Orientalising the Orient:

Zen Readings of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan

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ABSTRACT

The interests of this thesis began with the frequent encounters of Zen references in studying Asian contemporary art. Orientalism and Subaltern theories were the points of departure in shaping the discourses of this thesis. This thesis investigates the European gaze on Asian contemporary art, mainly looking at Korean minimalist movement *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's oeuvre.

The *Dansaekhwa* movement that flourished in 1970s South Korea is a localised aesthetics of broader minimalist and conceptual art forms. Lee Ufan was one of the pivotal figures in developing discourses for *Dansaekhwa* and *Mono-ha*. Asian contemporary art is often understood in the light of Zen and other Eastern religions, seemingly based on their Asian heritage but without any other supporting evidence. When it comes to European understandings of Asian contemporary art, socio-political history and artists' statements— each crucial aspects of art history as a discipline— are often not considered worthy of attention and even entirely omitted. Instead, Western scholarship on Asian contemporary art is often filled with Orientalist assumptions.

This thesis investigates *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's oeuvre, analysing the socio-political contexts in South Korea at the time, as well as the artists' statements that are ubiqoutously present but nevertheless silenced in the existing scholarship on Lee's works. The thesis explores a few pivotal postcolonial studies on the European gaze towards the Other. It analyses how the void of the artists' voices and socio-political contextual analysis in Western scholars' readings of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks, inevitably contributes

in misunderstanding. It critically analyses that the default lens of Orientalist Zen reading of *Dansaekhwa*, Lee Ufan's works and other Asian contemporary art, only further orientalises the Orient.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Denver Airport opened its Zen Room, a place where passengers waiting for their flights could experience so-called "DEN ZEN" through unexpected encounters, such as practicing yoga with goats and meeting famous American football players ("DEN ZEN"). Regardless of the cleverness of Denver's play on words, its campaign demonstrates that Zen Budduhism popularised in the mid-20th century in the West, remains popular decades after its first emergence.

This thesis came about as a result of my frequent encounters with Zen Buddhism references while exploring contemporary art, including the works of Asian contemporary artists. The East and Zen are often mystified, orientalised, and exotified without many extensive attempts to understand the East. This thesis investigates a South Korean minimalist movement called *Dansaekhwa* and the art of one of its representative artists, Lee Ufan, whose works Western art critics often associate with Zen Buddhism by default. Through an analysis of Lee Ufan's art and the ways in which it has been interpreted in the West, this thesis also contributes new insights to the larger discourses about the European gaze onto Asian contemporary artworks.

Edward Said's post-colonial study, *Orientalism* was a point of departure for this thesis in its theoretical framework. According to Said, orientalism can mean several things. Firstly, Oriental studies or Orientalism can refer to the studies of the Oriental culture, history, people and societies. This academic discipline is now more commonly called Asian Studies and/or Middle Eastern Studies rather than Oriental Studies, due to the latter's

connotation of the “high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism” (Said 2). In this context, an orientalist could mean: an expert in the studies of the Orient, for example, someone who studies Chinese dialect or Indian religions (Said 50) or more generally interested in all things Oriental (“Orientalism”). Secondly, orientalism can refer to a style of thought that has accepted “the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on” (Said 2-3). Thirdly, “Orientalism as a Western-style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). In this third definition of orientalism, the Orient (East) is represented in particular ways by the West or the Occident. Although the term ‘orientalism’ in the context of this thesis can fall into all three categories, my investigation of the Orientalism that pervades scholarly interpretations of Lee Ufan and *Dansaekhwa* fit more closely with the third definition, which Said extensively discussed and redefined. One of the premises of this thesis is that the tendency of Orientalist reading persists in Western understandings of contemporary artworks by Asian artists.

Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978), begins with two powerful quotes that provide insights into his extensive discussions to follow. “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” by Karl Marx. “The East is a career” by Benjamin Disraeli. These quotes also align with the Gayatri Spivak’s rhetorical inquiries in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). Said’s *Orientalism* explores the European colonialist’s patronising views towards the Others (the colonised, the Orient, or the East). The ignorant colonialist perceptions of the Others lead to stereotyping the Orient and perpetuating the orientalist gaze. The orientalist sees the East as the barbaric, primitive, uncultured, exotic, mystic,

passive, and therefore needs Western intervention to give them a voice. In the preface to the 2003 edition of *Orientalism*, Said questions whether modern imperialism ever ended since Napoleon entered Egypt two centuries ago. In the introduction of *Orientalism* written in 1978, Said says it would be foolish to attempt creating an encyclopaedic history of orientalism because "if [the] guiding principle was to be "the European idea of the Orient," there would be virtually no limit to the material" (Said 16). In a similar vein, this thesis identifies a similar pattern whereby Western art critics and scholars read Asian contemporary artists' works with orientalist views that only further mystify and exotify pre-existing stereotypical perceptions of the East.

This thesis investigates how art critics from Europe, Britain, North America, Australia, and New Zealand frame the works of Asian contemporary artists with Zen and other Eastern philosophy and religions. The main subject of inquiry for this thesis is a Korean minimalist movement of the 1970s, *Dansaekhwa*, and one of the central figures in *Dansaekhwa* and *Mono-ha* movements, the artist Lee Ufan.

Collins Dictionary defines "East-West relations" as between that of the United States and its Western allies versus the Soviet Union and its communist allies. The Oxford Dictionary provides an arbitrary definition of "East-West" as "relating to the relationship between eastern and western parts of the world or of a country, region, or town." "The Orient" in Said's text predominantly refers to the Middle East, and "the Occident" or the West refers to Britain, France, and the United States. For the context of this thesis, however, "the East" as a term refers to Asia and includes the Middle East, while the term "the West" refers to Europe, Britain, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Many texts

that the thesis references, including articles, books, interviews, use the terms East and West without providing definitions for these terms. With respect to the critical analysis contained in this thesis, the terms “European” and “Western” can be understood as interchangeable terms, because Europeans in the context of colonisation settled in Western English speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Although the purpose in differentiating East and West is to shed light on the process through which Orientalising occurs, there are limitations these terms’ usage. In the first chapter of *Orientalism* “The Scope of Orientalism,” Said acknowledges the limitation of having the East and West dichotomy as an analysis tool:

> When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, public policy, the result is usually to polarise the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies. (46, Said).

One of the criticisms for Said’s *Orientalism* was precisely adopting this East and West dichotomy and reinforcing the binaries (“Orientalism”). However, it seems unavoidable to establish such binaries for arguments Said makes to criticise the problematic European (Western) gaze onto the Others (Eastern) as subjects. Using the case study of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan, this thesis identifies patterns of referencing Zen or other Eastern religions in art writings of Asian contemporary art written by European art critics and scholars. In doing so, it was also unavoidable to establish such binaries to compare the reading of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan from both sides.

Asian artists' voices are often omitted when their artworks are investigated by the Western art critics. Asian artists' interviews and catalogue writings are often readily available, yet they receive a disproportionate lack of attention in interpretations of their artwork. The absence of Asian artists' voices in critical discourses on Asian contemporary art has led to the misunderstanding of many artworks and further perpetuated stereotypes of the East. Such a discrepancy is conspicuous; after all, Western artists' statements are highly valued in art criticism.

Dansaekhwa was translated from the English term "monochrome paintings" by the Korean scholar Yoon Jin-Sup. The term *Dansaekhwa,* treated like a proper noun in English, is now widely used in Korean to describe minimalist artworks of the 1970s in South Korea. The *Dansaekhwa* movement is distinctive from Western monochrome paintings, abstract or minimalist art and captures unique Korean aesthetics and cultural complexities. Its different uses of colour, composition, material, and socio-political backdrop create a distinct aesthetic effect. *Dansaekhwa* was undeniably influenced by the minimalism and abstract art movements within the global contemporary art scene, given the time of *Dansaekhwa*'s emergence and the resemblance in aesthetic qualities. The socio-political context of Korea in the 1960-1970s, however, also undoubtedly played a role in *Dansaekhwa*'s aesthetic and discursive development. Therefore, the terms "monochrome paintings" or *Dansaekhwa* are both misleading when understood literally, because they do not capture the characteristics of either art movement.

Dansaekhwa should not be understood in the literal sense but instead, as an arbitrary term that came to be associated with the minimalist and abstract art movement driven by a group of elite male artists in the 1970s in South Korea. This group of men, who were eventually grouped together as *Dansaekhwa* artists, worked closely together and

exchanged their ideas and inspiration, which led them to developing the movement's unique aesthetics and discourses. Lee Ufan is recognised for his contributions to the theorisation of *Mono-ha* and *Dansaekhwa* and is considered one of the prominent artists in both art movements. Lee Ufan's sculpture *Relatum Series* share similarities with Minimalist sculptures in its minimalist aesthetics and the motivation of "not-making" in protests endless production and consumerism. In contrast, another prominent *Dansaekhwa* artist Park Seo-bo says he disagrees with the term "monochrome" to describe his artworks. He does not fully agree with the term *Dansaekhwa* to describe his artworks but prefers the term *Dansaekhwa* over monochrome paintings ("Why *Dansaekhwa*"). The range of *Dansaekhwa* artworks are, in fact, much broader than monochrome colour paintings. Taking into consideration the variety of *Dansaekhwa* compositions along with the political issues at the time of its emergence, *Dansaekhwa* must be seen as a localised art movement specific to the social context of 1970s South Korea.

Dansaekhwa as an art movement has not been studied thoroughly, yet there are several sources that could benefit the study of Korean contemporary art and *Dansaekhwa* in particular. There are only a limited number of books and journal articles available on the oeuvre of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan. There are a limited number of books and journal articles available. There are three books published on *Dansaekhwa*, two in Korean and one in English.[1] There are numerous exhibition catalogues available for retrospective exhibitions

[1] *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (2013), by Joan Kee
Dansaekhwa *단색화 미학을 말하다* (2015), edited by Jin-soo Seo
From Dansaekhwa Phenomenon To Lee Ufan's Forgeries *한국 미술의 빅뱅: 단색화 열풍에서 이우환 위작까지* (2016), edited by Sang-yong Shim

on *Dansaekhwa* as an art movement and exhibitions on individual *Dansaekhwa* artists. Art magazine and newspaper articles with artist interviews in relation to the exhibitions are available in English, Korean and other languages. Moreover, Lee Ufan published numerous books on his philosophical thoughts on aesthetics and art in English, French, Japanese and Korean. There is a biography written by an art historian about Park Seo-bo, one of the prominent figures of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. This thesis draws from these sources in order to give voice to artists like Lee Ufan who not only embody the *Dansaekhwa* movement but whose works are also grossly misunderstood in Western art criticism. This thesis understands *Dansaekhwa* as a localised aesthetics of wider minimalist movement.

The first chapter discusses the socio-political history and localised contexts of *Dansaekhwa*'s emergence in the late 1960s and its resurgence in the 2010s. I then unpack the discourse of *Dansaekhwa* as Art of Resistance. Chapter One argues that *Dansaekhwa* as well as Lee Ufan's works are often examined by Western art writers based on orientalist assumptions on the East, entirely omitting artist's voices. Chapter Two investigates the artist statements of two pivotal figures of the *Dansaekhwa* movement, Park Seo-bo and Lee Ufan. An examination of these artists' views shed necessary light on critical understandings of their artworks and the *Dansaekhwa* movement. Chapter Three then explores Western Minimalist art to compare its aesthetics with that of the *Dansaekhwa* movement and their contrasting receptions by art writers. By looking at Western Minimalism, it highlights how Western Minimalist artists' voices were highly valued in the perception of Western Minimalism. In comparison, *Dansaekhwa* and Asian contemporary artists' voices were entirely omitted despite their availability. Chapter Four discusses critical post-colonial texts

that investigate European gaze onto the Other to call into question the Western gaze on Asian art. It looks at Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Gayatri Spivak's thoeries of the subaltern, Victor Segalen's *Essay on Exoticism,* and Leonard Bell's text on the European gaze of Māori as subjects of paintings. Finally, Chapter Five examines specific cases where Western art writers blatantly ignored artists' voices, which led to the misconception that any Asian contemporary art was Zen inspired. This last chapter also discusses in depth the problematic readings of *Dansaekhwa* by art scholar Simon Morley. This thesis argues that looking at Asian contemporary art through the lens of Zen and Eastern philosophy is further orientalising the Orient.

1 The Emergence and Resurgence of *Dansaekhwa*

On the 23rd November 2019, Kim Whanki's (김환기) *Dansaekhwa* painting titled *Universe 5-IV-71 #200*, reached the highest price auctioned for Korean art at US$ 11.3 million at Christie's Hong Kong auction (Doh). Currently, nine out of the ten most highly-priced Korean artworks are *Dansaekhwa* paintings. *Dansaekhwa* is currently being re-appreciated in the 2010s since its heyday in the 1970s. Park Seo-Bo, one of the leading figures in *Dansaekhwa* movement, says the 21st century is like a medical ward: "If an artist presents an artwork filled with the artist's thoughts, it is almost like adding violence. The purpose of painting should be to absorb the stresses and anxieties caused by various things in the 21st century, such as mass shooting and murders" (qtd. in H. Park). Perhaps this quote of Park Seo-bo provides one of the possible reasons for *Dansaekhwa*'s regained popularity since the 2010s. This chapter mainly discusses the socio-political background of the emergence in the 1970s and resurgence in the 2010s of the *Dansaekhwa* movement in South Korea and. It is noteworthy that *Dansaekhwa* art, with its minimalist and abstract qualities, emerged and resurged under governments that heavily surveilled and suppressed freedom of speech.

1.1 An Emergence in the late 1960s and a Resurgence in the 2010s

Dansaekhwa began to emerge in the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s. *Dansaekhwa* artists were mostly affluent youth who came of age in the wake of the Korean War. The Korean War (1950-1953) erupted through the interventions of the Soviet Union and the United States, only a few years after Korea achieved independence in 1945 from Japanese colonisation (1910-1945). The creation of the De-militarised Zone (DMZ - present from 1953 till today) along the 38th parallel effectively divided the peninsula in two, and South Korea became an isolated peninsula without a land route. The war ruined everything on the small Korean peninsula and only left the remnants of the war fields. Despite the devastating effects of the Korean War, which led to the most impoverished period in the history of South Korea, the artists who eventually led the *Dansaekhwa* movement could afford to study at university practise their art. Later, in the 1960s and the 1970s, travelling overseas was still difficult and was only for the highly privileged few. Yet many of the *Dansaekhwa* artists, as well as the art critic Lee-Il, travelled overseas frequently. Their travels allowed them to keep in step with global contemporary art trends and movements.

Most of the *Dansaekhwa* artists were born amid the Japanese colonial period and are currently in their 80s or deceased. They lived throughout Korea's tumultuous twentieth century. In the last hundred years, the Korean peninsula resisted 35 years of Japanese colonisation, experienced three years of civil war, and endured 67 years of the ceasefire that still ideologically divides the country into North and South. South Korea saw oppressive militant dictator regimes from the 1960s to the 1980s. That period was followed by the

democracy movement with deadly protests (Gwangju Uprising in 1980 and June Struggle in 1987) against authoritarian governments with high levels of corruptions.

It is interesting to note that *Dansaekhwa* emerged and flourished during the oppressive militant authoritarianism in the 1960s and 1970s under Park Chung-hee's (1963-1979) regime that came into power through a military coup. Economic prosperity was prioritised at the cost of human rights and freedom of speech under Park's regime. Freedom of speech or expression had little room to exist during this time. Anyone that gave any sign of holding a different view to the militant regime's political agenda could have been abducted on the street, tortured, and possibly sentenced to death or life imprisonment based on false accusations.

Dansaekhwa emerged in the midst of the oppressive socio-political atmosphere in the 1960s and the 1970s under the authoritarian regime. Yoon Jin-Sup, who curated a few *Dansaekhwa* exhibitions, explains that to comprehend *Dansaekhwa*, it needs to come with the understanding of the scenes of Korean politics, economy, culture and society as well as the relationship among the artist's guilds. (Yoon "*Dansaekhwa*'s Emergence" 74-77). In acknowledging the local issues at play when the *Dansaekhwa* movement began, it must also be said that *Dansaekhwa*'s emergence was not isolated from developments in global contemporary art. The *Dansaekhwa* movement shared artistic elements with certain global art trends at the time, such as abstract, Minimalism and conceptual art.

Yoon Jin-Sup and many others generally argue that *Dansaekhwa*'s value was first recognised by Japanese art critics in the landmark exhibition at Tokyo Gallery, *Five Korean*

Artists, Five Kinds of White in 1975. However, there are many pieces of evidence that one of the leading figures in *Dansaekhwa*, Park Seo-bo was eager to promote and proactively recognise the value of Korean contemporary art and the *Dansaekhwa* movement in particular.

Although it may be difficult to pinpoint one event that marks the beginning of the *Dansaekhwa* movement, some trace its roots to the avant-garde group called A.G. This group of elite artists was formed in 1969 and over the course of their short five-year existence, held three exhibitions. The A.G. published magazines to introduce contemporary art to Korean readers. The first magazine published in 1969, *A.G. No.1* exhibits a series of artworks that are mostly white in colour, painted by now considered *Dansaekhwa* artists. The cover page of *A.G. No.1* features a geometric shape monochrome painting by Seo Seung-Won. Myungdong Gallery's *Exhibition of White Colour* in September 1972, also further followed the trend of exploring different shades of white colours and minimalistic expression in Korean contemporary art scenes at the time (J. Yoon "*Dansaekhwa*" 79-81).[2] These distinctive features of colour white, abstract and minimalist aesthetics can be seen as the prelude of the *Dansaekhwa* movement.

Park Seo-Bo (b 1931) is one of the prominent figures of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. Park was the Vice-Chairman (1970-77), then a Chairman (1977-1980) of the International Division of the Korea Fine Art Association.[3] In attempts to present the Korean contemporary

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[2] The Exhibition of White Colour (*백색展* in Korean) in Myungdong Gallery in 1972 featured the works of Kim Joo-young, Lee Won-hwa, Lee Jong-nam, Um Hee-ok, and Yeo Myung-gu.

[3] In Korean: 한국미술협회

artists of high calibre for international exhibitions, such as the *Paris Biennale, Sao Paolo Biennial, Triennial-India, and Cagne International Painting Festival,* Park Seo-bo curated large-scale exhibitions such as the *Independent* [4] in 1972, *Seoul Contemporary Art Festival* and *École de Seoul* in 1975. The *Independent* in 1972, was known to have been seen by the director of Tokyo Gallery, Yamamoto Takashi, three years earlier than the exhibition he curated, *Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White*[5] in 1975. This exhibition featured works of Park Seo-bo, Seo Seung-won, Lee Dong-yeop, Huh Hwang, Kwon Young-woo.

The *Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White* in 1975 in Tokyo Gallery is often considered as the pivotal exhibition for *Dansaekhwa* movement by numerous art critics, as it is credited to first recognise and highlight the characteristics of the movement. However, the avant-garde elite artist's group A.G.'s existence and their published magazine from 1969, *Exhibition of White Colour* at Myungdong Gallery in Seoul in 1972, Park Seo-bo's undeniably active involvements in organising contemporary art scenes at the time with the exhibition such as *Independent* in 1972, clearly demonstrate that what is now grouped as *Dansaekhwa* movement was actively sought, discussed and exhibited by Korean artists and art critics, prior to the Tokyo exhibition in 1975.

Lee Ufan recalls the development of *Dansaekhwa* movement in an interview with the art historian Yoon Jin-Sup (b 1955) for the catalogue of the exhibition *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting* at Seoul National Museum of Contemporary Art in 2012:

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[4] In Korean: *앙당펭당展*
[5] In Korean: *한국5 인의 작가, 다섯 가지의 흰색展*

> Let me explain how I see the school of *Dansaekhwa* developing. Those spearheading the quest at the forefront were the gallery director Yamamoto who saw the <Independent> exhibition in 1972, the art critic Nakahara Yusuke at Yamamoto's heels, myself as a channel of communication between Korea and Japan, Park Seo-Bo as a commanding leader in Seoul. The important role played by the Myungdong Gallery as a base of its promotion cannot be denied. . . [I]t would have been impossible to accomplish or even discuss the school of *Dansaekhwa* without the presence and role of Park Seo-Bo. It was against the reality of oppression, exclusion, and alienation from the art institutions that Park Seo-Bo mediated, meting out the paltry resources inside and outside of Korea to encourage further development of the *Dansaekhwa* artists. His passion and dedication were indeed magnificent. (Lee qtd. in Yoon "The World of *Dansaekhwa*" 21)

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT KOREAN *DANSAEKHWA*

Korean minimalist movement *Dansaekhwa* is a localised version of global contemporary art movements and has characteristics that distinguish it from its counterparts in other countries. Some of *Dansaekhwa*'s features include the use of various shades of white, repetitious colour applications, the application of traditional calligraphy mulberry papers to explore tactility or the drawing of countless irregular shapes, and the use of Joseon-era's porcelain-like off-white and earthy tones of colours. The art critic Nakahara Yusuke who was part of organising *Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White (1975)*

in Tyoko Gallery wrote about the unique features of the Korean minimalist paintings, now called *Dansaekhwa*, that he saw.

> What I mean is not that Korean contemporary paintings are aligned with Euro-American trends. Some Korean painters indeed demonstrate distinctive characteristics that do not exist in any other countries. On my first visit to Seoul in the spring of 1973, I recognised that the use of halftone colours and a delicate deliberation of the surface coexisted in a painting I saw. (qtd. in Yoon "The World of *Dansaekhwa*" 21)

The use of different shades of white is one of the characteristic features of some *Dansaekhwa* paintings. White has long been seen as a symbol of Korean culture by locals and visitors to the Korean peninsula alike because common people generally wore white clothing. Westerners who visited Korea in the late Joseon dynasty (1392-1897) in the 19th century recorded that the nine out of ten people were wearing white on the street and described Koreans as "the white-clad people." Yoon Jin-Sup (b. 1955) also recalls from his childhood, that adults in his village took delight in wearing white clothes (Yoon "The World of *Dansaekhwa*" 19, 22). In this respect, off-tone white colour scheme which is one of the defining aspects of *Dansaekhwa* paintings make it specific to Korea, that distinguishes from other Minimalist paintings from other countries in the 1960-70s.

