *changsŭng* (totem pole). The first is an example of popular, mass-produced advertisement art, while the other is a classic example of celebrated German "high modernism." These chapters provide an art historical analysis of these pieces but then twist and turn them to go a little beyond that. Thus, this is an analysis that discusses Germany's take on colonialism, on modernism, and the formation of its own identity. It also questions, however, some of the essential convictions and certitudes we all share about classical modernism in Europe (to get to a more horizontal viewpoint with Korean modernism). Some parts of that discussion extend into times much later than the early 20th century. I have made a conscious effort, though, to keep the use of specialized terminology to a minimum, to make the texts reasonably easy to read (and keeping all discussions concrete).

In a nutshell, what are the issues of this book, apart from the "storylines" of the biographies and sample artworks discussed? Well, I hope to at least raise some essential questions regarding established historical and art historical models about colonial modernity, the relationship between politics and modernism in art and dance, and the relationship of Western and Korean modernism. The German part of it mostly highlights the privileged status Nazism bestowed on international specialists but also scrutinizes preconceptions about Germany's modern cultural production and the nature of its historic relations to Korea and Asia.

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Thank you for your attention!
Frank Hoffmann

Citation: Frank Hoffmann. *Member book: Hoffmann, Berlin Koreans and Pictured Koreans*. H-Asia. 02-20-2016. https://networks.h-net.org/node/22055/discussions/112571/member-book-hoffmann-berlin-koreans-and-pictured-koreans
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