DANSAEKHWA'S RESURGENCE AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF SOUTH KOREA IN THE 2010S

For nine years, from 2008 to 2017, two presidents of South Korea – Lee Myung-bak (2008 – 2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013 – 2017) – were deemed to have brought the hard-earned Korean democratic state to regress. Over five months (every Saturday from October 2016 to March 2017) of peaceful candlelight protests were held near the Blue House (the president's residence) in Gwang-Hwa-Moon Square in the middle of Seoul and attended by approximately 16 million people. These demonstrations led to the impeachment of president Park Geun-hye in March in 2017. Park's impeachment effectively ended nine years of regressing Korean democracy under two consecutive governments led by the conservative party, whose political ideas and histories are deeply rooted in the previous authoritarian, militant, corrupt governments that lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Park Geun-hye regime used tactics similar to those used in the 1970s during her father Park Chung-hee's regime to censor freedom of speech at the state level and created a blacklist of arts and culture personnel. The purpose of the blacklist was to disadvantage or limit the creative activities of any artists, actors, journalists, filmmakers, writers, public figures, sportsman, and celebrities who exhibited signs of criticism towards the government in power. In other words, anyone who publicly supported the opposition party could become a target. The existence of the blacklist was revealed to the public throughout the 2016-2017 impeachment scandals. More than 9,000 personnel and 340 institutions were found to have been blacklisted. Some on the blacklist lost their source of income, and any satirical art or commentary against the then government was removed and those

responsible punished. It reminded many of the helplessness that they felt under the authoritarian governments from the 1960s to the 1980s. Interestingly, another moment of déjà vu was experienced, as *Dansaekhwa* was revived with its popularity during this time, when it reminded people of the hopelessness of the 1970s under the brutal dictatorship that deprived the basic democratic rights - freedom of speech. Park Chung-hee was the longstanding dictator from 1963 to 1979 till he was assassinated. His daughter Park Geun-hye was voted as president in 2013 and impeached in 2017. Their regimes had many resemblances as some of the same high government officials were redeployed. They adopted similar tactics to heavily censor media and art industries to intimidate them not to question the authority's corrupted practices. Interestingly, *Dansaekhwa* was flourished in the 1970s under Park Chung-hee's regime and regained its popularities in the 2010s during his daughter Park Geun-hye's government that deployed similar tactics to systematically suppressed the freedom of speech. *Dansaekhwa* art with minimalist and abstract aesthetics qualities seems to have helped prevent would have prevented artists and galleries from being blacklisted.

Many retrospective *Dansaekhwa* shows were held at various galleries in Korea and overseas, and *Dansaekhwa* paintings gained popularities at Hong Kong auction market in 2010s. For example, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity* was held at Guggenheim New York in 2011. The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art[6] held a *Dansaekhwa* retrospective exhibition *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting* in 2012. Kukje Gallery in Seoul held the exhibition *The Art of Dansaekhwa* in 2014. With the resurgence of *Dansaekhwa* in the

[6] MMCA, 국립현대미술관

2010s, one noticeable change is that the name *Dansaekhwa* has become proper noun in English, whereas artworks of the movement used to be referred to as Korean monochrome paintings (Kwon 13). Art scholar Yoon Jin-Sup began to use the term *Dansaekhwa* as a proper noun in written English for the Gwangju Biennale's Special Exhibition Korea/Japan Modern Art's catalogue in 2000 (Yoon "*Dansaekhwa*'s Emergence" 94).

1.2 Arts of Resistance?

Dansaekhwa is widely referred to as art of resistance in the form of silence. Lee Ufan has repeatedly referred to *Dansaekhwa* as an art of resistance in his attempts to shape the discourse of *Dansaekhwa*. In an interview for the exhibition *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting* at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea in 2012, Lee Ufan characterised the *Dansaekhwa* movement as a resistance movement against the oppressive dictatorship in the 1970s. Lee Ufan poignantly described it as a period of abstract, during the decade of impoverishment and oppression. He claimed that the repetitious patterns and strokes in monochrome paintings were to express the negativity and the resistance against the repressive militant government (qtd. in Chung 132). It could be argued that silence is metaphorically reflected in abstract *Dansaekhwa* artwork by not having many visual narratives to unfold. However, Lee Ufan's claims of *Dansaekhwa* as art of resistance was followed by sharp criticism. *Dansaekhwa* artists, already perceived as elite and detached from social ills, were often criticised for being "silent" against the socio-political backdrop of the time (C. Kim 31). In an interview for *Dansaekhwa* exhibition at Gukje Gallery in 2015, Lee Ufan revised his argument by saying that it was within the limited range of what they could do ("Why *Dansaekhwa*"), because their freedom of expression as artists was highly constrained.

From the 1960 to 1980s, government oppression intensified. Officials condemned anyone showing signs of being influenced by communist ideology and took down any sign with red colour that was seen to be associated with communism (Kee 193-95). Park Seo-bo and some *Dansaekhwa* artists, such as Chung Chang-sup and Yun Hyongkeun, participated

in national painting projects led by Park Chung-hee's repressive government in the 1960-70s. The purpose of the campaign was to paint propaganda images of "idealized scenes of past military glory, industrial progress, and national unification" as well as "victory over communism," by Park Chung-hee's own estimation (Kee 213). The artists' involvement in this project was seen as being admitted to complicity with the government. However, their other abstract artworks suggest no specific links to this intention, yet neither does it make explicit a code of resistance against the known adversary (Kee 193-201).

As discussed above, the minimalist style of painting might have easily kept *Dansaekhwa* artists from being blacklisted or questioned by the militant governments in the 1970s. However, it seems more plausible that abstract nature of *Dansaekhwa* was the by-products of the oppressive governments limiting freedom of expression, rather than a proactive resistance against the oppressive regime. The minimalist styles of art were probably within the limited range of creativities that were allowed. However, *Dansaekhwa* artists mostly coming from affluent families, they may have comfortably adopted the contemporaneity of art scenes having travelled overseas. This also conveniently avoided the possible scrutiny of being censored by government.

As noted, Korean minimalist movement *Dansaekhwa* is a localised version of the global contemporary art movements and unique to its counterparts in other countries. One of the unique features would be the different shades of white colour, including that of Joseon dynasty period's porcelain white colour. The term People of White Clothes is widely used to describe Korean people by Koreans. However, it may no longer have the same connotations from the Japanese colonialism period (1910-1945), that used to refer to the

resistance activists for the country's independence. There was no reference found that the choice of different shades of white in *Dansaekhwa* was to inherit the spirit of 'resistance' against the Japanese colonisation. The true art of resistance was the Minjung Art movement that was flourished in the 1980s. It was initiated with the socio-political motivations that acknowledged the needs of artists to use art as a medium to participate in the pro-democracy movements in Korea. Its beginning was marked in 1969 when the group called "Hyun-Sil-Dong-In" was formed by Oh Yun, Im Sae-Taek and others (Mok). The group advocated for nationalism that fosters Korea's independence, unification, and preservation of cultures. The aspiration of Minjung movement was to re-establish and regain Korean national identity and autonomy from the relentlessly continued invasions and oppression since the collapse of the modern Korean Empire. Daehan Empire was established in 1897 by the last King of Korea, Go-Jong, and it was collapsed in 1910 as the Japanese took away the sovereignty. Minjung movement was led by dissidents against American intervention in Korean War and South Korean governance, the tyranny of militant dictators, and the exploitation of capitalist system and Chaebol (super-rich families in Korea).[7] It was heightened with the pro-democracy movements in the 1980s. Many protestors were brutally murdered at the Gwangju Massacre in 1980 and June Struggle in 1987. Militant regimes brutally oppressed any pro-democracy movements in the 1980s. In July 1985, the 19 artists were arrested on the site of the large-scale exhibition *Korean Art, Power of Artists in their 20s*. Five of them were convicted guilty and were subjected to rigorous interrogations. An elite and prominent art critic, Lee Il, was a pivotal figure in *Dansaekhwa*

[7] 재벌 in Korean: super-rich family members who own and run big conglomerates in South Korea. It was such unique phenomenon in how Chaebol in Korea operate, and it is treated like proper noun.

movement as he was an equivalent figure of Clement Greenberg for Abstract Expressionism for *Dansaekhwa*. Lee Il commented that the Minjung artworks' titles and contents were frightening. It was shocking that there is such an art movement in our country (Shim "Revisiting Lee-Il" 54). Lee Il, as an elite art critic, clearly made himself as distant and indifferent as possible, from this socio-political turmoil. He was criticised by another art critic Shim Sang-Yong. According to Shim, although Lee Il expressed his position against police intervention, he inevitably legitimised the government authorities abusing their power. Lee Il criticised Minjung art as failure and low-quality art, but completely dismissed its desire to critically comment on the socio-political injustices in the forms of art (Ibid 55). Minjung Art began with the criticism and resistance against the established modernist artists, who called themselves avant-garde in Korea, and were consistently "silent" and distanced themselves from the reality of the oppression and atrocities done by the militant governments (E. Park 66-67). Minjung Art movement began to expand in the late 1970s when people began to realise that the art was only possessed by the enthusiasts or the privileged few. Also, there was an urge to self-reflect on the passive receptions of the influx of Western aestheticism without critical approaches (Shim "Minjung" 79).

It is interesting to note the pattern of *Dansaekhwa* emergence in the 1970s, followed by Minjung Art in the 1980s and their resurgence in the same order in the 2010s. It does not seem to be entirely coincidental given the similar socio-political environments. *Dansaekhwa* emerged under a brutal militant regime with minimalist aesthetic qualities that reflected no political agendas at its core. *Dansaekhwa* artists may have intentionally and conveniently distanced themselves from any socio-political matters, as governments were heavily censoring freedom of speech, especially supressing any signs of different political

views. However, in response to the oppressive governments that were condoned in the silent response of their predescessor elite *Dansaekhwa* artist group, the Minjung Art movement flourished in the 1980s. It was heavily charged with political commentaries to criticise corrupt governments in order to promote solidarity and bring awareness about the needs of civil rights. The same pattern follows in the 2010s, when *Dansaekhwa* regained popularity under governments with a state-controlled blacklist meant to deprive the basic democratic right to the freedom of speech. The *Dansaekhwa* movement was again followed by a resurgence of Minjung Art.

Dansaekhwa is often referred to as the art of resistance against the oppressive militant regimes in the 1960 and 1970s. However, it seems it was only claimed by *Dansaekhwa* artists in an attempt to create a discourse for *Dansaekhwa* retrospectively and was only followed by harsh criticism. *Dansaekhwa* can be seen as the passive byproduct of an oppressive government, because minimalist art without visual narratives would have protected its artists from the government's severe censorship. However, there is not any specific element that demonstrates that it was an act of silent protest against the oppression itself except for the artists' retrospective claims.

This chapter discussed the socio-political background of South Korea at the time of the emergence and resurgence, respectively, of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. As will be shown in the following chapters, the socio-political discussion is entirely omitted in the investigations of *Dansaekhwa* by Western art writers. Also, Asian artists' voices are often silenced in the discussion of their artworks. Instead, Western art criticism on *Dansaekhwa* artworks often convey orientalist stereotypes, which will be further explored in chapter five.

The next chapter will discuss the development of *Dansaekhwa* by looking at the perspectives from artists and Korean art critics in order to compare them with those of Western art critics.

2 *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan – Artist's Statements

Lee Ufan's work *From the Lines* (1976) was auctioned for USD 2.1 million at Sotheby's auction in November 2014 (Hong 140). The price of his works increased as it gained more popularity by being exposed to international galleries. Lee Ufan says his ways of artmaking could be understood as the rejection and criticism of drawing and making. Hence, he argues it is the expression of open criticism towards capitalism that is fuelled by mass production and mass consumption (U. Lee "What Is"). However, it is questioned by some art scholars, how free Lee Ufan's works are from the end of capitalism that worships the capitals (Hong 141). Lee Ufan's philosophical engagement on his artworks conflicts somewhat with his prolific productions of minimalist works selling for millions of dollars.

Kukje Gallery, near the Kyeongbok, palace exhibited *The Art of Dansaekhwa* in 2014 to "re-contextualise[s] the origins of *Dansaekhwa* through the lens of Korean modernism" ("*Press Release"*). It revisited the works of seven prominent artists of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. Kukje Gallery released a press release in both English and Korean, and it highlights the importance of the exhibition. "*The Art of Dansaekhwa* especially captures the importance of traditional Korean philosophy, the innovative use of materials, and the performative aspect of studio practice, all of which were key components of the movement." All seven *Dansaekhwa* artists featured in the exhibition are elite Korean men of a similar age, who all experienced the socio-political challenges in Korea's 20th century. There are photographs and documentation to confirm that they influenced each other's creativity and intellectual ideas.

The photograph above captures Park Seo-bo on the left and Lee Ufan on the right in Park's Shinchon studio in Seoul. There are many photographs of them together in their respective studios and at various events. It is evident that they shared conceptual ideas to influence each other, therefore developed distinctive Korean minimalist aesthetics now known as *Dansaekhwa*. Kukje Gallery's press release briefly defines *Dansaekhwa*'s birth in the Korean context.

> Korean *Dansaekhwa*, also referred to as *Baeksaekpa* (the School of White) emerged in the 1970s as a reaction against the academicism of the National Art Exhibition and in response to the rapidly changing social and political landscape within the country. Characterised by its emphasis on monochromatic compositions and refined approach to materiality, *Dansaekhwa* was immediately associated with questions of Korean cultural identity and the burgeoning modern art movement. What defined the *Dansaekhwa* movement was a deep philosophical commitment to the power and indigenous vitality of traditional materials as well as the relationship between the artist's consciousness and the act of making. This focus on studio process has led many scholars and artists to characterise *Dansaekhwa* as a type of "performance" based on its highly specific, intentional processes used in the making of artworks. In this definition the preparation and action implied in making a painting achieves a level of mindfulness akin to that seen in meditation.

Dansaekhwa is Korean modern art movement that was initiated by a group of male elite intellectual artists. It is appreciated by overseas audiences as Eastern aesthetics, through individual *Dansaekhwa* artist's retrospective exhibitions. Kukje Gallery's press

release acknowledges the shared influences both from the East and the West in terms of painting techniques, ideas, and aesthetics:

> Using painting techniques from both the West and the East, *Dansaekhwa* artists regularly employed raw burlap and Hanji paper in totally new and innovative ways using Western idioms while simultaneously modifying them to engage with traditional aesthetics. This willingness to adopt ideas from Western modernity allowed for the movement to engage in a global dialogue while fostering radical new hybrid techniques that continue to be associated with *Dansaekhwa*.

Dansaekhwa artists were highly educated in Korea and overseas during the most impoverished time in Korea, and most of them held prestigious positions at universities and art associations in Korea. Some *Dansaekhwa* artists, who were in the centre of shaping the discourses of the movement, actively voiced their concerns on rapid Westernisation in Korea. However, they were criticised for their hypocritical gestures of embracing and reappropriating Western art aesthetics and movements while at the same time condemning it. This chapter discusses two of the most important figures in *Dansaekhwa* movements, Park Seo-bo and Lee Ufan. The following discussion centres on the *Dansaekhwa* artists' statements, writings, and background in order to demonstrate the significance of….

2.1 Park Seo-bo - *Dansaekhwa* is Not an Extension of Western Minimalism

Park Seo-bo (박서보 b 1931) is one of the pivotal figures in the 1970s iteration of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. He was born in Gyeongsang Province of South Korea in 1931 during the Japanese colonial period (1910 – 1945) to an affluent family. Because of his background, he could afford to attend Hongik University in Seoul to study painting during the 1950s. Kate Lim, a curator and an art critic based in Korea and a CEO of Art Platform Asia, says Nam June Paik's oeuvre was formed in a completely different orbital space to that of Korean contemporary art scenes. Paik was based in New York in the 1960s and participated in Neo-Dada and Fluxus movement. Paik's presence in South Korean art history context is not prominent, but Paik became a well-established artist outside of the Korean context. Lee Ufan's philosophical engagement with his artworks seems to have the power to attract the interests of art critics, collectors and galleries. Lim published a biography on artist Park Seo-bo in 2019 to acknowledge the importance of Park Seo-bo's oeuvre in Korean art history and in international galleries.

Donald Judd (1928 – 1994) visited a gallery in South Korea in 1991. A journalist in Korea at the time, viewed Western Minimalism and Korean *Dansaekhwa* movement in the same light. The journalist stated the Minimalism movement was led by Donald Judd and Ad Reinhardt and rapidly spread globally, including Korea in the 1960s and listed many *Dansaekhwa* artists (Lim 237-238). Donald Judd referred to Park Seo-bo as the greatest Minimalist artist of Korea when he visited Korea in 1991. However, Park Seo-bo consistently

claimed that *Dansaekhwa* and Minimalism are nothing like each other and rooted in fundamentally different foundations. He insists that he is a *Dansaekhwa* painter but refuses to be called as a Minimalist (Lim 238). Kate Lim criticises the views that understand *Dansaekhwa* as a modified form of the Western Minimalism. Lim argues that it is an example of cultural imperialism, as it assumes Minimalism to be the standard criteria as a starting point (250). Lim favourably references Park Seo-bo's view that *Dansaekhwa* was a separate movement that differs from the Western Minimalism. She says it is only confusing to compare the similarities between *Dansaekhwa* and Minimalism. Park Seo-bo is an essential figure to understand *Dansaekhwa* as he was in the leading centre of the movement. He engaged in numerous discussions in theorising the concepts of *Dansaekhwa*. For example, Park Seo-bo differentiates *Dansaekhwa*'s monochrome colours from that of the Western monochrome painting:

> Even Korean people tend to see *Dansaekhwa* as a modified version of Western Minimalism movement. I would say they are fundamentally different from their birth. Ours began from the concept of nothingness. Western monochrome is entirely white or completely black, as it was birthed in relation to its opposite, the colour paintings. The difference in ours is the colour that is neither black or white, but dark blackish or white-ish pale colours. It is the white colour where potters would tread on their clay soils and apply enamel glaze to get the white colour that is not 100% white, but the colour that is peaceful and natural. It is the dark colour where the ceiling becomes blackened after woodfire—that black colour of blackened walls over the decades of woodfires. My black is that darkened colour. There is an infinite depth of its mind. (qtd. in Lim 250)

The character 無 (understood in Chinese, Korean and Japanese) is translated into English as “nothingness.” Nothingness is often discussed and referenced in East Asian philosophical discussions. In this case, the statement that *Dansaekhwa* came from nothingness seems to have been used to support the claim that it was not influenced by Western Minimalism. This argument is difficult to comprehend if one understands that *Dansaekhwa*’s minimalist, abstract and conceptual characteristics, share high resemblances with Western contemporary art movement trends at the time. Lee Ufan asserts that “to be frankly honest, we must openly acknowledge and accept the existence of a definite Western influence without any reserve” (“Why *Dansaekhwa*”). He adds that, “however, I don’t mean that it was directly imported. Instead, I think we pieced certain aspects together with what we were looking for, resulting in works that transmit our individual consititutions” (ibid).

Some of *Dansaekhwa*’s main features are undeniably aligned with that of the global contemporary art movements of the 1960-1970s. As Park Seo-bo articulated, *Dansaekhwa*’s tones of monochrome colour are quite distinct from Western monochrome paintings. *Dansaekhwa*’s monochrome tones are generally softer, warmer and subdued colours. Also, there are many adjectives to describe the colour black and white in the Korean language. For example, more than 50 different adjectives can be used to describe different tones of the colour red and more than 70 adjectives can describe the different tones of the colour black in the Korean language. Park Seo-bo suggests that *Dansaekhwa* colours are the familiar colours that can be found in everyday lives and make viewers reminiscent of the accumulated time and memories of the past. *Dansaekhwa’s* monochrome colour is often the outcome of countless dots, lines or shapes. Park says that *Dansaekhwa* colour has the depth of mind and spirit.

Park Seo-bo's *Myobup Series* is an example of laborious repetition of lines. It is called *Myobup* (묘법) in Korean, and also called *Écriture*, meaning "handwriting" in French. Park Seo-bo was inspired by his son learning how to write ("Why *Dansaekhwa*"). The repetitive and laborious activities are intertwined with the materials, which Lim says is one of the core elements of *Dansaekhwa*. Park Seo-bo's retrospective exhibition held in 2019 at MMCA – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art was called *Meditator who does not Know to Tire.*[8] It reflects the relentless actions required to create his painting, and his prolific artist career at the age of 87 at the time of the exhibition. Art historian, Lim says Park Seo-bo's paintings are entirely different from that of the Western Minimalism's properties of mechanical repetition or reduction to its minimalist structures. It involves human's laborious repetitions, countless attempts and efforts that are valuable in itself (251). Lee Ufan also comments:

> The method of repetition and recurrence is not nonsensical. It is what differentiates from the Western hollow and cold aesthetics. Korean *Dansaekhwa* aesthetics are abstract, yet it embodies the natural rhythm of human touch and depicts the expression of the liveliness of breathing life. (qtd. in Lim 251)

[8] Park Seo-bo's retrospective exhibition (from 18/May/2019 to 1/Sep/2019) at MMCA was titled as, 지칠 줄 모르는 수행자 in Korean, "Meditator who does not Know to Tire" is the literal translation of this. The official English title of the exhibition was "The Untiring Endeavorer."

The aesthetics of visibly human touch with irregular rhythms and patterns can be seen as one of the most outstanding distinctions between Korean *Dansaekhwa* and Western Minimalism. Korean *Dansaekhwa* paintings often have irregular lines and patterns that evokes human touches and emotions that permeate through its visual aesthetics. In contrast, the majority of Western minimalism aesthetics is often intentionally detached from anything that evokes human emotions. For example, Donald Judd's *Untitled Series'* repetition of the rectangle industrial blocks or Frank Stella's *Black Painting* evokes coldness and abruptness away from the sense of any emotions. Park Seo-bo's *Myobup Series* with its repetitive lines are drawn by the artist's hands. They are irregular in their length and shape and almost overflow the canvas. They remind the viewers of the artist's gestures, actions, presence, labour and emotions. Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* with carefully hand-picked stones by the artist from nature evokes the sense of warmth and nature's ambience.

Lee Yong-woo is an art historian and critic and has published numerous books on Korean contemporary art. He states in the preface of 2015's Venice Biennale that *Dansaekhwa* is post-war Korean modernism and can be understood as the extended forms of Minimalism and abstract art influenced by Western art in the 1960s and the 1970s (qtd. in Lim 249). It is undeniable that *Dansaekhwa* was influenced by the global contemporary art movement at the time. They share similarities in their characteristics, such as abstractness, monochrome colours, minimalistic compositions, simple shapes that do not intend to portray specific figures, the absence of the artist as a creator of great mastery art, and concepts being the essential components of artworks. Acknowledging these similarities,

however, is not to say that the *Dansaekhwa* movement did not develop its own meaningful and unique regional discourses and aesthetics that reflect Korean culture and the socio-political background of the time.

2.2 Lee Ufan's Writings and Interviews

Lee Ufan was born in Gyeongsang Province in Korea in 1936 in during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), like most of artists involved in the *Dansaekhwa* movement. Lee entered Seoul National University's School of Fine Arts in 1956. He was trained in East Asian calligraphy with repetitive drawing of points and lines, which later became the influential part of his brushwork series of *From Point, From Line* ("Lee Ufan"). Lee travelled to Japan to bring medicine for his sick uncle, who persuaded him to remain there to study. Lee moved to Japan and studied continental philosophy and aesthetics at Nihon University in Tokyo from 1958 to 1961, with a keen interest in phenomenology and structuralism. From the 1970s onward, Lee Ufan frequently moved between Korea, Kamakura (where his family lives in Japan), and his Paris studio (Munroe "The Ethics of Abstraction" 38, Munroe "Lee Ufan").

Lee Ufan was from an affluent family being able to study fine arts at the Seoul National University in the most impoverished time of South Korea in the mid-1950s. Lee Ufan being able to study abroad in Japan in itself, was a privilege at the time. Lee Ufan's transcultural living that was experienced much earlier than many others at the time, naturally made him a cultural ambassador between Korea and Japan, as well as between Eastern and Western art worlds. Lee Ufan says "[t]he dynamics of distance have made me what I am" (qtd. in Munroe "Lee Ufan"). He was becoming known as an established artist and art scholar from the late 1960s, holding exhibitions in Korea and Japan. Lee Ufan is one of the most established Korean artists internationally. His exhibitions have been held at prominent international galleries and museums, such as the Musée d'Art Moderne Paris in 2005, the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in 2008,

Pace Galleries in 2008 and 2015, the Guggenheim Museum New York in 2011, Lisson Gallery London in 2015, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in New York in 2019.

Lee Ufan is an artist, philosopher, prolific writer and one of the main representatives of the *Dansaekhwa* movement. He published a collection of his previously unpublished short essays from 1967 to 2007 on his philosophical engagements on aesthetics in Korean, French, English and Japanese.[9] He wrote abundantly on his works of art and philosophical engagements. Yet, Western art critics often entirely silence his ever-present voice in the discussion of his work or *Dansaekhwa*. It aligns with Spivak's subaltern theory, when Lee Ufan becomes subaltern to the Western art critics and scholars. Lee Ufan's voice is completely voided even though it is available in the forms of interviews and exhibition catalogues for acclaimed galleries, all of which showcase his successful career as a contemporary artist. Also, his prolific writings were available in multiple languages in books, interviews, articles, and numerous exhibition catalogues. However, his subaltern voice – Asian artist's voice, did not seem to have been considered worthy of attention in understanding Lee Ufan's works by most of the Western art critics. This led to misunderstanding of his works with orientalist views instead. Lee Ufan's voices on his artistic motivations are entirely ignored when his art is misunderstood as Zen-inspired. Lee Ufan asserted that it is a misunderstanding of his work to see his work in the light of Zen in the interview with the Tate in English in 2013. The subaltern, in this case, an accomplished Asian male artist's voice is overshadowed by Western understanding of his art with

[9] The book *The Art of Encounter* is a collection of Lee Ufan's short essays on aesthetics and art. It was published by TURNER/LEESON Gallery and Walther König in 2004 and revised and expanded edition in 2008. It was also published in Korean and the book title was *여백의 예술 (Art of Void)* and published in 2002.

orientalist views – default Zen reading. Lee Ufan is still alive to communicate, and his interviews and writings are abundantly available. Lee Ufan's comments and writings on his artistic motivation are entirely omitted and rarely quoted in the discussions of his artworks or *Dansaekhwa* by Western art critics. In contrast, Western minimalist artists' works were widely understood by thoroughly studying artists' essays and interviews on their artistic intension and their philosophical engagements. This section will look at some of Lee Ufan's writings to understand his artworks.

BUDDHA'S LOTUS: METAPHOR OF ENCOUNTER OR SCULPTURE

Dansaekhwa from the 1970s regained its popularity in the late 2000s in Korea as well as overseas. The exhibition *Lee Ufan: Sculpture* was held in Kukje Gallery in Seoul in 2009. The ten works of *Relatum Series* were exhibited. Lee Ufan wrote an essay titled, "Buddha's Lotus: Metaphor of Encounter or Sculpture" in the exhibition catalogue - *Lee Ufan: Sculpture* (2009). It begins with the famous story of the Flower Sermon from Chan Buddhism.[10] The story of the Flower Sermon begins with Buddha quietly holding a white lotus flower in a silent teaching session for his disciples near a pond. Only one of his students in the crowd smiled as the sign of enlightenment. Lee Ufan used this story as a prelude to the introduction of his sculpture *Relatum Series*. However, he does not indicate in the piece that his works were influenced by Buddhism. By 2009, Lee Ufan's works had been abundantly discussed by Western art critics with regards to Zen Buddhism; Lee may

[10] Chan Buddhism is an ancestor of Zen Buddhism in Japan. It is pronounced as Chan in Chinese, Seon in Korean and Zen in Japanese.

have referenced the Flower Sermon as a response. Lee's piece is followed by a discussion on his sculptures, and it resembles that of the Western minimalist artists' discussions of their artworks, explores bodily experience and site-specificity. Donald Judd calls his minimalist sculptures "specific objects," Sol LeWitt refers to it as "structures," and Lee Ufan calls his minimalist sculptures "presented objects":

> A presented object becomes an artwork through the intervention of the artist. I call a presented object a sculpture when it acts as a three-dimensional metaphor. Sculpture is not simply a presentation of a subject or an object itself, but it is an act of play and an attempt to open up our surroundings or a part of the world (14).

Lee Ufan begins the essay "Buddha's Lotus" with one of the famous Buddha's story and ironically finishes the essay with "Amen." Given the minimalist and abstract trends of global contemporary art scenes suggest that Lee Ufan's work may not have been influenced either by Buddhism or Christianity. Instead, he said he does not understand Buddhism very well, and it is a misunderstanding to read his works in the light of Zen. There are abundant Zen connections made in comprehending Lee's oeuvre. However, there is no quote of the artist, or supporting evidence to follow. Making Zen references, the Western scholars have not considered inquiring into Lee Ufan's comments on his artistic motivations, despite their availabilities in English.

At the beginning of Lee Ufan's essay, he discusses the unexpected and observational encounters in life that are "moments of brilliance and beauty, sadness and remorse" that are only ephemeral. Lee Ufan says scholars are trying to explain why and "[r]eligious authorities tell us to stop questioning and believe in God. Yet artists attempt to visualise

these observational encounters" (14). In Lee Ufan's book *The Art of Void,* the compilation of his short essays on aesthetics and philosophy, he wrote an essay titled, "Henri Matisse's Miscellaneous Thoughts." He begins the essay with his recently found joy of being an artist. He says Da Vinci wanted to be called as an artist rather than a scholar or anything else, and he may be able to relate (59). Lee Ufan wants to play the role of the artist that transcends the traditional artist's role that was to depict the subject as close to the real subject. Lee Ufan's idea of trying to capture the specific observational encounters through experiencing art aligns with that of the Western minimalist artists' intentions to put the viewer's experience of being in time and space at the forefront as the core part of seeing minimalist sculptures. Lee Ufan says, "An artist wishes to intentionally create these brilliant moments so that they can be observed by anyone at any given moment and bring enlightenment" (14).

Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* juxtaposes natural stone(s) and factory-produced iron plate(s). According to him, the stones may have been "formed hundreds of thousands of years ago and some were formed before the Earth's creation. They are materials that are totally opaque, transcending the time of humanity" (15). In contrast, the iron plates are industrial production in an abstract shape that is made of the elements extracted from the stones. An iron plate is "not yet to be moulded into any concrete shape. It is neutral and conspicuous" (15). Lee Ufan says stone and iron plate have "a father and son relationship." He envisions "a remote past and a faraway future" and rediscovers himself while standing in between natural stone and iron plate (15). His minimalist sculptures transcend themselves beyond the artist's intention of not making. The unique feature of Lee Ufan's minimalist sculpture in comparison to the other Western minimalist sculptures is that he "borrows" the

natural stones from the streams nearby where the exhibition is held. Lee Ufan often emphasises that the stones can go back to their natural habitats at any time. His borrowed and presented objects resemble the characteristics of the Western minimalist artists on how they blurred the boundaries of ways of making art or the aesthetic qualities of art. Minimalist artists created sculptures by placing made objects in the gallery space. However, they often did not make the objects from scratch like in the traditional ways of making sculpture. Lee Ufan's 'presented object' also has a similar tendency. Lee Ufan says "[m]y work is an attempt to limit the action necessary for making" (15). His process resembles the characteristics of Western minimalism. However, unlike some other minimalist sculptures with the absence of artist, Lee Ufan as an artist is quite present in *Relatum Series*. After all, Lee Ufan carefully chooses the stones that he feels right for the specific location each time.

Lee Ufan's recent exhibition titled *Lee Ufan: Open Dimension* is on from 27 September 2019 to 13 September 2020 at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C. It is the first time in 45 years for Hirshhorn to let a single artist's ten new oeuvres to occupy its entire outdoor plaza. Lee Ufan "spent two years pondering and sketching the installation" (Jenkins). Lee Ufan repetitively emphasises that his works are "relational." He explores the unfamiliarity of the objects being in the gallery space, the object's history and life as a being, and phenomenological experience that is beyond our visual experience of seeing:

> When natural stones and iron plates are moved to an unfamiliar space like an art gallery, it may at first appear unnatural, violent, or even trivial. . . Objects acquire another life through the intervention of the artist, and they are transformed into living metaphors through this realistic and refreshing encounter. One can say that

> the metaphor has become visualised in the act of emphasising minute physical phenomena un-seeable by the human eye. (16)

When the stones and steel plates are placed in an entirely new space, they obtain new lives and provide a different bodily experience to the gallery visitors. Lee Ufan emphasises the past and the future, or the father and the son relationship of stone and iron plates. Each object has its own inner life and history from where it existed before, like a stone potentially hundreds or thousands of years old. It has the relationship to nature where it came from and establishes the new relationship with the new habitat – the gallery space. The boulders are often carefully picked by Lee Ufan in the nearby locations or local quarries.

Lee Ufan also reiterates the site-specificity and individuality of his borrowed and presented objects. The relationship with his sculpture objects and location is one of the critical elements, which makes his sculptures site-specific. Lee Ufan spends time selecting his stones and steel plates carefully, as they are not just any stone or any steel plate to him. He explains the individuality of his installation or sculpture and site-specificity in his essay "Buddha's Lotus":

> Instead, careful installation of the work emphasises the need for a particular stone or iron plate. When installed in a unique site the object is given a kind of corporeal presence and this in turn reveals the quality of a space. In my work, material and site are always unique and so when the location changes, it becomes a new work even if the material and design remains the same.

> A sculpture is extremely ephemeral and dependent on its surroundings. At the same time, owing to its uniqueness and site-specificity, a sculpture must engage infinitely with the space. Here I am not referring not to a metaphysical idea of infinitum, but infinitum of an ever-changing world with constant communication between inner and outer space. A sculpture is therefore a fragment of infinitum. Through this metaphor, the viewer is able to experience a perception of infinity. (18)

Lee Ufan's countless *Relatum Series* at different locations may look more or less the same with stones and iron plates or sticks. However, the relationship with the space that they ephemerally inhabit in the duration of the exhibitions, as well as the relationship with viewer's bodily experiences of being in the space, gives each *Relatum Series* new lives as art objects. Lee Ufan wants his sculptures to reveal themselves and enlighten the viewers beyond his intentions. He says my presented objects "cannot act as representatives of my ideology, and I can only attempt to help the world reveal itself. . . the sculptures are always expanding beyond my intentions. . . I desire to present sculptures for others to become enlightened" (18-19).

Throughout his essay, Lee Ufan does not mention anything about Buddhism inspiring his work. Instead, he wants the viewers to ponder his work, for example, the relationship between the found and the made being in the gallery space. Although Lee Ufan does not believe that his sculptures can represent his intentions, he still wants viewers to find something that transcends his ideas. There is an extra layer of philosophical intention to Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* – more than the phenomenological experience of being in time and space. Stone and steel plate are used as metaphors to ponder on the past and future and

more. Lee Ufan finishes his essay “Buddha’s Lotus” with “[a]s I stand before my sculptures, I reflect on the insistence of my own existence and hope that I am able to create illuminating moments that transcend me. Amen” (19).

THE ART OF VOID

Lee Ufan’s book *The Art of Void* (여백의 미술) was published in 2002 in Korean. It is a compilation of his short essays and writings on aesthetics, contemporary art, cultural critics, philosophy over the thirty years since 1967. Some of them were previously published in magazines, newspapers, catalogues in Japanese, Korean, English, French, or German. Similar compilations of his short essays were also published in English in 1996 and French in 2002. Marcel Duchamp’s avant-garde gesture of readymade was the influential predecessor of contemporary art and minimalism. In the essay, “Discovery of the Stone” (38-40), Lee Ufan writes about Duchamp’s readymade urinal called *Sam* that was exhibited in 1917. He talks about how revolutionary it was to transform a mass-produced object into a work of art as a symbol of industrial society, compared to the sculpture that was characterised by the artist’s individuality and creativity. In autumn 1968 in Shinjuku, Lee Ufan placed a big stone on top of a massive glass sheet laid on the ground in front of a gallery entrance. It made a few cracks on the glass sheet. According to Lee Ufan, space is created for observers to relationally interact between objects and space, will and coincidence, action, and body in response to the enormous stone sitting on top of the glass sheet. Lee Ufan wants his work of art to prompt the viewers to ponder on the relationship between made and unmade, and the object’s inner being and its surroundings. Lee Ufan says his work begins with criticising

and combating his contemporaneity and questioning the origin and validity of painting and sculpture. Also, he attempts to intentionally crack the space of the holistic statue and encourage the viewers to encounter the unknown and strange state.

Lee Ufan's sculpture with stone on a glass plate is aesthetically minimalist and was first titled as *Phenomenon and Perception* in the 1960s. The title was inspired by Merleau-Ponty's writings, and Lee later re-named it as *Relatum* in the 1970s (Rawlings). As discussed earlier, Lee Ufan's minimalist sculptures and Western minimalist sculptures share many similarities. More than its visual simplicity, the statements of artist motivations are in a similar vein of criticising mass production and consumption, art that became a commodity, to challenge the boundary of art, and to explore the bodily experience in relation to sculpture and installation in exhibition spaces.

In Lee Ufan's essay "In Search for the Stone" (41-44), he compares the gardens of East Asia that try to be part of the surrounding's natural scenery to the European ways of treating the garden as the part of architectural scenes. Lee Ufan is fascinated by how the stones near the streams can be thousands of years old. Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* may all look more or less the same in its compositions. However, each piece of *Relatum Series* becomes site-specific work as he always finds the stones from the nearby locations after careful consideration. He is highly aware of how different the stones are in different places depending on its geological history and environmental surroundings. The stones that are similar sizes and colours become entirely different beings when they are sitting on the streams of rural areas and when they are sitting in the galleries in urban cities. Lee Ufan found it challenging to become fond of different stones with regional specificities - to

achieve this is as difficult as to understand humans inhabiting in that region. Lee Ufan says that a stone is a stone, but it has its own image, mass, colour, shape that he finds it difficult to appreciate it when it is not familiar to him. He shares many stories of long journeys to find the perfect stone in the region where the exhibition is held. In 1971, he visited Europe for the first time to participate in Paris Biennale in the Bois de Vincennes - the largest park in Paris. He wanted to exhibit a few of his works with stones, and he struggled to find the right stones. His friend's wife drove him around for hundreds of kilometres in the night before the exhibition opening, and he still could not find one. Eventually, as he was strolling in the park to shake off the despondency, he found the perfect stone near a small pond. Two police officers were waiting for him in the morning, and it turned out the stone came from Japan and was gifted from the Japanese government to be part of the garden. Lee Ufan negotiated and promised to return the stone after the exhibition.

Another attempt of the perfect stone search was in Germany a few years later. Lee Ufan was again struggling to find the perfect stone. He made trips to forests, streams, and fields every day for the whole week. The stones he is usually fond of are round and expressionless. Such stones are easily found anywhere in Korea and Japan. He found it strange that he could not find the stones in other regions when he could find them everywhere in Korea and Japan. After about a week—once Lee Ufan familiarised himself with German meals, wine, scenery, and the sound of the language—he found a few stones that he liked near a river. They were very dark and rough in its appearance, but he thought it was a perfect natural stone found in Germany. The assistant who drove him around in search of the stone said these stones were the very first stones that they came to see. Then, he realised that he could only become fond of the German stones as he assimilated himself

to its region and culture. Lee Ufan has searched for the exact right stones over the past thirty years in the forests of France and Germany, the fields of the Netherlands and Belgium, the Alps mountain range, the hilly districts of Tuscany, the Thames River, and the urban New York City. Lee Ufan finds it difficult to believe that they are all called a stone, despite their unique images, expressions, colours, shapes, and histories.

2.3 Lee Ufan - Philosophical Inquiries

Lee Ufan studied philosophy at Nihon University. However, he was explicitly fascinated by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. His *Relatum Series* was formerly called *Phenomenon and Perception B* (1968) inspired by Merleau-Ponty's writings. Lee Ufan renamed it as *Relatum* in 1972, using the term "relatum" derived from mathematics to draw attention to the space around the sculpture (Rawlings). His minimalist sculpture shares more similarities to that of the Western minimalism, influenced by metaphysical thoughts of phenomenological engagement and the core part of the sculpture is the bodily experience of the viewer in the exhibition space.

Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* is more than what can be seen. He wants the viewers to ponder on the stone's own inner being and rich history in relation to the industrially produced steel plates and the spaces that they ephemerally inhabit. Both objects appear to be emotionless and minimal in their aesthetic qualities, which resemble the style of Western minimalist sculptures. However, the stones *found in nature* nearby the exhibition space is a unique aspect of Lee Ufan's minimalist sculptures. Lee Ufan's near-obsession or desire to find the right stone for his work of art is a unique feature of his minimalist sculpture with "borrowed" objects. Lee's admiration of nature surpasses humans' existence and understanding of time and at the same time gives the nature its own spiritual agency in a form similar to animism. Where animism would involve some form of worship or perceiving of the stone as an animated and alive being, Lee's fascination with the stone comes from his interests in its rich geological history over a period of time that transcends humans' comparatively ephemeral time on earth. Lee Ufan tries his best to find the stones

that he feels right and aesthetically familiar to the stones that can be found abundantly in the streams of Korea and Japan. In this way, the *Relatum Series* can be characterised as drawing on East Asian aesthetics.

Western minimalist artists made statements about mass-production and the overflow of replicated goods in industrial society, by exhibiting related objects in the gallery space. Advanced technologies such as photographic images challenged the traditional ways of making realism paintings or the traditional role of the artists and galleries of replicating the subject as close to realistic. Then, the artists created works of art that can only be fully experienced being immersed in the physical gallery space such as giant minimalist sculptures. Lee Ufan makes similar but different statements on mass production and an increasingly industrial and materialistic society. Western minimalist artists made statements by placing industrially produced materials in the gallery space. Lee Ufan uses the stone - natural object found and juxtaposes it with the industrially produced object – steel plate, which is made out of the materials extracted from the natural stone. Everything is human-made in the gallery space. To bring the natural object found in nature unaltered into the artificially created gallery space, and place it next to human made steel plate, that enabled mass-production of the materials, is original and modernistic in its conceptions. Lee Ufan's carefully picked stone from the nature that he thinks is precious due to its transcendency over ephemeral human beings in life longevity and history that it carries. It can be appreciated in different lights, when the preservation of nature as it is, has become one of the critical challenges of our current time.

One of the *Relatum Series* (관계항 – 만남의 탑, 1984-1985) is placed in front of the Seoul Newspaper Press Centre's skyscraper in the middle of the busy Seoul business district. The sculptures in the middle of tall and grey office buildings on busy business districts offer a place of rest for bypassers' eyes and minds. Lee Ufan's carefully selected round stones moulded by nature have aesthetically pleasing qualities, especially when they are surrounded by artificial space, such as a gallery or even the sculpture garden that is meticulously planned with a tidy lawn. Pieces from *Relatum Series* can be found in various places in the city of Seoul as public installations. The blunt and impassive stone that was shaped by nature over thousands of years has weary aesthetical merit when it is surrounded by tall grey concrete buildings and asphalt sealed roads. Lee Ufan finds himself pondering on the past and the future standing between the stone and the steel plates (U. Lee "Buddha's Lotus" 15). A spectator could ponder upon the nature that has existed long before human's existence and the nature that human has abused to the maximal point where it is fast becoming inhabitable for the humankind.

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCE

Lee Ufan's *Things and Words* (1969) won an award during the ninth Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan that was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in May 1969. Lee Ufan performed outside the gallery, where he would run back and forth with three large papers against winds and try to lay them flat on the ground. The paper sheets became crinkled and weathered, and Lee Ufan also became tired. Then, he placed three new large rectangular paper sheets on the floor of the exhibition hall, adjacent to each other in an

orderly manner. *Mono-ha* works were often ephemeral to comment on modernism's permanence of artworks (Tate "*Mono-ha*"). The title *Things and Words* refers to Michel Foucault's "The Order of Things" that was published in French in 1966, which became popular among Japanese intellectual groups. Lee Ufan recalls attending Foucault's lecture on madness in a standing room lecture at the University of Tokyo in October 1969 (Kee 411).

An art writer Ksenija Pantelić wrote about *Mono-ha* on Widewalls magazine. They said, "[i]n both his sculpture and installation works, as well as in his paintings, Ufan promoted the thoughts of Eastern philosophy and the rejection of the Western notions of representation." Pantelić does not clearly state what kinds of Eastern philosophy Lee Ufan promotes. Pantelić assumes that an artist from the far East would innately draw upon Eastern philosophy without providing any explanation about such claim.

MOHO-HA

Lee Ufan discusses *Mono-ha* in the interview with Sook Kyung Lee for Tate in 2014. *Mono-ha* (School of Things) was an art movement that emerged in Tokyo led by Lee Ufan and Nobuo Sekine in reaction to industrialisation and mass production (Tate. *Moho-Ha*). Lee Ufan explains that *Mono-ha* introduced the unmade stone and "not making" in the gallery space to counteract the effects of consumerism and capitalism:

> In the second half of the 1960s, industry in developed areas of the world, such as Europe and the U.S., or in the case of Asia, Japan, grew at a hyper-accelerated pace. The student protests in Paris in May 1968 and the countercultural movement in New York around 1967 and 1968 were indications that all that could be achieved with modernity's growth had been achieved. At the same time in Japan, it was the intellectuals who were protesting about the breakdown in society's values. Consequently, a discussion arose regarding production, or the act of making. I'm not Japanese, but as someone from the outside, I thought I should be a part of this. We believed that the unmade needed to be introduced, rather than something that was made. To give you an example, a rock, a natural stone, is not human-made, but can be as old as the earth. In an attempt to break away from the conventional way of thinking that concentrated merely on making and look at things anew, we asked: how does bringing in the unmade open up a new dimension of expression and change both the made and the unmade? That movement became *Mono-ha.* (S. Lee and U. Lee *Man and Nature United*)

Mono-ha was coined by a Japanese journalist as more of a demeaning term to point out that there is no skill required by the artist, and that it is merely a display of a thing. Like many art movements' terms, the *Mono-ha* artists themselves rejected the term to describe their artworks. Lee Ufan says:

> Initially, we resisted the term *Mono-ha*, but it spread around the world and became a standard term for the movement. It is actually not too bad of a description, because it refers to displaying an object without a known maker. And we were not

> presenting an object; rather, we were examining the relationship between object and space, or between object and object. (S. Lee and U. Lee *Man and Nature United*)

Other art movements share similar anti-art notions, such as *Arte Povera* (a literal translation would be “poor art”) in Europe, Minimalism, and earthworks in the United States. Lee Ufan observed that technology nullified the artist’s ability to make things, and says *Mono-ha* explores the phenomenological relationship between objects, space, and the viewers. Nobuo Sekine’s *Phase-Mother Earth* (1968), dug up soils in a cylindrical shape and a hole on the ground next to it. Both Lee Ufan’s boulders and steel sheets and Sekine’s dug up soils and large marble share some similarities with the contemporary art movements at the time such as conceptual art, Minimalism, public installation with the emphasis on site-specificity, and Earth Art of the 1960s. *Mono-ha* also resembles Duchamp’s readymade from the 1910s, which is considered as a highly influential predecessor for the 20th-century contemporary art movements. Its anti-art tendency as well as “not making” but placing the ready-made object. “This move from artist-as-maker to artist-as-chooser, is often seen as the beginning of the movement to conceptual art. . . the readymade was seen as an assault on the conventional understanding not only of the status of art but its very nature” (Tate “Readymade").

Lee Ufan’s installation with the boulder found in locations near his exhibition spaces, juxtaposed with often large, manufactured steel sheets, reminds the viewers of the absurdity of Dada movement. The boulders and steel sheets that are not made by humans or artists, but ‘readymade’ by nature is reminiscent of Duchamp. The utilisation of industrial materials such as large steel or glass sheets that are manufactured at the factory hearkens

to such materials used in minimalist sculptures. The simplicity of objects installed and the encouragement of the phenomenological experience of being in the exhibition space with dull industrial materials parallel the minimalism movement of the 1960s. The big steel sheets that are overwhelmingly big in exhibition spaces or outdoors may indeed remind viewers of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981). Furthermore, the site-specificity of *Relatum Series* brings to mind that of Serra's own site-specificity. Serra claimed, "to remove the work is to destroy it." Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) came about two decades after the *Mono-ha* movement in the 1960s.

The similarities in thought and aesthetics suggest they have reciprocally influenced each other. They share the few similarities with the use of steel sheet – the emblem of industrialisation, site-specificity, and the emphasised importance of their sculpture work as the relationship between objects, space and the viewers. *Dansaekhwa* and *Mono-ha* can be considered as one of the many contemporary art movements that emerged from conceptual art traditions. Most of them emerged in the 1960s, which suggest they influenced each other via international travels and art magazines.

Lee Ufan is recognised as one of the key figures to develop the discourses of both *Mono-ha* and *Dansaekhwa.* Lee Ufan's essay "From Object to Being,"[11] which discusses Sekine Nobuo's artworks later became the intellectual foundation of *Mono-ha* movement. It explores Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" and explores site-specificity of artwork:

[11] Also translated as "Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo" translated by Reiko Tomii.

> In essence, in order for a structure to be that structure, it is nearly impossible to transfer it to another place. When it is transferred to another place, it either reveals another place-ness or in most instances turns into a fictional *object* that cannot be perceived. The Greek gods must stand atop Olympus and the Greek pantheons atop the Sicilian hills (255).

Mono-ha artists "rejected Western modernism and the privileging of the artist as creator." Lee Ufan argues, "[t]he highest level of expression is not to create something from nothing, but rather to nudge something which already exists so that the world shows up more vividly" (qtd. in Rawlings). His *Relatum Series* formerly known as *Phenomenon and Perception* epitomises this view.

2.4 Lee Ufan - Transnational Identity

Lee Ufan often writes about the nomadic patterns of his life, that was based on both intentional and inadvertent decisions. He was born in Korea in 1936 and moved to Japan in his early 20s. He has been residing between Kamakura in Japan, Paris in France, and South Korea for the past 40 years. As an internationally acclaimed artist, he also often needs to temporarily reside in the cities where his exhibitions are held. Lee Ufan embraces his transnational identity that has shaped his journey as an artist, "the dynamics of distance have made me what I am" (Guggenheim "Marking Infinity").

Lee Ufan's father was a liberal newspaper journalist who often travelled to Tokyo and Manchuria. Lee Ufan, attending Seoul National University Senior High School, became increasingly political with leftist ideology ("Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity"). When Lee Ufan came back to Korea in the 1960s after graduating in philosophy from Nihon University in Tokyo, he found himself to be against the militant regime of Korea. Lee was arrested and tortured by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in 1964 and reportedly fled Korea to go back to Japan (Jenkins). Lee Ufan was in a privileged position going to Japan to study in the post-war period, then later became a political refugee. Perhaps this experience of being a political refugee can partly explain his disassociation and silence on Korean socio-political unrest under the brutal dictator's regime of South Korea in the 1970s. His minimalist art makes absolutely no comment towards the Korean political upheavals at the time of the 1970s when he was active as an artist in Korea. His experience of being tortured and fleeing as a political refugee could have interested him and other elite artists with *Dansaekhwa*

type of minimalist art with impassive and abstract aesthetic styles when oppressive censorship was practised under the militant regime in the 1970s.

Lee Ufan often discusses his complex transnational identity as a person and as an artist. While he seems to fully embrace his transnational identity, he does not describe it as such a pleasant experience. He was one of the first generations to experience transnational identity that is now better understood by many, but there were not many in his time in the 1960-70s. His tone of voice in the discussion about his sense of belonging or identity always has a blunt undertone of resentment or sadness. Lee Ufan says that he is often criticised for being nomadic or bohemian in both Korea and Japan. He felt as if he was treated as either a defector on one side and an intruder on the other side. The imagined communities that are bound by nationalism made him an outsider. Lee Ufan describes himself as a nomad who willingly chases after freedom. He says he resides in the amplitude of poignancy where he is infinitely neither Korean or Japanese. According to him, it is where he and his artistic territory exist (U. Lee *The Art of Void* 383). To Lee Ufan, the stone seems to "belong to an unknown world" beyond the self and outside modernity, evoking "the other" or "externality" (Munroe "Lee Ufan"). The stone that is brought from nature unaltered sitting in the gallery space juxtaposed next to the steel plates seems foreign and intruding just like Lee's own transnational identity.

The stone in the artificial white cube gallery space evokes a sense of otherness. It looks like a strange unknown being, seemingly lost. Perhaps this partly explains Lee Ufan's fondness for placing locally found stones in the foreign gallery spaces. The stone invites viewers to walk around and explore the absurdity of being in a gallery yet lacking a sense of

belonging. The stone is abruptly transported to the completely foreign gallery, where it does not usually belong, however, proudly occupies the space as a work of art in the gallery.

The displaced stones thus embody Lee Ufan's own sense of self, especially as he moves between countries and cultures. Being treated as the strange other and unable to be accepted as either fully Korean or Japanese, Lee Ufan flew away to France in Europe where he is again default considered as the other. He is perpetually a foreign being. The alienness of Lee Ufan's stones in the gallery spaces reflect the artist's own sense of being foreign in Korea, Japan, France or Europe. The stone becomes part of the gallery space, but it remains inherently different from its surroundings. Lee Ufan's foreignness in Korea, Japan, France or Europe shares uncanny resemblances to his stone's alienness in the gallery space. The stone is intended to be in the gallery space but it did not have any choice. The stone does not belong to the gallery space permanently but only inhabits the space temporarily during the exhibition. It also aligns with Lee Ufan's intention to move between Korea, Japan and France, but at the same time, he transited between different countries due to being othered in each place. He does not seem to fully belong anywhere and each place becomes only a momentary place for him to inhabit. Lee Ufan wrote the introduction to his book *The Art of Void*'s Korean edition in Paris in 2002. He writes of the life-long struggles of his complex transnational identity:

> I grew up in Korea, so Japan treats me as a Korean intruder when I reside in Japan. As time went by, Korea also gives me a hard time by accusing me of being a defector to Japan. So, in an attempt to find a place to stand, I went far away to Europe and explored every corner of Europe for the past thirty years. There, Europeans would politely isolate me by speaking in terms of praise and describing me as Eastern or

> foreign. There seems to be no other place to live than nurturing myself in the midst of constant exhibitions with unfamiliar artists in strange places (7-8).

The stones that Lee Ufan finds and adopts "as it is" from the region and transports to the gallery space are perhaps an unconscious reflection of his complex identity and constantly wanting to assimilate to the new strange place where he is treated as a foreigner. It can be seen as a mirror image of his desire to be accepted "as who he is" while perpetually the strange nomad to his surrounding communities.

Joan Kee's*Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (2013) is the only book published in English explicitly on *Dansaekhwa*. Kee's 2008 article "Points, Lines, Encounters: The World According to Lee Ufan" discusses the difficult positions that led to the antagonism he received in both Korea and Japan. Lee Ufan remembers being "a subject of hostile speculation" by settling in Japan (405). He became a prominent figure in the Japanese avant-garde art scenes. In other words, he came to prominence within the country that had brutally colonised his own home from 1910 to 1945. The colonial period was still a living memory for many of Lee Ufan's Korean peers, and they understandably questioned his position in Japan. Meanwhile, he was classified as an outsider in Japan. Lee Ufan was informed that his works were excluded to participate in the Japan Art Festival in 1970. This was a huge hindrance to his possible artist career opportunities to reach the international art scene as the festival was held at Guggenheim Museum. Edward Fry – then Guggenheim's associate curator with the control over selection for the festival, showed interests in Lee Ufan and his close colleague Sekine Nobuo's works. However, Lee Ufan's works were removed by Japanese co-organiser based on his Korean nationality (412). It shows how the national boundaries and identities were more rigid at the time, although it

may still be more or less unchanged. Lee Ufan was embraced as an established Korean artist shortly after he was known in the Korean art scene in 1968. He was selected to represent Korea for *Paris Biennale* in 1971. Lee Ufan was one of the leading figures in *Mono-ha* movement in Japan, and his junior *Mono-ha* artists exhibited their works at the same biennale as Japanese delegates. Kee says "it was in distinct contra-position to his status in Japan as both art world insider and outsider" (412). The Korean contemporary art scene in the 1970s was dominated by the elite artists who studied or worked overseas. "Central to the Korean art world's enthusiasm was in the general priority given to Korean artists working abroad. The activities of artists living abroad, such as Kim Tschang-yeul and Lee Ungno in Paris, and Kim Whanki in New York, were frequently reported in the press" (412).

Lee Il, the influential Korean art critic, also studied and completed a research fellowship in art history and archaeology at university in Paris from 1957 to 1965. Lee Il began his art criticism by translating French art critic Michel Ragon's text into Korean in 1964. Lee Il is to the Korean contemporary art world as Clement Greenberg is to the American contemporary art world. Lee Il shaped the theories of *Dansaekhwa* and characterised the movement with monochrome and the uniqueness of white colour in his essays (W. Yoon "Lee-Il"). In the selection process for the exhibition "Contemporary Korean Painting" in 1968, Lee Il and jury members thought artists who already had been exposed in overseas galleries could appeal better in international art scenes. In this light, although Lee Ufan's activities and residence in Japan in the post-colonial period was the subject of antagonism, his established position as an artist in Japan was embraced in elite Korean contemporary art scenes.

3 Western Minimalism in Comparison

This chapter discusses Western minimalism in order to add context to current understandings of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks. As this thesis understands *Dansaekhwa* as the localised version of minimalist art movement. Western minimalism is investigated based on artists and art critics' statements from interviews and essays. This is highly contrasting to how *Dansaekhwa*, Lee Ufan and some of the other contemporary Asian art are understood by the Western art critics' orientalist assumptions with default Zen references. Western art writers' reading on Asian contemporary art is often based on assumptions driving from Oriental stereotypes, but entirely omitting artist's statements that are readily available in exhibition catalogues and other forms. The previous chapters discussed *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks looking at artist statements and socio-political backgrounds of the time. This chapter will discuss the Western minimalism and how artists' voices played the pivotal role in understanding the art movement. Then, Chapters Four and Five will explore how *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks have been misunderstood based on mere assumptions about the East.

3.1 Western Minimalism

The Minimalism art movement's pioneering moment is often considered to be Frank Stella's black pinstripe painting called *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, ll* exhibited in MoMA in 1959. Minimalism as an art movement flourished in the 1960s. In an acclaimed essay "Minimal Art" in 1965, Richard Wollheim coined the term "minimalism" (Danto, Doss 164). Minimalism is the term that stuck with the type of art that is minimal, abstract, geometric, monochrome without any decorative embellishments, or dull objects in three-dimensional exhibition spaces. They are mostly sculptures or installation forms but can also be found paintings. Many other terms were coined for this new style of art, such as ABC Art, Rejective Art, Minimal Art, Literalist Art or Specific Objects. The term 'minimalism' is still ubiquitously used to refer to minimalistic compositions of various things. The term has also become a simple lifestyle mantra, and Marie Kondo's 'minimalist' lifestyle advice gained huge popularities in the Western countries through Netflix in 2019. Minimalism art is still widely appreciated and celebrated. Frank's retrospective exhibition was held at Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 2015, then at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 2016. MoMA also held Donald Judd's retrospective in 2017. In "Questions to Stella and Judd" interviewed by Bruce Glaser for ARTnews in 1966, Stella famously stated:

> My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It really is an object... All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion... WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SEE.

Minimalism, like other art movements, also emerged in responses to its predecessor Abstract Expressionism. Eugene Goossen wrote about minimalist exhibition *Primary Structures* in 1966, "[t]he demand has been for an honest, direct, unadulterated experience in art… minus symbolism, minus messages, and minus personal exhibitionism" (Doss 163). Stella's *Black Paintings* were, in some aspects, a direct opposite to that of Jackson Pollock's Action Painting that was also called Abstract Expressionism. Stella's works were precisely planned to be in pinstripe lines. Pollock's heightened emotions and actions and Stella's reduced emotions to as minimal as possible. Pollock's is colourful and chaotic, and Stella's is monochrome and arranged. Frank Stella compares his work with that of the Abstract Expressionism to position themselves against the predecessor's notion of art:

> We believe that we can find the end, and that a painting can be finished. The Abstract Expressionists always felt the painting's being finished was very problematical. We'd more readily say that our paintings were finished and say, well, it's either a failure or it's not, instead of saying, well, maybe it's not really finished (135).

Abstract Expressionism was something uniquely American in the Paris dominated modern art scenes at the time. It replaced Paris with New York as the centre of modern art. Abstract Expressionism was also called Action Painting or the New York School and was widely appraised in the post-war period of the United States in the 1950s. Minimalist art completely removed any subjective feelings of the artist and went furthest away from the

artist's emotions, while abstract expressionism celebrated the fullest senses of emotions. The term minimalism has been widely referred to anything "geometric, vaguely austere, more-or-less monochromatic, and generally abstract-looking work" since the mid-1960s (Batchelor 6). Many artists, who are considered part of the minimalist movement of the 1960s, were not generally impressed with the term minimalism to describe their new type of art. Dan Flavin said, "I find the invitation to participate in your untitled 'minimal art' exhibition objectionable. I do not enjoy the designation of my proposal as that of some dubious, facetious, epithetical, proto-historic 'movement' (1967)" (Ibid 6).

Minimalism art reflects the traits of its contemporary predecessors, such as Dada movement, Cubism, and Abstract Expressionism. It still rejects the idea of the conventional forms of art from the past, where it tried best to represent or reproduce the reality. Minimalist paintings and sculptures share the similar traits of Duchamp's readymade objects, abstract shapes, and conceptually driven art. Barbara Rose writes in her article "A B C Art" in 1965, Minimalism arose from radical and curious synthesis of two works. Kasimir Malevich placed a black square in 1913 and identifying it as "void" and Marcel Duchamp called a metal bottle-rack a "ready-made" the year after. Rose described their twentieth-century artworks as "the blanket denial of the existence of absolute values" (Rose 275). In "Questions to Stella and Judd," Stella explicitly explains that his minimalist style was the rejection of the preceding forms of art.

> There's always been a trend toward simpler painting and it was bound to happen one way or another. Whenever painting gets complicated, like Abstract-Expressionism, or Surrealism, there's going to be someone who's not painting complicated paintings, someone who's trying to simplify. (Glaser)

Judd also suggests that he was intentionally rejecting the European conventions of art, he says compositional effects "tend to carry with them all the structures, values, feelings of the whole European tradition. It suits me fine if that's all down the drain." The general public's receptions of minimalist or conceptual art were not favourable when it first emerged. It was also not digested well within the art world. There were concerns about the artist's new approaches to making art. Two main criticisms were its lack of aesthetic qualities that were traditionally expected of art and how it blurred the boundaries of art and non-art everyday objects, which was seen to devalue art as a whole (Danto, "The Artworld" *580-83*).

Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish philosopher who was affiliated with the Frankfurt School discusses in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" how mass production in capitalist-driven society affected the experience of viewing art. Benjamin begins his essay by exploring how the reproduction of art is not a new phenomenon; however, with technological advances, photographic accuracy became possible. In 1936, a few decades before minimalist art appeared to explore the phenomenological bodily experience of being in the gallery space and time to appreciate art, Benjamin makes the statements that almost foresee what was to be experimented in art and gallery space in the 1960s and onwards. He states:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence (218).

Minimalist sculptures cannot be reproduced and appreciated on the two-dimensional spaces like paintings which can be reproduced in high pixel photographs on two-dimensional spaces on prints or computer screens. With Benjamin's framework, minimalist sculptures can be seen as the protesting gestures against the capitalist-driven mass-production. Minimalism can be seen as a response to the availability of mass-reproduction that threatened the authenticity of an artwork. For example, "[f]rom a photographic negative. . . one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed" (220). Minimalist or contemporary artists make statements on mass-production by placing the mass-produced objects in the gallery space. The experience of being immersed in the gallery space and time walking around the minimalist sculptures cannot be replaced by mass-production or reproduction. "Minimalism seeks the meaning of art in the immediate and personal experience of the viewer in the presence of a specific work" (Batchelor 7).

The exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors* at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966, was one of the major events for Minimalism art as it was the first exhibition to group minimalism artists together. It featured works by Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Morris and more. It introduced a new unconventional approach to sculpture that was referred to as minimalism retrospectively. The new radical and unconventional ways of making art were incomprehensible for many. Hilton Kramer, New York Times art critic, reviewed *Primary Structures* exhibition and criticised the lack of feelings in sculptures and that the viewers were "rarely moved" ("Art

World”). This new approach to sculpture and art were provoking and not readily appreciated by all. A visitor at Sol Lewitt’s exhibition at Dawn Gallery in New York in the 1960s was left puzzled and wrote on the guest book, “You must be kidding – I hope” (Battcock 8). The Jewish Museum held a revisionist exhibition *Other Primary Structures* in 2014 curated by Jens Hoffmann – deputy director of exhibitions and public programs. It built upon their pivotal exhibition *Primary Structure*s of 1966, and belatedly introduced the sculptures from places ‘other’ than the United States or Britain. It featured 1960s sculpture art from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and Eastern Europe that had not been introduced to the audiences in the United States. *Other Primary Structures* in 2014 explores and re-examines how the landmark exhibition of *Primary Structures* in 1966 played a role in the new minimal art movement influencing the global art scene.

The exhibition was held in two parts over different periods. *Others 1* was held from 14 March to 18 May, 2014 and exhibited the artworks made before or simultaneously with the 1966 *Primary Structures* exhibition. *Others 2* was held from the 25 May to 3 August, 2014 and featured the works created after the *Primary Structures* exhibition between 1967 and 1970. *Others 2* included the works of the *Mono-ha* School that appeared in the late 1960s. The Jewish Museum’s lengthy introduction to the *Other Primary Structures* exhibition on their website states the following: “[w]hile artists in Japan and Korea also used abstract geometric forms, their work primarily drew inspiration from Eastern philosophy and Zen tradition” (“Major Exhibition”). The exhibition *Others 2* explicitly introduced works of art as an examination of the influences of minimalist art exhibited in *Primary Structures* in 1966. Yet, it informs the readers that the *Mono-ha* works from Korea and Japan are mostly influenced by Eastern philosophy and Zen without providing any evidence to this claim. The

similar references that mystify and further orientalise Zen and Eastern philosophy are found abundantly in many discussions of Asian art. It usually comes without providing any explanation or evidence, so is only a mere assumption without any sign of attempts to understand the Eastern philosophy or Zen or investigate artist statements.

Sol LeWitt, an American artist whose works are associated with conceptual art and minimalism, argues in his Artforum article "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art", that "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the art. . . what the work of art looks like isn't too important" (LeWitt qtd. in Doss, 169-70). This sentiment was shared by many conceptual artists and extended to minimalist artists. Some of the minimalist artists were involved in the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) – Andre and Morris were part of this artist-activist group. It was formed to protest for artist's rights against the museums. It also organised Art Strike in support of anti-war demonstrations and closed many galleries and museums in New York City in 1970 (Doss 172). These anti-government, anti-authority or anti-institution sentiments were demonstrated in various forms in the 1960s of the United States. Minimalist artists also challenged the conventional approaches to art and sculpture and introduced alternative ways to think about art and gallery spaces. Minimalist sculptures encourage viewers to immerse themselves in the time and space with three-dimensional objects that become sculptures when placed in gallery spaces. Minimalist sculptures placed viewers' bodily experience at the forefront of experiencing art.

It is absurd and ironic that American art – minimalism movement in the 1960s amid the ideological Cold War, may have been influenced by Russian avant-garde from the early 20th century. Russian avant-garde art in the 1910-1920s was experimenting "the reduction

of artwork to its essential structure and the use of factory production techniques" and "clearly inspired minimalist sculptures (Tate "Minimalism"). Camilla Gray's book *The Great Experiment in Art 1863-1922* about the Russian avant-garde was published in English in 1962. It provided a better understanding of the works of Vladimir Tatlin and Aleksandr Rodchenko. Dan Flavin is one of the prominent American minimalist artists. Flavin began to create the series of work called *Homages to Vladimir Tatlin* in 1964 – his signature work of fluorescent lighting installations. Morris' essay "Notes on Sculpture" – one of the pivotal writings to understand minimalist sculptures, also discusses Tatlin and Rodchenko. "Tatlin was perhaps the first to free sculpture from representation and establish it as an autonomous form both by the kind of image, or rather non-image, he employed and by his literal use of materials" (224).

Battcock argues that Marcel Duchamp's readymade was enormously influential for minimalism movement, and says "[t]he minimal artist no longer questions – he challenges and observes" (12). "Marcel Duchamp's readymade factory produced objects placed in the gallery space are considered as influential figures setting up the minimalism movement" ("Minimalism"). There was a significant shift from admiring an artist's exceptional attention to details in stunning realism painting or sculptures, to artist's emotions projected onto colourful canvases in Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism. Minimalism challenged and subverted this to place the viewers' experience in the gallery space at the forefront. "Minimal artists acknowledge both the viewer and the space of the gallery. . . They force the audience to an awareness of existence that goes beyond the presence of any particular art object. . . In so doing, the artists allow no room for confusion or misrepresentation" (Battcock 12). Although the artists and art critics are somewhat adamant that minimalist art

and sculpture is as simple as what is there in front of you and what you see is what you see, minimalism still leaves some viewers puzzled with challenges to think about where the boundary is for art, qualities of art, or the functions of art. Viewers are compelled to question what they are looking at and experiencing with newly introduced notions of art.

Donald Judd wrote an article “Specific Objects” in 1965 in New York. Judd refers to his minimalist sculptures as specific objects that are new three-dimensional work. Judd was well aware of some viewers’ adverse reactions to his new type of art. “The motive to change is always some uneasiness. . . The objections to painting and sculpture are going to sound more intolerant than they are. . . New work always involves objections to the old, but these objections are really relevant only to the new” (1). Judd talks about the limitations of painting on a rectangular surface against the wall, namely that everything needs to go on the rectangular two-dimensional space, which to Judd was limiting. The main purpose of the painting is to depict an object or figure within the limited rectangular surface. Judd treats Mark Rothko’s field paintings, Yves Klein’s blue paintings, and Kenneth Noland’s circles differently from other paintings. Judd says they are “nearly unspatial” or, in other words, there is an absence of space unlike other paintings on a limited amount of rectangular space to depict an object or a figure. Judd praises three-dimensional space as a “real space” where “something credible can be made, almost anything.” Judd continues his fascination with three-dimensional space: “Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all” (4). The three-dimensional space as a “real space” was explored by Judd and

other minimalist artists. It was a space that anything could happen, thus liberating the space from the limited rectangular canvas that is put against the wall.

Judd says the art "work needs only to be interesting. . . The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting" (4). Minimalist artists were exploring three-dimensional spaces as an opportunity to create exciting new art. They were experimenting with the bodily experience of being in time and space with interesting objects placed by artists. It could only be experienced in the white cube gallery spaces, unlike paintings or photographs on a two-dimensional canvas. Robert Morris' geometrical, simple big white blocks in the white cube spaces are cold, abrupt, and emotionless. Morris said in his essay "Notes on Sculpture" in 1966, "[s]implicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience" (228). Morris was also experimenting with the relationship between the object, space, and the body. "Things on the monumental scale, then, include more terms necessary for their apprehension than objects smaller than the body, namely, the literal space in which they exist and the kinaesthetic demands placed upon the body" (231). Morris also adopts the term "specific object" for his sculpture, as in: "the work is located strictly within the specific object" (235). Morris puts the viewer's bodily experience at the forefront of his artwork rather than the great masterpiece of realism or the artist's intense feelings portrayed delicately on canvas. "[S]hape – does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work" (234). What may appear as a random object that is unexplainable for its existence in the gallery space, Morris suggests it is thoughtfully delivered. "Control is necessary if the variables of object, light, space, body, are to function. The object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less *self*-important" (234). Morris also acknowledges the

reception of the new art that people found it “negative, boring and nihilistic.” Morris concludes his essay, “[t]hese judgments arise from confronting the work with expectations structured by a Cubist aesthetic in which what is to be had from the work is located strictly within the specific object. The situation is now more complex and expanded.” Morris’ conclusion to his essay leaves the viewers of the new specific objects to ponder on the complexities of the new experience. It invites the audience to further expand on their new gallery and art experiences and the definition of art. It perhaps provides modern viewers with relief from the busy lives with overloaded information and visual images, being immersed in the moment of time and space.

Michael Fried’s essay “Art and Objecthood” published in *ArtForum* in 1967 and Clement Greenberg’s essay “Recentness of Sculpture” written in 1967, critically discuss the new art that they refer to as literalist art, which is now known as minimalism art. Fried and Greenberg are influential contemporary art critics in understanding American contemporary art and minimalism movement. They provide insights into the reasons why some viewers did not appreciate minimalism as an art form. Many gallery-goers remain confused or question where the boundary for art and non-art is, like Fried and Greenberg explored in their essays. Greenberg in “Recentness of Sculpture” (1967) proposes that minimal art is essentially close to non-art with a rather condescending approach to people who would consider minimalism as an art. According to Greenberg, it is inconceivable that ”anything” is art. “Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today – including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper. . . Yet it would seem that a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment” (Greenberg “Recentness”

183). Fried, known as a friend of Greenberg, adds onto this point by trying to distinguish modernist painting and sculpture from what he thinks are mere objects:

> "The condition of non-art" is what I have been calling objecthood. It is as though objecthood alone can, in the present circumstances, secure something's identity, if not as non-art, at least as neither painting nor sculpture; or as though a work of art – more accurately, a work of modernist painting or sculpture – were in some essential respect not an object. (Fried 125)

As the title "Art and Objecthood" (1967) suggests, Fried proposes that literalist art (minimalist sculpture in his term) is not an art, but a mere object. Fried criticises the theatricality of the literalist art and how minimalist sculptures or objects put an emphasis on the beholder's bodily experiences at the foremost of the holistic art viewing. Fried says "Morris wants to achieve presence through objecthood, which requires a certain largeness of scale, rather than through size alone. . . literalist works of art must somehow confront the beholder" (4). Both Fried and Greenberg found it disagreeable on the theatricality of the minimalist art that the beholder's experience is the centre of appreciating the new art. Fried paradoxically proposes that literalist art is a new genre of theatre, but an antithesis to art. His more traditional definition of art does not seem to include theatre work – which is a compilation of art forms from music, dance, fashion, prop, acting, drama, literature and more. "The literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art. Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work" (Fried 125).

Greenberg acknowledges in the discussion of Modernist paintings that new type of art is open for discussion in a way that the viewer's experience or opinion matters. Each time, a kind of art is expected that will be so unlike previous types of art and so liberated from the norms, that everybody, regardless of how informed or uninformed, will be able to have their say. Greenberg discusses how Modernism is more than art and literature but encompasses every living culture and how self-criticism is the key to the Modernism's growth, in his essay "Modernist Painting" in 1961. Greenberg claims that "Western civilization is not the first to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the civilization that has gone further in doing so" (5). It was his beginning remark for the essay. It is a classic Eurocentric example that is blatantly ignorant without any source of evidence provided to its claim. Western modernism influenced some aspects of Eastern art and culture and vice versa. However, the statement as such does not acknowledge the existence of Eastern philosophy, culture, art and literature advancing in their own terms that were separate to that of the Western modernism. Greenberg cannot blatantly pause Eurocentric superlative without an attempt to comprehend or comparatively study the full course of the same era of development of art, literature and culture between the West and the East.

3.2 Similarities and Differences between *Dansaekhwa* and Western Minimalism

Park Seo-bo says *Dansaekhwa* is fundamentally different from Western Minimalism, however, the aesthetic similarities and the time of emergence cannot be overlooked. Western minimalism emerged in the 1960s and *Dansaekhwa* in the 1970s. Some of the *Dansaekhwa* artists who studied overseas in Japan and France, were aware of the global art scenes in the post-war times, also with the availabilities of art magazines. It is undeniable that *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's sculptures were influenced by broader global art movements. Lee Ufan was in the centre of *Mono-ha* movement, and it appears to have influenced wider global art movements reciprocally. Some of the similarities that *Dansaekhwa* and Minimalism share are abstract and minimalist compositions and colour, geometric shapes, and the act of not drawing or making.

On the other hand, there are also distinctive features that are only found in Korean *Dansaekhwa* movement of the 1970s. They adopted the global art movements that they observed and developed it further with localised colour, materials, and methods to create unique aesthetics. *Dansaekhwa* is often a product of repetitive and laborious actions of drawing many dots, squares, and lines, or reapplying and drying the Korean traditional mulberry paper layers. Also, *Dansaekhwa*'s colour tones are often off-white, black, pastel-like tones, or subdued colour. In contrast, Western minimalist paintings are more vivid and monochrome. Many *Dansaekhwa* artists use Korean traditional mulberry papers, whereas Western minimalist painting is often oil paintings on Canvas.

Park Seo-bo had a cerebral infarction in his mid-60s, and his health deteriorated from 1994 onwards. By 2009, he had become weak and did not have enough strength to hold a canvas. His paintings in *Myobup Series* involve repetitive bodily actions, and he hired people to create his abstract paintings with countless lines (Lim 252). He only provided concepts and ideas, just like Western minimalist artists. Although what triggered them to only input concepts and ideas were different, the elements of their artworks made it possible for others to create the works for them. The concepts and ideas were the most critical part of their works, and it is called conceptual art. Some of the conceptual artists' intentions were to comment on commercialised art industry by producing art that cannot be sold and contemplated with the boundaries of art that left the viewers in uncomfortable spaces. The similar art movement with intentions to comment on commercialised art industry and consumerism emerged in Europe, USA, South America and Japan. For example, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, Joseph Beuys' *Social Sculpture*, Lee Ufan's *Mono-ha*, *Arte Povera,* Minimalism movement.

According to Lee Ufan, *Relatum Series* formerly known as *Phenomenon and Perception* was influenced by Merleau-Ponty's writings (Rawlings). Western minimalist artists and critics also engaged with phenomenological experiences of time and space. A phenomenological investigation is a common factor in both. Their sculptures can only be best appreciated by being immersed in the gallery space. The sculptures encourage the viewers to fully explore the bodily experiences of being in time and space which was explored by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. They use ready-made and industrial objects to practise 'not-making' to comment on mass production and endless consumerism. Also,

they are plain, simple and minimalist in their aesthetics and compositions. Both Western minimalists and Lee Ufan's minimalist sculptures reject the act of making art and challeng the idea of how to create an artwork. Minimalists globally emphasise the three-dimensional objects in the gallery spaces providing a bodily experience and site-specificity of the works. It invites the viewers to walk around their three dimensional objects to explore the time and space. Lee Ufan's borrowed object – the stone that is unaltered and found in nature presents unique aesthetic qualities. Another unique element is Lee Ufan juxtaposes the borrowed boulder and factory produced steel plate to evoke the presence of past and future, and want them to transcend to reveal themselves to the viewers to ponder.

Another difference is how artists' statements were treated in examining the Western minimalism and *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's art. Artist's conceptual ideas played a significant role in understanding the Western minimalism as it was the core element of minimalist art. However, artist's statements are entirely silenced in examining *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks that are also deeply conceptual in its nature. Instead, it was orientalised by associating it with Zen and Eastern philosophy based on Eastern streotypes and mere orientalist assumptions. The next two chapters explore how Asian artists' voices were omitted, despite its presence and availabilities, and how it led into misunderstanding contemporary artworks created by Asian artists.

4 An Understanding of the East and Zen

The fascinations towards the discovered Other during the colonisation era were expressed with a inadvertently degrading and patronising gaze towards the others – the colonised or the discovered by European colonisers. What is inadvertently said or done, but with the deeply entrenched assumption of us (European or the West in this context) being default superior than the others (Non-European, non-Western), is the underlying source of Orientalism that Edward Said extensively investigates. The others (non-European in this context) also have become the exotic subject of the Western gaze. This section discusses the orientalist gaze towards the Other through the examples of Sarah Baartman, Gauguin's voyeuristic gazes towards the Pacific people, and Goldie and Lindauer's portrayal of Māori people in paintings. It also explores pivotal texts of postcolonial studies, namely Edward Said's Orientalism, Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and Segalan's exoticism analysis. The purpose of exploring these examples and texts are to analyse the parallel elements of misrepresenting and misunderstanding Asian Art and in particular of *Dansaekhwa* through the European gaze, that entirely avoids acknowledging the other's ability to speak and represent, and the existence of history pre-European discovery.

4.1 The European Gaze onto the Other

Hottentot Venus case of Sarah Baartman from the 1810s is the tragic example of colonial exoticism and how colonised others became the subject of European gaze. Baartman, the Khoikhoi woman from South Africa, became a living human exhibition. She was brought to London due to her large buttocks and was treated as an exotic object that would generate income like an animal in the zoo. She was paraded and exhibited to fulfil exotic curiosity of Europeans in London and Paris. Even her remaining body parts, such as brain and genitalia, were displayed for about a century in the Museum of Man in Paris after her death. Nelson Mandela requested her remains to be returned home for burial in South Africa. It took eight years for France to return because they had to carefully word the bill so that other communities could notclaim the return of their objects and treasures that were taken by France ("Sara"). It was perceived okay to exhibit colonised people and culture as colonisation was prevailing the international relations in the 19th century. The human zoo to exhibit the 'savage' others from the colonised countries, fulfilled colonialist European exotic curiosities and reminded audiences of European dominance first-hand. The displays of the non-European were treated as an entrepreneurial affair (47 Forsdick).

As recent as in 2002, eight Baka pygmies, an ethnic group from Cameroon, were performing their traditional dance and song for tourists in the artificially made indigenous village at a zoo in Belgium (Forsdick 46). The Other once again became the exotic subject of a living human exhibition for Europeans' gaze in the twenty-first century. It still mimics the acts of intentionality while having an inadvertently inconsiderate and degrading approach to the others – in this case, the insensitive choice of the place and its audience group. Although

the zoo performance was a charity organiser's idea to raise funds to build schools, wells, and pharmacies in Cameroon, it stirred controversy because it belied notions of equality and exposed the colonial roots of modern society. It brought the memories of human zoo exhibition of the others in humiliating ways, during the colonial period. The event was harshly criticised as racist, neo-colonial, degrading, and voyeuristic (Osborn qtd. in Fosdick 46). Forsdick argues that the fundraiser created "a series of uneasy associations between the colonial past and the post-colonial present, suggesting that any neat division between the two is little more than imaginary" (46). Although the incident took place in 2002, it demonstrates with striking clarity what Said argued in 1978: the colonial era may have ended, but the system of thinking and the colonial power relations still remain.

ORIENTALIST GAZE

By 2003, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has been translated into thirty-six languages and continues to be discussed. Said predominantly discusses the examples of how colonial imperialists from Britain and France look at the discovered Arab and Muslim countries – the East, the others. Yet Said's orientalism theory is highly transferrable when analysing the European gaze towards any non-European subject. *Orientalism* also critically discusses how the West represents the East in stereotypical and exotifying ways. It argues that the Occident sees the Orient with colonialist eyes where the Orient needs to be represented and educated by the Occident's interventions and knowledge. His analysis of orientalism does not only belong to the colonial periods, but Said further argues that the demarcation between the East (them) and the West (us) formed over the centuries is still in

the making. “To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact” (39). For the purpose of my thesis, Said’s orientalism theory is discussed to investigate Western art critic’s gaze towards *Dansaekhwa* and Asian contemporary art.

Said quotes the writings of Balfour and Lord Cromer, the diplomats and colonial administrators who represented the Crown in Egypt in the late 19th century. It shows how blatantly Orientalist views were received as norms only over a century ago. Balfour would readily state, “[w]e are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake” (Said 33). Cromer believed “logic is something the existence of which the Oriental is disposed altogether to ignore” (36). Cromer quotes his friend Sir Lyall, “[a]ccuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind” (38). Cromer and Balfour would describe Egyptians as lacking energy, initiatives, accuracy, and basic logical thinking skills. They seemed to have default believed that Europeans are everything opposite and were born with all these abilities. Cromer says, “[t]he European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature sceptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition” (38). Balfour and Cromer believed these without difficulty, and it was reflected brazenly in their writings.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) critically discusses that the subaltern is silenced as they are treated as having no history or values of their own. The subject is not recognised as “having any moral, aesthetic or historical value” (Foucault qtd. in Spivak 28). Therefore, any kind of analysis of the subaltern’s voice is by default

omitted and disregarded as unworthy of attention. Subaltern theory is highly relevant in the claim that this thesis makes. Western scholars from predominantly English speaking countries did not attempt to investigate what the *Dansaekhwa* artists had to say, when they attempted to understand *Dansaekhwa* movement. Their voices and socio-political history were treated as unworthy of attention. As discussed earlier, artist's interviews, statement, and the socio-political backdrop are thoroughly studied when investigating Western minimalist art movement. However, Western scholars omitted these entirely when investigating *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks. Instead, they made assumptions based on exotic East they know through the mystic lens of Zen. Western art writers stuck to their Zen reading based on orientalist assumptions without any further investigations, even though artists' voices were abundantly available in written English for various exhibition catalogues, books and articles. Then, these views were recycled repetitively among Western scholars and art writers and became the accepted ways of reading *Dansaekhwa*, Lee Ufan and other Asian contemporary art, even though they are different from what artists had to say about their artworks as artists' voices are entirely omitted in the process. Here Asian artists' voices like that of subaltern's voices being muted and treated as unworthy of attention. Instead, the Western art writers' misleading assumptions are accepted as the ways to understand *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan. The examples of these would be discussed in the next chapter, and this chapter is exploring various postcolonial theories on European gaze towards the others.

EXOTIFIED IMAGES OF THE OTHERS

Victor Segalen (1878-1919)'s incomplete book titled *Essay on Exoticism: an Aesthetics of Diversity* (*Essai sur L'Exotisme*) was written between 1904 and 1918. Segalen was a French naval doctor, explorer, writer and opium-addicted dreamer (A. Lee "Notes on the Exotic"). Although it was written in the early 20th century, his essays are still critical in understanding the alterity and the others in current time. Segalen was concerned about his observation of the different cultures being lost, due to the influence of Western colonisations. As the title of the book suggests, he valued the diversity to which he was exposed. Segalen tried to redefine "exoticism" and "diversity" in his own terms and understanding. He was part of the French colonisers, however, able to critically reflect the colonialist approaches to the alterity and the colonised others. Segalen's essays on exoticism and literature were written at the height of the first World War and are considered as a precursor of post-colonialism studies. It is recognised with the increasing relevance in contemporary times where the understanding of the Other is being re-examined from various perspectives. Anti-colonialist views are being explored to subvert default colonialist perspectives and challenge what is accepted as a norm in perceiving the alterity, and Segalen's works are being re-discovered as a vital contribution to the field.

French artist, Paul Gauguin's paintings of Tahitian women, are classic examples of European colonialists' voyeuristic gaze onto the others in art forms and exotifying the subjects in its artistic representations. Gauguin as a post-impressionist artist is recognised for his painting's aesthetic qualities in his unconventional uses of bold colours, which was deemed as avant-garde blends of tones and the use of dark contours with bold and flat

aesthetics. His characteristic style is called cloissonist, and one of the prominent features of post-impressionism. Gauguin's immoral lifestyle and colonialist approaches to Tahitian people during his 12 years in Tahiti have prompted many to re-examine Gauguin's artistic oeuvre as a whole. The National Gallery in London exhibited *Gauguin Portraits* from 7 October 2019 to 26 January 2020. Its audio guide begins with "is it time to stop looking at Gauguin altogether?" (Nayeri). This question is paradoxical as it is the introductory statement that leads into Gauguin's exhibition space. It answers the question by itself by introducing the gallery visitors to Gauguin's fifty portrait works. The National Gallery of Canada exhibited the first exhibition dedicated to Gauguin's portraitures from 24 May 2019 to 8 September 2019, before it went to the National Gallery in London.

A Canadian art writer Leah Sandals criticises the Eurocentric framing of the exhibition *Gauguin: Portraits* (2020) in her article, "What's Missing from the World's First Gauguin Portraits Exhibition?" Sandals argues that it omits the perspectives of the Pacific people that Gauguin depicted, while Gauguin's paintings play a considerable role in how the gallery visitors would form their views about the Pacific region. Also, the issues about Gauguin's problematic relationships with Tahitian girls as young as 13 years old, and Gauguin's sensual depiction of them are not critically addressed. It becomes a problem if Gauguin's exotified depictions of the Pacific women and people are the primary source on how non-Pacifika viewers would come to form a general perception about the Pacific region as a whole by passively consuming the sensually depicted images of the people of the Pacific. Léuli Eshrāghi - a curator of aboriginal art in Australia, was concerned that the absence of the voices of the Pacific people in Gauguin's exhibitions because "[t]hey're a problematic painter's vision and exoticization and simplification and abstraction of who we

never were. I feel like that's a really dangerous thing" (qtd. in Sandals). The National Gallery of Canada's CEO Sasha Suda and her team updated some of the wall texts with Eurocentric biases, in acknowledgement of the need to inform viewers with the artist's approaches to the people of the Pacific and to explore more diverse perspectives of the indigenous people. Sandals pointed out how the fictional images of the indigenous women of Gauguin's paintings were treated as a selling point for the exhibition, much like how luxury Tahiti cruises utilise similar images in the same light for mere marketing apparatus. In this light, Sandals is concerned about how these fictional and exotified images of Gauguin's depictions of the Pacific women are consumed globally as the windows to form their stereotypical perception on the people of the Pacific. Another uncomfortable fact about Gauguin's Tahitian portraits is that viewers are not introduced to the person that is drawn in the portraiture. A portrait usually specifies who the subject is. By not informing the viewers who the depicted subjects are, suggest that their individual importance is not recognised. The portrayed Pacific people are merely treated as the subjects of voyeurism for the European gaze in Gauguin's portraits. It resembles that of the exhibition of Primitivism and Hottentot venus, which is discussed extensively on how it treated the African people and culture as merely exotic objects of European voyeurism. Art historian Thomas McEvilley in "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief" in November 1984 issue of *Artforum* criticised how indigenous works displayed next to Picasso, Gauguin, and Brancusi in *Primitivism* exhibition in 1984 had no information on its date, name, function, or religious connections. "[A]re we not ready yet to begin to understand the real intentions of the native traditions, to let those silenced cultures speak to us at last?" (McEvilley 46).

Yuki Kihara, an artist of Samoan and Japanese descent, shares the same concerns about Gauguin's popularities by Western consumption. "[Gauguin's] works produced in Tahiti and Marquesas Islands have today become a blanket stereotype of the Indigenous people and the region, presented as noble savages living in idyllic paradise ripe for Western consumption" (qtd. in Sandals). Kihara points out that "art audiences prefer to know more about the Moana from Gauguin compared to what the Indigenous Moana peoples have to say about it." This phenomenon seems to be prevalent where non-European's culture and history are being told through the European people's gaze. By default, the voices of the non-European people are not paid any attention in telling their stories and cultures, as if they cannot speak for themselves or their voices are not worthy of listening to. Eshrāghi points out how Gauguin's paintings on Tahiti are hugely celebrated, in contrast to the distinct lack of attention given to Tahitian painters. Eshrāghi says, "[i]t just really bothers me that in 2019 there are no Tahitian painters recognized anywhere near the level that Gauguin is." Kihara says "[Gauguin's] paintings don't speak of the Indigenous worldview but rather offer a romantic, orientalist view about us." The continued popularities of Gauguin's celebrated paintings of the Pacific women in the West and other non-Pacific countries are highly problematic. Gauguin's paintings play a role in influencing how the general public shapes their romanticised views about the Pacific. However, they are merely Gauguin's re-imagined depictions that reflect the distorted, sensualised and exotified views of his towards the Pacific. Gauguin named one of his paintings as "*Savage Poems*" that depicts the naked Pacific female. The history of Gauguin's adulterous and pedophilic behaviour towards Pacific women and his depictions of their naked bodies, need to be consumed with fully informed views. Otherwise, the naive consumption of Gauguin's paintings would only ead viewers to formmisguided views that further reinforce superficial stereotypes of the Pacific people.

Many scholars now question of whether Gauguin's artwork deserves less attention or not due to his colonialist gaze, pedophilic and adulterous relationships he had with Pacific women. Caroline Vercoe, the University of Auckland's senior lecturer and Samoan descent, discusses how Gauguin's art could be re-examined with better contextualisation. Gauguin's celebrated art that is being re-evaluated "reflects the capacity of Gauguin's art practice to enable many kinds of dialogues," She continues, "But I think, increasingly, it's important not to have them couched as a dialogue within only a European-centric context" (qtd. in Sandals). Sandals observes that although the National Gallery of Canada tried to shed the lights on Gauguin's colonialist views and unethical lifestyles, it is either located in the corners with less traffic flows or is only told by the voices of European scholars. None of the Indigenous Pacific scholars were part of their programmes in addressing Gauguin's colonialist and exotifying views on the Pacific. Sandals concludes her article with her concerns on *Gauguin: Portraits* exhibition that did not have "a clear plan for addressing the problematic representation of Indigenous peoples and girls in Gauguin's works, despite the NGC's recent efforts toward foregrounding Indigenous art." Sandals criticises "inherently colonial structure of museums in the West" that the issues do not only lie on the artist or their contemporary art, but museums favour to foster "European-master blockbusters" as curatorial choices.

EUROPEAN GAZE ONTO MĀORI

Leonard Bell is an associate professor in Art History at the University of Auckland. He investigates European visual representations of Māori from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and how they reflect the colonial past and constructs through visual depictions of Māori people and lives. He argues that the studies of these images can help shed light on the historical relationships between the European colonisers and the colonised Māori. He points out that the depicted images of Māori are "made by Europeans for Europeans" (Bell, *Colonial Constructs* 2). It is known that European painters had an intention to document, as they considered Māori as the dying indigenous race. These supposedly documented images of Māori personnel or lives by European artists are neither ethnologically accurate or objective reflections of Māori and their lives.

Many treated Lindauer's paintings of Māori lives as valuable records of what they believed to be fast disappearing race. The New Zealand Herald wrote; "We have allowed an aboriginal race to largely pass away, with manners and customs largely unrecorded... Mr Patridge has preserved many valuable records of the noble Maori race. . . of a type of Maori now fast dying out." Cowan described the paintings as "photographic in their meticulous fidelity to life" (qtd. in Bell *Colonial Constructs* 199-200). Bell says the audience responses at the time from newspaper, exhibition reviews, catalogues cannot be regarded as sophisticated art criticism and are now understood as simplistic and naive (Bell, *Colonial Constructs* 4). Bell argues that although some artefacts are depicted with details, its ethnographic details are not to be deemed as accurate. For example, the dress depicted in *Digging with the Ko* (1907) by Lindauer is wrong for the occasion. In Lindauer's painting,

Maori Women Weaving Flax Garments, the method in the painting is unknown to Māori people. Also, the shapes of mokos were rearranged in the aesthetically pleasing ways of European conventions for European viewers. Bell concludes that the depicted images of Māori by European "had to be sufficiently 'Maori' to be credible for European viewers" (Bell, *Colonial Constructs* 200). Bell finds that the alleged documentary value may not have been achieved from the first-hand observations, but in fact, it was several steps away from the Māori people and lives. Lindauer claimed to have stayed in a Māori village to observe the Māori customs. However, it is known that Lindauer knew the photographer Samuel Carnell who took photographs of many Māori architecture and artefacts. Some of Carnell's photographs and Lindauer's paintings show similar features in parallels (Ibid 200). Although it is important to note that some of Lindauer's Māori portraits were comissioned by Māori. It is generally held in high regards among Māori, especially the descendants of the Māori people depicted.

Bell's analysis of colonialist European gazes onto the indigenous Māori as the colonised subjects, parallels with other case studies of European gazes onto the subjects of non-European others. Gauguin depicted the indigenous people through his romanticised perceptions towards the Tahitians, and it is reflected in his paintings. Gauguin exotified the Tahitian women in his paintings and labelled them as savage in its title. Lindauer also romanticised Māori people in different ways to make them look Māori enough to appeal to the European viewers while adding conventional European aesthetic details for the European audiences. These European painters' depictions of the Māori and Pacific people were exoticised, romanticised, and altered to serve the European viewers' curiosities about the others and aesthetic expectations. Unfortunately, these altered images inevitably

played a significant role in shaping the audience's viewson Māori and Pacific people. If these paintings were the only or the first encounters of any images of Māori or Pacific people, it could have been misleading. Some European depictions of Māori were presented as:

> savages existing at a primitive stage of social development. . . romantic beings, as noble, as ignoble, as relics of antiquity, as exotic curiosities, as picturesque, as hostile, as friendly or deferential, as objects of desire or display. . . as members of a dying race, as ethnological speciments, as marketable commodities, as antipodean peasants. (Bell, *Colonial Constructs* 4)

The European representation of Māori reflects their views in the colonial contexts. These altered representations of Māori can be read as the "domination and control, or attempted control, of Maori by European" (Ibid 5). Steele and Goldie's *The Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand* (1898) is now widely understood as ethnographically inaccurate depictions of the first arrival of Māori to Aotearoa. This painting was based on the origin of Māori story well-known to Europeans, the single fleet migration through the sea, but do not reflect the traditional Māori accounts or genealogies. The Great Fleet story was theorised by Percy Smith. Smith summarised what he heard about Māori histories and argued that Māori migrated in one great fleet in seven canoes in the 1350s and conquered Moriori who lived in Aotearoa previously. This story was accepted for over 60 years. It was popularised as it fit into European settlers' colonial narratives that they were the next superior people to take the land over from Māori (Howe). *The Arrival* painting contributed in confirming the Great Fleet story for the viewers, and some appreciated it as a historically accurate depiction of the Māori arrivals to Aotearoa when the painting was exhibited at the Auckland City Art Gallery. The exhibition was popular among Europeans. However, only a few Māori people

visited to see the painting at the Auckland City Art Gallery. Māori viewers looked on in disdain due to the lack of reflections of Māori traditional narratives, which made the painting a mere creation of pākehā minds (Bell "The Representation of the Maori" 145).

The legendary love story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai was a popular subject in the 1890s and early 1900s in various New Zealand art forms. Lindauer's *Hinemoa* (1907) painting echoes that of the European Ariadne paintings and sculptures. The image of Hinemoa was altered and simplified to serve the interests of colonialist viewers, to the point where it lost the meanings for the Māori people (Ibid 148). Lindauer's Hinemoa is depicted as seductive and passive with shy smiles and body gestures, which is contrasting to Hinemoa in the legendary love story. Hinemoa was the daughter of a great chief, and many young men desired her as a wife. Hinemoa and Tutanekai fell in love, but Hinemoa's father did not approve of their relationship. Hinemoa swam across the great lake to chase her love. The song Pōkarekare Anā is a song about this love story. The title Pōkarekare Anā means 'they are agitated' and it sings about the sadness and the yearning for love over the great lake between the two. Lindauer's Hinemoa lost its stories of love and their determination to chase love despite the family conflicts. Instead, Hinemoa became a mere sexual, primitive, and exotic female subject that is in the middle of lying down in the backdrops of tropical trees, bushes and the sea. Hinemoa in the legendary love story from Rotorua turned into a sexual and exotic object that is romanticised by the male European artist for the European viewer alike. The people of the Moana have been exotified by male European artists, and these altered images contributed to reinforcing many misled stereotypes. Gauguin and Lindauer's exhibitions are still very much popular in major cities around the world today. Their paintings still contribute to perpetuating exotified stereotypes of the Māori and Pacific

people to the viewers, who are not well-informed about the Māori or Pacific people, cultures and traditions.

Dansaekhwa artists' interviews and writings are available in English and Korean, and most of them are still alive to speak to their artworks and exhibitions. However, their voices are entirely omitted and treated as unworthy of investigation by Western. Western art critics have understated the socio-historical environment of the time when these artworks first emerged, as well as the artist's voices. It aligns with the arguments that Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Gayatri Spivak's "Can Subaltern Speak?" make. Western scholars and art writers did not consider what Korean artists stated about their artworks and socio-political background while analysing the *Dansaekhwa* movement. Asian artists are treated as subaltern, who do not have a voice or history. The Asian subject, in this case *Dansaekhwa*, is read through a Eurocentric gaze and understood based on their assumptions about the East, despite the availability of artist's voices in various channels such as interviews, exhibition catalogues and essays in English. The fact that Korean and Western scholars or art historians' readings of *Dansaekhwa* do not share many views in common is the evidence of how Western scholars have not considered the possibility that subalterns can also speak and history of their own. Chapter five will discuss the examples in more details to investigate how *Dansaekhwa* artist's voices were undervalued and replaced with assumptions about the East, without the willingness to understand their culture, history and artistic motivations.

4.2 Zen Presented as Eastern Wisdom

Zen references are ubiquitous to the point that it has become an ordinary and fashionable term. Zen is also heavily used in marketing products and other commercial endeavours. The list of daily encounters can go on; Zen style furniture, Zen fashion, Zen noodles, Zen self-help books, Zen wallpaper, Zen parenting, Zen wedding dress, cross-fit Zen and so on.

Zen is also abundantly referenced in contemporary art criticism and commentaries about Asian Art in the superficial ways of understanding Asian Art, mostly based on mere assumptions. Zen was strategically utilised by Japanese as an ideological tactic to shape Japan as a centre of Asia and promoted on the world stage as having superior Eastern thoughts. Zen was sold to the West and became a trendy wisdom that was appreciated by influential contemporary artists such as John Cage, who contributed to popularising Zen in the West. It also explores how rock gardens arbitrarily became the symbol of Zen which ultimately led to misunderstanding of Lee Ufan's boulders as Zen philosophy.

The school of Zen Buddhism and philosophy originated in China. The Chinese character 禪 means meditation and Buddhist doctrines and teaching. It is pronounced as Chan in Chinese, Seon in Korean and Zen in Japanese. The School of Chan (禪宗, Chan-zong) in China developed at the beginning of the sixth century. It spread to Korea in the seventh century and to Japan in the twelfth century ("Zen Buddhism"). Chan-zong (禪宗) is translated as the meditation school. Chan Buddhism was known for its "embodied

realization of Buddhist awakening", and its "defining concerns were experiential and relational" (Hershock).

As Christianity gradually lost popularity over science and enlightenment, Buddhism gained popularity with the New Age movement in the 1970s in the West. As early as 1883, Phillip Brooks, who was the pastor of Trinity Church in Boston, expressed his concerns about how fast Buddhism was spreading and how many people want to be classified as Buddhist rather than Christians in Boston (Cho). Cho Eun-Young, a professor in Art History at WonGwang University, says that Japanese Zen Buddhism was part of socio-political tactics in the making of the national image of Japan as the centre of Asia. As Japan expanded their relationship and cultural territories to the Western world in Europe and America, they needed something that proved Eastern superiority with Eastern ideas that reflect the culture, arts, and religion. Zen was popularized in the West by Japanese author Daisetz Suzuki (1870 – 1966). It was intentionally promoted as the system of Japanese or Eastern thoughts that are supposedly more sophisticated than Western ideas. They were well aware of how ill-informed the West was about the East and targeted materialism of the West. During this process, the ideas of Zen were transformed into representing holistic Japanese art and culture. Zen was reinterpreted and presented to the West as cultural content that encompassed a rich history and superior spirituality of Japan and the East. The ideas of promoting Zen were adopted with Japanese nationalist tactics in competing among different nations and ethnicities in then becoming globalised world stage (Cho).

Judith Snodgrass, in her book *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (2003) discusses how Japanese

strategically introduced Japanese Zen Buddhism to the West as an Eastern philosophy that is superior to that of the West. Snodgrass is an Associate Professor at the Western Sydney University, and her areas of research involves Buddhism in the West and Buddhism and Asian modernity. The first time the narrative of Japanese Zen Buddhism was introduced to the West at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 by Japanese Buddhist priests during the Meiji Buddhist revival movement. Japanese Buddhist and Japanese Christian converts were united in defence against the Western imperialism and Christian missions (1-3 Snodgrass). Western Buddhist scholars, such as T.W. Rhys Davids and F. Max Muller, according to Snodgrass, have provided foundational knowledge about Buddhism, however, fundamentally orientalist at the same time. They understood Buddhism's values through the Western gaze, which "did not correspond with any Asian reality, it nevertheless functioned as the truth of Buddhism" (Snodgrass 8). Buddhist reform leaders were aware of the limitations of Western academic constructs of Buddhism and were present in the Parliament of Religions. They perceive Western Buddhist scholarship as "an aid in defence against Christian imperialism," as some of them saw Sakyamuni (Buddha) as a more significant philosopher who had completed a system of thought two centuries before Europe. Snodgrass argues that modern Japan sought the ways to define themselves with their own strong national spirit that would make them stand as equally powerful as the West, which was different from the past approaches to imitate the West (9). Also, Buddhism was studied by Christian missionaries as in the notion of "know your enemy" in Western framing with orientalist views. The Parliament of Religions was dominantly Christians, and Buddhism was the "Other" from a Christian and Eurocentric point of view. Japanese Buddhist delegations tried to challenge the assumptions posed by the Eurocentric discourses, as well as embraced to their advantages when necessary. Snodgrass called this

"[t]he Orient participated in Orientalism" (11). Snodgrass says "Buddhism's denial of a creator God accommodated evolutionary theory and materialist philosophy" (6).

Shoji Yamada is an associate professor in Japanese Studies in Kyoto and published the book, *Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West* in 2005. Yamada says the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* written by Herrigel was popular as "hand in hand with the Zen and New Age booms in Europe and [the] United States, it was very fashionable as a trendy kind of "wisdom" from the 1950s through the 1970s" (3). Yamada says the famous Ryoanji rock garden only attracted many who considered it beautiful, after the Zen boom in Europe and the United States post-1950s. It was not a renowned garden that attracted many before this time in Japan among Japanese. According to Yamada's findings, the popularity of Ryoanji rock garden, and the association of Zen and the rock garden were not seen before the 1930s. Neither Japanese or English tour guide books on Kyoto mentions Ryoanji rock garden in the nineteenth century. Also, in the essay "In a Japanese Garden" written in 1894 by Lafcadio Hearn discusses "the beauty of the stones," but did not call it Zen (Yamada 195). The praise of Ryoanji rock garden and the association with Zen to rock garden trace back to when a German architect Bruno Taut published a book *Houses and People of Japan* in German in 1936. It was translated into English the following year. Taut visited Japan in 1933 and was brought to Ryoanji garden in Kyoto by Japanese. Taut describes the rock garden at Ryoanji as "an Embodiment of the Zen spirit." According to Yamada, it was rare to link Zen and the rock garden prior to Taut's writing, as well as Japanese writings. Taut's argument was Japanese gardens from the 15th and 16th centuries intentionally reflected philosophical ideas. His novel perception was that the philosophy of Zen Buddhism was expressed through odd-shaped stones in the garden in Ryoanji (197-8). In Yamada's word, "[w]hy was

Taut able to connect the rock garden and Zen? The more one thinks about it, the deeper the mystery becomes" (198). D. T. Suzuki wrote a foreword for the English version of *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Herrigel in 1953. Both Suzuki and Herrigel are known to have studied under the same teacher – Shaku Soen. Suzuki's foreword described Herrigel's book in a flattering manner. However, Suzuki revealed his true thoughts about Herrigel in a conversation with Zen scholar Hiramatsu Shinichi in 1959, "Herrigel is trying to get to Zen, but he hasn't grasped Zen itself. Have you ever seen a book written by a Westerner that has?" Suzuki said about writing the introduction to Herrigel's book "I was asked to write it, so I wrote it, that's all" (Yamada 207-8). Alan Watts contributed in further mistifying Zen and grounding the connections between Zen and the rock garden. Watts wrote more than twenty books on Zen. In Watts' book *The Way of Zen* (1957), he introduces "Ryoanji as the icon of Zen, and Kyudo[12] as Zen physical culture leading to enlightenment" (210). Yamada says Watts' book had a significant impact as Watts was one of the most successful Western Zen experts at the time. From then on, rock garden and Kyudo became popular icons of Zen. Hisamatsu published *Zen and the fine arts* in 1958, and praised Ryoanji in the light of Zen, calling it an empty garden. Hisamatsu also listed seven characteristics of Zen culture as; "asymmetry, simplicity, austere sublimity or lofty dryness, naturalness, subtle profundity or deep reserve, freedom from attachment, and tranquillity" (qtd. In Yamada 213). Yamada concludes his investigation:

> The entire concept of "Zen culture" itself has been created using just this sort of rhetorical sleight of hand. The view of Japanese culture that today is taken to be axiomatic is that Zen is a spiritual culture emblematic of Japan and that almost all of

[12] Japanese type of archery

> Japanese culture is permeated with Zen elements. If one traces this idea to its source, one will find that it originated with Suzuki and Hisamatsu (214).

An American scholar Nancy Wilson Ross published *The World of Zen* in 1960. In the book, Ross referenced Suzuki, Watts, Herrigel and others and showed profound admiration of Ryoanji garden. “One of the truest expressions of the Zen way with garden designing may be seen in the famous Kyoto garden of Ryoanji. . . many Western visitors find at Ryoanji something deeply satisfying” (qtd. in Yamada 215). Alan Watts was a British academic who contributed to spreading Eastern philosophy Zen in the West. Although Watts’ knowledge of Zen at an intellectual level was recognised, it is known that Watts’ Zen was self-taught and Watts was criticised for not being properly trained under a Zen master. Watts’ Zen discourse was considered by Suzuki as fake and needed to be appropriately trained. Watts was criticised by Japanese scholars due to his disinterests in seeking to understand traditional Zen. Yamada described Watts as “cigar-chomping Watts, who talked about Zen to hippies” (222).

Peter Herschock is a director of the Asian Studies Development Program at the East-West Centre in Honolulu and a noted expert on Chan Buddhism. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on “Chan Buddhism” is written by Hershock. It discusses the difficulties in attempting to understand Confucianism or Buddhism in their own terms, beyond Western philosophical traditions of thoughts by default:

> A major difficulty in attempting to engage philosophical perspectives originating from beyond the horizons of European and American traditions is the tendency to

> assume default status for Western philosophical categories and questions. This leads, for example, to expending considerable energy considering whether Confucian or Buddhist ethics are best seen as species of consequentialism, deontology or virtue ethics, rather than trying to understand them as much as possible in their own terms. Doing so risks overwriting the philosophical distinctiveness of so-called "non-Western" traditions and tacitly justifying the continued definition of academic philosophy in terms of exclusively Western defaults. (Hershock)

Ryoanji garden became a famous Zen garden within a course of a decade in the 1950-1960s according to Yamada's investigation. Snodgrass and Yamada argue that Zen Buddhism was strategically promoted as Japanese philosophy to the West. With Zen related publications and promotions by the Western Zen scholars and Suzuki and Hisamatsu, Zen was constructed to be advertised as a way of Japanese life, culture and philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. Zen is often discussed in the association of Eastern art and culture. As discussed earlier, associating Zen with rock garden Ryoanji in Kyoto was constructed idea seemingly based on nothing, but a German architect's statement inflated it over the time. Snodgrass argued that Zen was intentionally sold to the international community as the sophisticated Eastern or Japanese philosophy by Japanese delegates and scholars in attempts to promote themselves compatible against the dominant Western culture in the 20th century. Yamada points out Zen, and its links to rock garden aesthetics were total construction of the West that was favourably picked up by Japanese scholars as they saw it as an advantage to popularise Japanese culture and lifestyle to the West. Zen was introduced to the West with Japanese's attempts to claim the dominance in the East and

West competition. Zen is now referenced in numerous discussions about East Asian art and cultures and used as marketing tools as it sells to Western consumers.

Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* that have similar visual elements to Ryoanji Japanese rock garden is praised as the philosophical Zen aesthetics. Lee Ufan talks about his indifference to Zen Buddhism and says *Relatum Series* is fundamentally different from Zen rock gardens. (S. Lee and U. Lee, *Man and Nature United; U. Lee, "Buddha's Lotus" 15*). The art writers and scholars from the West continuously discuss Lee Ufan's works in the frames of Zen and other Eastern religions and philosophy, despite Lee Ufan's claims against it. The artist statements are essential parts of understanding Western contemporary art. However, when it comes to Asian artists' contemporary artworks, West needs to speak for the East, and the Eastern voice is entirely dismissed. It aligns with the postcolonialist tradition of thoughts such as Said's Orientalism and Spivak's Subaltern Studies, where they argue that the West spoke for the incapable East and voided Eastern voices. Although Zen was initially introduced to the West in the quest of Japanese's attempts to compete for Western dominance on the international stage, it can be argued that it was an attempt by the Orient participating in Orientalising the Orient. This Zen Buddhism discourse was picked up by Western scholars, and artificially constructed ideas of Zen Buddhism in relation to Japanese ways of living and culture were projected as broader Asian ways of lifestyle and culture. It is orientalising the Orient to frame any Asian artists' contemporary artworks within the lens of Zen or any other Eastern religions when the artists specifically say otherwise. It treats as if the Asian artists' voices are non-existent or not important. Western art critics often override Asian artists' voices with their presumptive opinions to link contemporary Asian artworks to Zen that is mystic, exotic and difficult to comprehend.

John Cage (1912 - 1992) is considered as one of the most influential figures of avant-garde music and art in the post-war periods. He is also known to have been fascinated by Eastern ideas such as Zen Buddhism and Indian philosophy. Cage discussed his attendance at lectures by Daisetsu Suzuki on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University for a period of two or three years (Patterson 53). Cage's interests in Zen and Japanese culture served as a catalyst to popularise them in the mid-twentieth century in the United States (Sheppard 347). As Zen Buddhism became popular among contemporary artists or scenes in the West, there were also concerns that Zen Buddhism was quoted in a fashionable manner without comprehending the ideas about Buddhist enlightenment. Lieberman says;

> Today there are western artists avowedly using Zen to justify the indiscriminate framing of simply anything--blank canvases, totally silent music, torn up bits of paper dropped on a board and stuck where they fall, or dense masses of mangled wire. The work of composer John Cage is rather typical of this tendency.

Japanese arguably orientalised themselves to mould and promote Zen Buddhism as superior Eastern philosophy that formed the system of thoughts supposedly earlier than the West. The exotic Eastern wisdom without the creator God appealed to the West who was questioning the existence of God throughout the Age of Enlightenment. However, the shallow understanding of the trendy Eastern wisdom Zen through the European gaze led to the superficial appreciation of emptiness. It also led to the misunderstanding of Asian artists' art, including Lee Ufan's *Relatum Series* with boulders. This chapter explored the postcolonial studies to analyse the examples of the Other being misrepresented and misunderstood through the European gaze. The next chapter will discuss the parallel

elements of how the Western art writers misunderstood Asian art, Lee Ufan's artwork and *Dansaekhwa* with the void of the Other's voice.

5 Orientalising the Orient through Zen Readings

Zen is often referenced in art commentaries and criticism about Asian Art in the manner of orientalising the Orient. Zen references are often the reflections of the misunderstanding the Asian contemporary art. It reflects the inability or unwillingness to comprehend other cultures. Instead, associating any artworks made by Asian artists with Zen is a convenient and fashionable way to describe the incomprehensible Other. Zen reading of anything Asian without much investigation only further mystifies the East and Eastern philosophy and culture.

There are limited numbers of books published on *Dansaekhwa* in Korean or English languages. Two edited books about *Dansaekhwa* written by prominent Korean art critics do not discuss Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism in relation to the *Dansaekhwa* movement in any extended manner if at all. The only English book publication on *Dansaekhwa* is by Korean American art history scholar Joan Kee, and it also does not discuss *Dansaekhwa* in relation to Zen or other Eastern religions. However, these Eastern religions are often discussed by Western art critics or media about *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks. It seems the German architect Taut's link made to Zen and rock garden, which was favourably taken up by self-taught and popular Zen scholar Alan Watts, is now considered as the expert on Eastern religion and aesthetics. The investigations of Eastern philosophy and intellectual thoughts were omitted in understanding Eastern subjects, which is probably the cause of the misunderstanding of the Eastern religions and thoughts.

Chapter One discussed the socio-historical background of when the *Dansaekhwa* movement emerged. Chapter Two explored *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks by analysing the artist's writings, interviews as well as that of Korean art critics and scholars. Chapter Three discussed Western minimalism in comparison to the *Dansaekhwa* movement – which is the localised form of the minimalism style of art. Chapter Four looked at the few texts and examples to explore the European gaze towards the other, the East and Zen. Chapter Five discusses specific examples of how Western art critics read Asian contemporary art, *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks with orientalist stereotypes and analyses them based on the postcolonial studies discussed in Chapter Four.

5.1 Asian Art Seen Through the Default Lens of Zen

LEE MINGWEI'S PARTICIPATORY ART

The exhibition *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* was held at the Auckland Art Gallery from November 2016 to March 2017. It was previously held in the Mori Art Museum from September 2014 to January 2015. The chief curator at the Mori Art Museum, Mami Kataoka, wrote in the exhibition catalogue that the participatory art from Asia is unique in the sense that it is based on relationality from Buddhist thoughts and the here and now vein of Eastern philosophy. Indian Buddhist monk Nagarjuna and D.T. Suzuki explored Mahayana Buddhism, which was passed on from India to East Asia and to Japan. The impermanence of all worldly things means being in the present moment here and now is the most important. After all, all things exist in mutual relationships, then nothing exists. Nothing exists apart from the relationship between the things only exists.

As its title suggests, *Lee Mingwei and His Relations: The Art of Participation* involved numerous participatory artworks. The *Mending Project* (2009/2014/2016) invites the gallery visitors to bring pieces of their clothes to be mended by the host, who is sometimes Lee Mingwei himself. While the host mends clothes that the visitors bring, the host also listens to their stories. Lee Mingwei says mending is very personal for him, because he grew up in Taiwan during the 1960s when the country was impoverished, and his mother often repaired worn-out clothes. The gesture of mending is, therefore, something special and emotionally satisfying for him in that it brings back good memories of his mother. Moreover, Lee Mingwei was a weaver at California College of Arts. According to Lee Mingwei, his time spent at the college planted the seed for his the *Mending Project,* albeit

his final inspiration came from the September 11 attacks in New York in 2001. Lee Mingwei's friend John missed the tragedy by a few minutes because he was late to work on the day. All 400 of John's colleagues lost their lives. That evening, Lee Mingwei found himself mending clothes that he had been meaning to repair but had not find time before. Lee Mingwei says "I truly believe all my projects, and especially this one, are a way to weave human psychology, social relationship, and memory together" (Simone).

Lee Mingwei was born in Taiwan in 1964, and he works and resides between Paris and New York. He studied at the California College of Arts in the early 1990s. Suzanne Lacy was one of Lee's professors, and Lacy studied under Allan Kaprow, who was part of establishing performance art and Happenings in the late 1950s and 1960s (Kataoka 23). Lee Mingwei's participatory art came to life in under their influences. Allan Kaprow met John Cage in 1951 and encountered the Zen that was popular at the time in America. However, to connect Lee Mingwei's work to Zen Buddhism is a few steps too far. His interview statements about the *Mending Project* references no trace of Zen Buddhism or specifically Eastern thought. Rather, Lee discusses his own memories of mending itself in relation to his mother and the 9/11 attack that were personal to him (*LEE MINGWEI*).

Marina Abramović (b.1946)'s *The Artist Is Present* (2010 in the Museum of Modern Art) stretches the premises of body and mind and the relationships between the audience and the artist. Abramović intimates, "I understood that… I could make art with everything… and the most important is the concept… And this was the beginning of my performance art. And the first time I put my body in front of [an] audience, I understood: this is my media." (qtd. in "The Artist"). Her words suggest that Abramović's relational, participatory and

performance art *The Artist is Present* may be rooted in the tradition of conceptual art . Her participatory art does not seem to have had any relation to relationality in Buddhist terms or Eastern thought. Nor does anyone discuss her relational aesthetics in terms of Zen Buddhism or Eastern philosophy. It would be difficult to say if the idea of being in the present moment without worries of the past or future originated from either East or West. The idea of being in the present moment could have separately developed in different forms and traditions in both East and West.

Kataoka's statement that Lee Mingwei's participatory art was inspired by Eastern thoughts is highly questionable without adequate reasoning provided. Participatory art was already present in the contemporary global art scene. Photographic images threatened the existence of gallery and museums. Participatory art could only be fully experienced with your body and mind being present in the gallery space or wherever the art happened. Lee Mingwei studied at the California College of Arts in the early 1990s in the USA, and has been based in New York - the epicentre of contemporary art in the post-war period. It would have been inevitable for Lee Mingwei's artworks to be influenced by his art training and residing in the United States. Similarly, Lee Mingwei's Eastern upbringing in Taiwan would likewise have impacted Lee Mingwei's art. However, Kataoka does not provide any supporting evidence for the claim that Lee Mingwei's participatory art reflects Buddhist and Eastern thought. Lee Mingwei's participatory art does not seem to have contained something uniquely Asian or that reflects Eastern thought except the artist himself is of Asian descent.

Kataoka tries to differentiate Lee Mingwei's artworks from that of other Western contemporary artists by reading his artworks through the association of Zen Buddhism. It is

an example of the orient orientalising the orient by themselves. The narratives that fit into the mystic stereotypes by orientalising the orient may attract the Western audience as selling points and present Asian art as exotic and charged with superior Eastern philosophy as discussed in Chapter Four. Reading Lee Mingwei's artworks as rooted in Eastern Buddhist thoughts is blatantly assuming that Asian artist's works are default influenced by Asian traditions of thoughts. It often entirely ignores the Asian artist's extensive training beyond Asian art and thoughts, residence in the West and their artist statements. This type of art criticism or writings is often received without much critical engagement, even though the argument often comes without any supporting evidence, except the artist is of Asian descent.

Lee Mingwei's exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery in 2016 - 2017 included a number of his participatory art such as *Sonic Blossom, Sleeping Project, Mending Project, Letter Writing Projects.* One exhibition room was dedicated to the artists or ideas that may have influenced Lee Mingwei's artworks and was called "Works for Relationality." This room exhibited the works of Lee Ufan, D.T. Suzuki, Yves Klein, John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Hakuin, Travanija and more. The running theme of this exhibition room was contemporary art and artists that had been influenced by Zen Buddhism. Here, Lee Ufan's work was listed as Zen influenced contemporary art yet again, despite Lee Ufan's claim that reading his work in relation to Zen would only lead to a misunderstanding of his work. Although Lee Mingwei stayed in a Chan (Chan means Zen in Chinese, Zen's ancestor form from China) monastery at the age of six over six consecutive summers (Doran), Lee Mingwei does not discuss Chan/Zen Buddhism with regards to his relational artwork. He instead provides other specific examples that directly influenced his *Mending Project* that are irrelevant to Zen.

Lee Mingwei talks about his *Sleeping Project* – another relational, participatory art project. According to him, this project was inspired by sleeper-car train rides between Paris and Prague after graduating high school. He shared the sleeper train carriage with a gentle elderly Jewish man who told Lee about his family's story. The elderly man's whole family was sent to concentration camps, and he was the only survivor when they were liberated after three years. Lee Mingwei wanted to re-create a similar kind of intimacy and human connection that he had felt on the sleepers' carriage on the train within the gallery space. Lee Mingwei says his *Letter Writing Project* was conceived through reflecting his own experiences of writing a letter to his grandmother after she passed away (*LEE MINGWEI*). For this participatory artwork, Lee Mingwei does discuss Buddhist meditation practices. There are three letter-writing booths which represent three different postures of Chinese Buddhist meditation practices – sitting, standing and kneeling. Lee references Chinese Buddhist practices but did not discuss Zen specifically. The visitors are encouraged to write to someone about gratitude, apology or forgiveness - something they could not express to someone before in words. The conception of writing letter simply came from his personal experience of writing a letter to his grandmother after she had passed away, with the message that he did not have a chance to communicate when she was around. Although having three booths were inspired by the Buddhist meditation practices, the core conceptual ideas of writing a letter to the loved one with the things that they were unable to say, were not explicitly influenced by anything Zen, Buddhism or Eastern thoughts.

Relating to any Asian works of art with Zen without providing supporting evidence is often received without much intellectual inquiry. These types of art criticism are written and consumed without paying attention to the artist's voices about their work that often do not reference Zen Buddhism in relation to their artworks. It is often discussed based on the assumptions made by art critics, curator or journalist that artworks were influenced by Zen, seemingly basing it on an artist's Asian heritage. It mystifies their work by reading it with Eastern philosophy that became fashionable and is different, exotic, oriental and difficult to comprehend. At the same time, it also isolates their works to something different from that of their Western peers' contemporary artworks. Asian artists' works are default read differently based on art critics' assumptions made based on their ethnicities, more than art aesthetics or conceptual ideas that the artists openly discuss.

KIMSOOJA – ANARCHIST'S NAME

Kimsooja was born in South Korea and now is currently based in Seoul, New York and Paris. Her conceptual artworks deal with her nomadic lifestyle as a child and as an artist, belonging, identities and feminism. However, Kimsooja, the Asian contemporary artist's works are often discussed in relations to various Eastern thoughts such as Zen, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Kimsooja's solo exhibition was held at Trish Clark Gallery in Auckland in November – December 2017. Trish Clark Gallery's website introduces Kimsooja's work by claiming that, "[h]er beliefs locate readily within Buddhism, Zen, Confucianism or the age-old role of the artist as shaman." As it is often the case, the writer provides no further explanation or references about the Eastern philosophies that are

supposedly present in Kimsooja's works. The four belief systems listed in the article have distinctive practices and cultural background. It is blatantly ignorant to claim that her belief system is rooted in all of these.

Kimsooja is often explicitly asked about how Buddhism or Eastern ways of thinking play out in her artwork. In her interview with Nicolas Bouriaud in 2003, Kimsooja explains that her work is not derived from Buddhist thought but, in fact, she grew up in a Catholic household:

> Buddhist philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism is similar to the way I perceive and function in the world. However, the ideas in my work are created from my own questions and experiences, not from Buddhist theory itself. It is more complicated as – I was brought up formally a catholic, and practiced also Christian for some time, but Korean daily life practice is greatly dominated by Confucianism, mixture of Buddhism, and Shamanism... [T]he Eastern way of thinking inhabits every context of contemporary art history not just as a theory but attitude melded in one's personality and existence and is inseparable with Western thinking.

Kimsooja's statement suggests that she does not necessarily think in the notion of the dichotomy of Eastern and Western thoughts becausethey are intertwined. The interviewer, Bouriaud, continues to question Kimsooja about the impact of oriental (Eastern) thoughton the contemporary art world and whether it is a form of postmodern exoticism. Kimsooja answers, "[i]t would be unfortunate if the Western art world considered Eastern thought as decor for Western aesthetic investigation."

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts held the exhibition *Zone of Nowhere by Kimsooja* in 2018. It also claims Kimsooja's oeuvre is "[h]eavily influenced by Buddhism, Zen, Confucianism, Christianity and the role of the artist as shaman" ("Zone of Nowhere"). However, it is clear that what Kimsooja meant in the interview by mentioning four religious practices in Korea was to acknowledge that Korean culture and society continue to be influenced by age-old traditions but not necessarily her artworks. It seems the other half of her statements such as her upbringing as a Catholic Christian or her art practice reflecting her personal experiences and questions are entirely omitted or left out intentionally to fit the orientalising narratives in both New Zealand and Australian gallery's statements on Kimsooja's exhibitions. Her interview was done in English and published in English. However, the portion of it seemed to have been lost in unconscious bias or intentionally to fit into the convenient Eastern narratives. In any case, Kimsooja repetitively claims in various interviews that her art is based on her personal experiences. Italy is a Catholic country, and some of their culture and society may have been deeply influenced by Catholicism. However, Italian artists' artworks are not by default read only in the frame of the Catholic faith.

Kimsooja utilises many Bottari (보따리) in her various installations, sculptures and video works. Bottari means a bundle of anything from clothes to books that are wrapped in a large piece of a cloth often called Bojagi (보자기) – wrapping cloths. It is used to carry things or to move house in the past. Bottari can remind many people of the Korean War (1950-1953) when people had to bring only a few Bottari swiftly wrapped with only the essentials to flee from the civil war. In more contemporary settings, bottari can also remind Korean people of festive seasons of New Year or Thanksgiving – the two biggest family

celebrations. Often food in containers are wrapped in Bottari to bring it as gifts to family or close friends. Mothers usually pack the leftover food from the celebration and wrap them in Bottari for their children to take back home. Although Bottari has been mostly replaced by single-use bags, most Korean people would have nostalgic memories associated with Bottari – whether it is only from the memories of the past through historical pictures or their memories. Either way, Bottari suggests that someone is leaving a place to go to another place. Bottari seems to reflect and symbolise Kimsooja'sn omadic way of life and her healing process.

Kimsooja adopts Korean aesthetics such as a silk bedcover wrapped Bottari in her video, installation, and sculpture works. Her Korean cultural background is vividly present in her art aesthetics. Kimsooja remembers her grandmother's death when she was a little girl. Kimsooja says that her grandmother's "fabric and clothings that she used to wear became the presence of [her] empty body. For me, it's another frame of our lives. I'm not using typical Korean Bojagi which is known as a wrapping cloth, I'm always using this particular material, which is used Korean bedcovers" ("Why Did Kimsooja Crisscross"). This interview done by Public Delivery is in video recording format, with an added background sounds of weary winds and shamanistic bells chiming. While Kimsooja talks about her memories of her grandmother's death in her childhood and adding weary and rather scary background sound with shamanistic bells, made her presence in the video clip appear like a possessed shaman from the East and artificially made it oriental and exotic. It was an artist statement about her choice of materials for her works based on her childhood memories that are detached to her culture or origins. However, by adding the layers of oriental background sounds, it

orientalised and mystified her, otherwise, would have just been culture or religious neutral artist statements.

Her nomadic style of life as a child and as an internationally recognised artist residing between in Seoul, Paris and New York is a beautifully and poignantly expressed theme throughout her oeuvre. Bottaris often appear in her work. A few Bottaris are left on the floor of the gallery space – Kimsooja's Bottaris are usually wrapped in beautiful Korean used bedcover made of silk fabric, and sometimes a single black or white Bottari is left in a random corner of the gallery, which usuallyappears to not to fit the gallery space. Bottaris are like reincarnations of Kimsooja herself living in different cities, being a stranger to her new surroundings.

Kimsooja addresses migration issues in her work *Cities on the Move, the Bottari Truck – Migrateur.* She first performed this and recorded it in video format in 1997 in South Korea. She crossed South Korea for 11 days on a truck full of Bottari, and she was sitting on top of the pile. Kimsooja's own experience of her childhood where her family was always moving from one place to another, was the inspiration for this work ("Why Did Kimsooja Crisscross"). Kimsooja is travelling through different cities, and the video makes the viewers question the purpose or the end destinations of these trips. This piece is discussed by Public Delivery as "an art piece with contemporary relevance and evoking a nostalgic feeling for the past and yet a hopeful one for the future ahead and new beginnings" (Ibid). Kimsooja performed the same piece in Paris in 2007 and made a video recording of the performance. Kimsooja says in a making video clip of this piece in Paris that she chose to make Bottaris with clothing from this specific city Mac/Val-Vitry-Ivry as she wanted to "connect the

integrity of this place and [the] history of my immigrant [background]" as there were protests by immigrants who were refused to stay in 1996. Most of them stayed and protested in the cathedral called St. Bernard in northern Paris. In Kimsooja's own words, this piece is "my symbolic journey to this country's history of immigrants" (Ibid). Many of Kimsooja's works challenge the traditional roles of women. The bedcovers are traditionally sewn by women, and bottaris are packed by women as domestic chores. Kimsooja sitting on top of the pile of Bottari on a moving truck without a safety harness expresses the modern femininity of fearlessness, directing her own path, and taking risks. She sits on top the products of traditional women's domestic chores, and it symbolises a fearless woman having controls of her life who can do more than merely domestic chores. Kimsooja was hesitant in opening her artist website domain due to its commercial aspects and the mass media's power to influence people in unfair and untruthful ways. She was suddenly convinced to open a domain when she realised the power of the one-word name (www.kimsooja.com). To her, a one-word name symbolically "refuses gender identity, marital status, socio-political or cultural and geographical identity by not separating the family name and the first name" (Kim). She made this moment into a piece of art to commemorate it and gave a title; *A One-Word Name Is An Anarchist's Name* (2003). Her feminist tendency of works do not seem to have any traces from either her Christian upbringing, Zen Buddhism, Confucianism or shamanism.

Kimsooja claims her artworks reflect her own life experience of having nomadic patterns of life, moving her home often in her childhood and also as an internationally acclaimed artist in her adulthood. Kimsooja reinstates that her works are influenced by her personal issues and later also by human rights issues. All articles that associate her art

practices in relation to Eastern religious thoughts or practices do not provide any further information on the possible links between her art practices and Zen, Taoism, shamanism, or Confucianism. Kimsooja in fact often informs her interviewers that she grew up Catholic and practised Christianity for years. Some Asian countries' cultures and ways of life would be inevitably influenced by Buddhism as a philosophy and a religion. So does some of the Western countries' cultures and ways of life would be inevitably influenced by Christianity as a religion and philosophy. To identify Asian artists' works with fascinating Eastern religions and philosophy is only further orientalising the orient.

5.2 An Orientalist Reading of *Dansaekhwa*

Asian art and *Dansaekhwa* are often understood based on orientalist stereotypes by loosely associated with Zen and other Eastern religions. Zen reading of Asian art is usually derived without much investigation into the other or the Orient about their history, training background, culture, religions and their statements. Zen references have become ubiquitous with the popularities of the New Age movement in the 1970s in the West. Zen's meaning seems to have been reduced to simply refer to any minimalistic styles of objects and lifestyles, and anything with meditative qualities. Also, Zen Buddhism is often referenced in discussions of Asian aesthetics. It is abundantly found in the discussion of *Dansaekhwa* or Asian artist's works by the Western art writers and audiences. A reviewer from Melbourne on Trip Advisor rated five stars for Lee Ufan Art Museum in Naoshima and wrote "Zen at [its] best… the wonderful contemplative zen garden overlooking the water is simply gorgeous ("Zen at Its Best").

Simon Morley, who is an artist, art critic and an academic, said *Dansaekhwa*'s prevalence of white is uniquely Korean responses to Taoist, Buddhist, and Neo-Confucian concepts. In much of the same vein, Henry Hughes, a curator and writer, considers *Dansaekhwa* as exhibiting "oriental spiritualism, of a rather generalized variety, often combining elements of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism"" (qtd. in Yoon, "The World of *Dansaekhwa*"). There is no relevant reference made by *Dansaekhwa* artist or Korean art critics' discussion of *Dansaekhwa* from these angles. Instead, the artists repetitively state that their artworks were not inspired by Zen, or Eastern religions and philosophy. Lee Ufan clearly states that reading any of his work with the lens of Asia or Zen Buddhism only leads

to the misinterpretation of his works. Lee Ufan discusses the experiences of living in both East and West, and how it may have influenced his artworks:

> At first, I didn't consciously make comparisons. But as I travelled around, I've become used to living and thinking alone. Despite having been born in Asia and growing up there, much of my education was Western, and because I've been traversing Europe half of my life, it's difficult to stand on one side or the other, although, strangely, standing on either side also feels very natural to me somehow. And as much as I'd like to believe that my thinking is very cosmopolitan, at times people are able to discern that I may be coming from somewhere deep within Asia. Occasionally, I resent and resist this, but it's something that I cannot really control. However, I oppose the idea that I somehow sell the idea of Asia, or that I sell the idea of modernism. Sometimes my works are described as Zen Buddhism, but I don't know either Zen or Buddhism very well. Those terms actually contribute to the misunderstanding of my work. (S. Lee and U. Lee *Man and Nature United*)

Tate's definition of *Dansaekhwa* is highly problematic as it treats their mere assumption about Korea and *Dansaekhwa* as an accepted definition of the term.

> Stylistically the artists of *Dansaekhwa* rejected realism and formalism for modernist abstraction, choosing to paint only in monochrome and in a style that emphasised the flatness of the canvas. The movement highlighted the post-war struggle within Korea over national identity, belonging and tradition.

The claim that *Dansaekhwa* movement is the representation of the post-war struggle over national identity and tradition is followed by no explanation. There was a strong sense of national identity and patriotism promoted by the government in the 1970s under Park Chung-hee's dictator regime. It promoted propaganda heavily rooted in nationalism. The citizens were encouraged to work hard for the country in various ways. There was a propaganda song called "Let's build a good life"[13] that was played loudly every morning from rubbish collector's trucks and played everyday on televisions to encourage the citizens to work hard and prosper as a nation (Choi). South Korea achieved rapid economic growth in the 1970s. The claim that the minimalist gesture in *Dansaekhwa* is the expressiveness of the struggle over national identity and tradition needs further supporting explanation. Otherwise, it remains as pure speculation without any demonstration of an understanding of culture and socio-political history of national identity and tradition. *Dansaekhwa* artists were mostly wealthy elites who entirely disengaged with any nationalist campaign or civil rights movement that were deeply part of the 1970s of South Korea. Elite *Dansaekhwa* artists who could go to university and travel overseas in the 1970s, were far removed from the post-war struggles over national identity. Instead, they were more interested in engaging with the global trends of contemporary art movements at the time.

Lee Ufan studied philosophy and was highly interested in Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's phenomenology. Lee Ufan named his sculpture series as the mathematics-derived term *Relatum*. It was formerly known as *Phenomenon and Perception*, the name borrowed from Merleau-Ponty's writings (Rawlings). Lee Ufan used the rocks - the objects

[13] The song is called 잘 살아보세 in Korean.

found in nature, in protest against overflowing production and consumerism and juxtaposed it against the factory produced steel sheets. Lee Ufan repeatedly says it is his refusal of making and criticism towards making (U. Lee “What is the Art of Void?”). Lee Ufan acknowledges there was *Arte Povera* (meaning “poor art” in Italian) before *Mono-ha* movement to criticise the endless production and consumption of capitalism and industrialisation. Viewers can be reminded of Zen garden looking at *Relatum Series*. However, when the contexts of the socio-political scenes and the artist’s intention are carefully examined, it becomes apparent that it is unrelated to Zen garden or Zen Buddhism, as Lee Ufan clearly said.

Western minimalist art is often understood through the phenomenology and the experience of being in time and space. This understanding is based on thoroughly examining the artists’ essays and statements, as discussed earlier in chapter three. A Zen reading of Lee Ufan’s minimalist art undermines Lee’s understanding of phenomenology and his intention to make viewers think about the relationship between the unmade objects, factory-produced material and its surroundings in exhibition space. Zen readings of Lee Ufan’s works not only vest his Asianness in his art but also limits the appreciation of Lee Ufan’s works, not being able to see it any other way. It is orientalising his work by associating his work only with the lens of Zen – the fascinating and mysterious Eastern philosophy. It is known that Zen Buddhist monks can meditate their entire life and die without reaching the desired enlightenment. As Zen Buddhism became popular among contemporary artists such as John Cage and the New Age movement, Zen was often quoted in fashionable and superficial manners. Lieberman says in the 1970s;

> Today there are Western artists avowedly using Zen to justify the indiscriminate framing of simply anything - blank canvases, totally silent music, torn up bits of paper dropped on a board and stuck where they fall, or dense masses of mangled wire.

New York Times reviewed the exhibition *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity* at Guggenheim in 2011. The review begins with, ""Marking Infinity," a five-decade retrospective of the art of Lee Ufan, fills the museum rotunda and two side galleries with about 90 works in a Zen-Minimalist, be-here-now vein" (Johnson). It assumes that the minimalistic style of Lee Ufan's work is influenced by Zen without any elaboration. It associated be-here-now vein with Zen's meditative qualities. However, it only misled to their assumption by seeing it through the orientalist gaze. Lee Ufan was the founder of the *Mono-ha* movement that criticised mass production and consumerism. He was fascinated by phenomenology like that of other minimalist artists at the time. It is rather evident that the be-here-now vein was the outcome of his philosophical engagement of phenomenology and the criticism of mass-production by engaging with not making. It also makes references to meditation, which is the core element of Zen, in discussing Lee's works with seven boulders; "the seven rocks prompt meditation on our unmediated experience of things in time and space." Lee Ufan stated he does not understand Zen, and reading his work with Zen is only a misunderstanding. Lee Ufan was educated in philosophy discipline and interested in Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's phenomenology. Zen readings of Lee Ufan's work, reflect an unwillingness to hear the artist's voice and to understand the artist's training background and intention. It also reflects the lack of critical engagement with artwork, especially from a socio-political perspective. It is further orientalising the Orient by associating Asian artist's

works with exotic Asian religions when the artist clearly explained it is a misunderstanding. It is mystifying the Asian artist's works by associating it with Zen Buddhism that appears to be fascinating and exotic, yet difficult to comprehend.

Robert Sullivan is the only Western art writer who comprehended the misunderstanding of Lee Ufan's works by relating them to Zen Buddhism, instead of French phenomenology. Sullivan succinctly states in an exhibition review of the exhibition *Lee Ufan: Open Dimension* at Hirshhorn Museum in Washington in 2019.

> In the West, meanwhile, he was characterized as almost stereotypically Asian, critics confusing his passion for French phenomenology with Zen Buddhism. But 40 years later, any reluctance to accept Lee's work, especially in the U.S., is turning. "It's really in recent years that people have been able to appreciate his vision." (Sullivan)

There are abundant references made to Zen and paradox in contemporary art criticism or writings. The references are ever-present. However, it is mostly referenced without explaining what it means. It appears to be something fashionable to mention or something that people would blindly accept without further inquiry or justification. It perhaps reflects Western interests or fascinations in the Eastern cultures and philosophy. The introduction of the Eastern ideas was relatively novel to the general public in the mid-twentieth century post-war time in the West. Some Western contemporary art in the mid-twentieth century were influenced by Eastern ideas. For example, John Cage – the prominent figure in post-war avant-garde and chance operations in music and art, is known

to have explored Eastern philosophy. Du Toit is an art and culture writer based in London and comments on minimalism in an article in 2016:

> At the heart of Light and Space is a tension between material construction and ethereal effects. It was inspired in the mid-1960s by the invention of newly available plastics and alloys used in the aerospace and the automobile industries, as well as a confluence of physics and Eastern philosophy. (86)

However, the Eastern philosophy seems to have been adopted in superficial ways without an attempt to understand it in depth. Only the vague concept that was fascinating and novel was exotified in the adaptation of the Eastern philosophy. Michael Duncan, at the beginning of his article about artist John McLaughlin says, “California painter John McLaughlin (1898-1976) remains an “artist’s artist,” a maverick geometric abstractionist whose unsettling, exploratory canvases thrive on a particularly Asian style of paradox” (85). The article was written a year after the retrospective exhibition “John McLaughlin: Western Modernism/Eastern Thought” that was held in Laguna Art Museum in California in 1996. The article explores the Japanese influences in McLaughlin’s life and art. McLaughlin lived in Japan as a Marine language officer after World War ll. Looking at Asian paintings made McLaughlin wonder who he was, while Western paintings were showing who the artists were. “McLaughlin frequently acknowledged his early interest in the large empty spaces in the 15th-century paintings by the Japanese artist Sesshu and his follower Sesson-what they called “the marvellous void”” (Duncan 86). The article explores McLaughlin’s residence in Japan and his interests in the marvellous void. However, it does not explore what it me’ans for his abstract and minimalist art to “thrive on a particularly Asian style of paradox..

Instead, it then talks about Zen, “a rock garden by Zen master Kyozan Joshu proved a perfect complement to McLaughlin’s paintings.”

5.3 Simon Morley's Problematic Readings of *Dansaekhwa*

Simon Morley has been an assistant professor in Fine Arts at Dangook University in Seoul, Korea since March 2012. He is an artist and art historian, who regularly holds exhibitions and publishes articles. He has Bachelor's of Fine Arts from the University of Oxford in 1980 and he completed his doctorate at the University of Southampton in 2012. He has published two papers on *Dansaekhwa* in 2013 and 2017 with Routledge. Morley also explored Eastern and Western landscapes and their different ways of seeing in his papers.

In Morley's 2013 article "*Dansaekhwa*: Korean Monochrome Painting," there are numerous arguments and terminologies used that are questionable due to their orientalist approach with default positioning of European or Western superiority over Asian subjects. The article begins with the introductory statement about *Dansaekhwa,* where Morley provides wrong information with degrading views about what he is about to discuss extensively.

> During the second half of the 1970s a monochromatic style of painting emerged in South Korea that is superficially very similar to the uncompromisingly reductive painting at the heart of the modernist revolution in the West. ("*Dansaekhwa*" 189)

Firstly, *Dansaekhwa* as a minimalist movement is considered to have emerged in the late 1960s, as was discussed earlier, and flourished in the 1970s. Secondly, *Dansaekhwa* has similar aesthetics to the Western minimalism. However, many distinctive characteristics differentiate them from each other. It claims that *Dansaekhwa* is "superficially very similar"

to that of the Western modernism, which was “revolutionary.” It suggests that *Dansaekhwa* is merely an unambitious imitation of revolutionary Western. Also, in the introduction, it says:

> *Dansaekhwa* in its heyday during the 1970s and ‘80s is exemplified by the work of such artists as the internationally better-known Korean-born but Japan and Paris-domiciled Lee Ufan. *Dansaekhwa* became a significant part of South Korea’s quest for a modern cultural identity in a period marked by slow economic development and repressive politics. (189)

There is a phrase widely known as Miracle of the Han River (한강의 기적) to refer to the rapid economic development in the 1970s and 1980s of South Korea. The phenomenon has attracted extensive scholarly attention and also studied by many other developing countries. South Korea was torn and impoverished after the Korean War in 1950-53. Park Cheong-Hee’s government in the 1970s is known for its brutal dictatorship, as well as achieving rapid economic development with state-aided industries exporting economically priced goods. South Korea could host the 1988 Olympics as part of the results. Morley referring to the 1970s and 1980s’ South Korean economic development as “slow” in his introduction is the beginning of numerous statements that are highly questionable about his knowledge on South Korea or East Asia in general.

Later in the same article, Morley says, the inability to travel freely overseas, Korean artists could only escape “embryonic Korean art scene” by encountering Western contemporary art via newspapers and magazines (194). As discussed earlier, Lee Ufan and

some of other *Dansaekhwa* artists travelled and studied overseas, when air travel was not as common globally. Morley's statement suggests that Western art influence was necessary for an "embryonic" Korean art scene to develop, but the "weak" Korean economy and inability to travel meant the artists could not be further enlightened by the Western art scene. His phrasing assumes that Western intervention was the only way for the "embryonic" Korean art scene to grow and develop. It entirely ignores the rich history of Korean art scenes that existed separately to Western art until the post-war period where the ideas were more freely shared between the East and the West. Korea has a long written history going back to BC period. His use of the term "embryonic Korean art scene" assumes that the rich Korean art history before the globalised post-war period does not exist. It is a profoundly ignorant and Eurocentric view with an inability to comprehend the possibility of civilisation that lived in Korea for a long time before it was discovered by the West. There are numerous statements that Morley makes that indicate a European colonialist gaze onto the inferior non-European subjects, much as Edward Said explores with Franco-British colonialist bureaucrat's ignorant statements about the colonised subjects in his book *Orientalism.*

Morley, in his article on *Dansaekhwa* as recent as 2013, uses the terms in highly problematic and orientalist manners. He used words such as "Oriental pre-history, inferior, indigenous, absence of an order" to describe Korea, East Asia and their art and culture. In contrast, he adopts terms such as "sophisticated and superior" to describe Western traits and culture. Morley uses the term "indegenous" to refer to Korean art and East Asian ideas on numerous occasions. Morley discusses *Dansaekhwa*:

> In an obvious sense, then, Korean monochrome painting appears to be one of the many symptoms globally, signalling the end of indigenous art and cultures characterized by harmonious evolution. . . *Dansaekhwa* seems to present itself visually as a site of rupture with its culture's past, and the emergence of this new stylistic tendency in the 1970s in South Korea. . . Korean artists encountered the liberating example of Western modernism and sought to break with their own heritage and to assimilate and emulate Western modernism's styles. ("*Dansaekhwa*" 192)

The term "indigenous" has the negative connotations attached to it in that the term is often used in colonialist contexts. Indigenous is commonly used to describe the indigenous or native people in the contexts of colonised countries, for example, indigenous people in America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to distinguish from the migrated British/European people as a result of colonisation. Indigenous people often refer to the people who lived in the land before the population from the mass migration with colonialism have dominated the population. The indigenous group of people are often discussed in derogatory terms with attached negative connotations such as primitive, uncultured, colonised, inferior, and under-developed. Also, indigenous people are often segregated from civilised society historically, even in the present time in different forms. One would not describe French culture or art of the past as indigenous. "Indigenous" is an inaccurate term to describe Korean people and culture, especially when Korea is not currently a colonised country and has a long written history of civilisation and kingdoms. It reflects how Morley sees himself as an enlightened Westerner to study the "indigenous" and "embryotic" Korean art and culture in the mindset like that of the colonialist. Morley - a

British scholar, coming to teach at a university in Korea somehow adopted the views and the tone of languages, that strikingly resemble that of a colonialist. The above excerpt by Morley argues that *Dansaekhwa* is the end of "indigenous" art and the rupture from its indigenous and inferior cultural past and is the art form that is enlightened and liberated by Western modernism.

However, in the same article, it also argues that *Dansaekhwa* is influenced by "Oriental pre-history" and "the prevalence of white or off-white tones in many of these works can be related to uniquely Korean responses to Taoist Buddhist and Neo-Confucian concepts" (Ibid 195). It is highly questionable how the off-white colour used in *Dansaekhwa,* is possibly influenced by the three religions quoted. *Dansaekhwa* was developed by close-knit artist groups who exchanged their artistic and philosophical ideas. The off-tone white hues could have become characteristic features of *Dansaekhwa* as a result of artists who worked closely together, shared their thoughts in discussions, and influenced each other. It is known in the literature discussed earlier, that they debated contemporary matters somewhat similar to the concerns that Western modernists had at the time. To say that the off-tone white colour is the responses to the combinations of three complex Eastern religions, may require more supporting explanations. Whether any religion, regardless of its origin (East or West), with a long history with varying branches of practices that are spread over vast regions, can be associated with a single colour in itself is profoundly questionable. Also, it reflects the lack of historical comprehension that Buddhism and Confucianism were at ideological war to oppress each other throughout Korean history. The statement that Korean abstract art form with off-tone white hue is the responses to Buddhism and also Neo-Confucianism simultaneously is incomprehensible.

Every new art form is influenced by its predecessor or their art scenes surrounding them. *Dansaekhwa* was also influenced by the global trends of the avant-garde and contemporary art scenes, as well as Korean-specific socio-political landscapes and art scenes. Given that *Dansaekhwa* blossomed in the 1970s and its abstract and minimalist qualities share aesthetic similarities to that of the Western abstract and minimalist paintings and sculptures of the 1960s, Morley's following argument about belatedness is not entirely unfounded. "A situation of cultural belatedness and inferiority seems inevitable, as Korean artists struggled hopelessly to move forward shoulder-to-shoulder with Western culture in an effort productively to assimilate foreign traits" (Ibid 190). However, describing *Dansaekhwa* movement as "inevitably inferior" and "struggled hopelessly to assimilate foreign traits," assumes Western aesthetics are superior to what *Dansaekhwa* artists have achieved. Minimalist styles of art emerged from different parts of the globe in the 1960-70s, influencing each other with their regional-specific characteristics. It also dismisses how different the *Dansaekhwa* movement is to that of the Western minimalist movement. It reflects the unwillingness to study the aesthetics of *Dansaekhwa*. Morley conflicts his arguments by unfoundedly assuming that *Dansaekhwa* aesthetics were influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. At the same time, he says *Dansaekhwa* artists struggled hopelessly to assimilate the Western aesthetics. One statement invalidates the other. It is problematic to comprehend how Taoism, Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, three complex traditions of thoughts have possibly influenced the abstract and minimalist forms of art, *Dansaekhwa*, that hopelessly struggled to achieve Western aesthetics.

Dansaekhwa certainly has some characteristics that are not found in Western minimalism movement, as discussed earlier. As Morley mentioned *Dansaekhwa*'s frequent uses of the off-tone white colour is one of the unique features, as well as its tactilities explored with Korean traditional mulberry papers as the choice of materials, instead of conventional Western canvas and oil paints. Also, *Dansaekhwa* paintings mostly involve a high level of repetitions in exploring tactilities of materials as well as laborious repetitions with countless irregular dots, and shapes. However, the end product is monochrome tone at a glance.

It is highly contrasting to that of Western monochrome paintings, such as Rothko's colour-field paintings or Stella's Black Paintings. Morley's choice of the terminology such as "cultural belatedness, inferiority, struggled hopelessly to assimilate" suggest that Morley assumes that Western is everything opposite, therefore, superior and advanced. It can be seen as a belated minimalist style of movement that emerged in Korea much like Western minimalism emerged half a decade earlier in the 1960s. However, given the differences in *Dansaekhwa* to Western minimalist movements, stating *Dansaekhwa* is "inevitable inferiority" compared to "Western culture" is within Morley's subjective and orientalist views. The claim was supported by no further explanations on why it was inferior, instead only suggesting it was due to, in his words, "belatedness." There was also the socio-political background that was specific to South Korea under the oppressive dictatorship. It could have prepared the socio-political climate for minimalistic style art to flourish and be fostered. It cannot merely be read as "belatedness" when the minimalistic style of art emerged in a completely different socio-political context in Korea and the United States. Also, they have distinctive aesthetic qualities, tactilities, and methods. *Dansaekhwa* could

be seen as localised aesthetics and art movement that was influenced by their contemporaries and the global art movements at the time.

Morley talks about Lee Ufan's residence in Japan and describes Western-influenced Japanese modern art scene as sophisticated, and East Asian ideas as indigenous:

> Lee's domicile there (Japan) gave him access to a more sophisticated modern artistic scene, one that had been open to Western influences for much longer than Korea. Hence, under the banner of *Mono-ha*, Lee adopted anti-art traits from Art concret and Neo-Dada, fusing them with indigenous East Asian ideas (194).

Firstly, Japan is part of East Asia, and Lee Ufan is considered as one of the founding members of the *Mono-ha* movement that was developed in Japan. It is partly agreeable that Lee Ufan's philosophy studies at Nihon University involved Western philosophy, and *Mono-ha*'s philosophical engagement was influenced by Western philosophy. It is also evident in Lee Ufan's pivotal essay "From Object to Being"[14] on *Mono-ha* and Sekine Nobuo's works. Lee Ufan references Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" in discussion of site-specificity of artworks. However, Western art and philosophy at the time were also influenced by Eastern thoughts reciprocally. In this light, describing the Japanese art scene that was influenced by "Western influences" that is "sophisticated" but to describe "East Asian ideas" as "indigenous" are contradictory. Morley places Western art as superior and sophisticated in the same way as the Franco-British colonialist with orientalist views towards the Oriental in Said's *Orientalism.*

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[14] The title of this essay is also translated as "Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo"

Morley has an interesting argument about some *Dansaekhwa* paintings' laborious processes of making. He argues that manual activities involved in *Dansaekhwa* are "closely connected to the pre-industrial world of agriculture" ("The Translucence" 19), and makes the connections to its earthy tones. He also suggests that these manual activities are similar to sowing rice. In essence, they are time-honoured processes. Korean art historian Yoon Jin-sup also makes comments on the laborious processes of making in a completely different perspective. Yoon called it an "Art of Mind" because the works reminded him of making Korean soup, where it takes long hours to boil it down to make the stock for soup base ("*Dansaekhwa*'s Emergence" 81). Both Morley and Yoon's analysis on the laborious processes of repetitions of some *Dansaekhwa* paintings are their subjective interpretations and not based on any evidence or artist's statements. Morley's approach is through his European gaze with being inherently dismissive of Korean culture by describing it as the outcome of the "pre-industrial world." Given that most of the *Dansaekhwa* artists were elite men from affluent families, they were not likely to have been inspired by sowing rice or making soup. As discussed earlier, *Dansaekhwa* artists engaged with the global art movements and theories with their localised concerns, aesthetics and use of materials. Lee Ufan philosophically engaged with *From Point, From Line* series from the 1970s. He said "repetition evokes infinity" for him. Lee Ufan intensely drew points and lines repetitively until he gradually became ill after a decade of painting the series (Rowlings).

Dansaekhwa is a localised adoption of what was trending in global art scenes. Morley says *Dansaekhwa* is "a cultural phenomenon located outside but not in isolation from the European tradition" ("The Translucence" 3). In a more connected world, it became

possible to share different thoughts and aesthetic styles. East and West are more in conversation and influenced by each other reciprocally. Although Morley has referenced Eastern religions and culture in arbitrary and derogatory ways, his conclusions to the "*Dansaekhwa*" articles is more agreeable. Morley concludes that *Dansaekhwa* is a form of the hybridity of cultures where different cultures meet, merge and overlap ("*Dansaekhwa*", 207).

Morley's articles are not an opinion piece online or a newspaper article, but are published in an acclaimed academic journal Routledge. Morley's articles presented some historical facts that were blatantly wrong about Korea and were similar in tone and phrasing to past colonialist tone of voice in describing Korea and East Asia with derogatory choices of words. And they were published in peer-reviewed academic journal Routledge in 2013 and 2017. It only reflects the lack of comprehension of the West towards the East. It suggests the interests in the East as the subjects of European gaze. However, it disdainfully classified the East as indigenous and inferior as starting points of discussion. Morley's articles inadvertently treat the East as a subject that does not have a long written history of civilisation or not worthy of attention, that is, before the Western discovered the East. Morley's article exhibits an unwillingness to understand the East but willing to look at oriental subjects with a colonialist Eurocentric gaze. Morley's approach to *Dansaekhwa* has some parallel resemblances with the Franco-British Colonialist Cromer and Balfour's comments towards the East as quoted by Said. Also, Morley's gaze towards Korean art aligns with Spivak's postcolonial analysis of the subaltern theory, where "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (28). Therefore Morley came up with his own analysis to represent the Other. In this case, he interpreted contemporary Korean artworks and socio-

political history based on mere assumptions and entirely omitted the *Dansaekhwa* artists' voices.

CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that reading Asian contemporary art through the lens of Zen orientalises the Orient. I look at the European gaze onto Asian contemporary art, in particular of *Dansaekhwa* and its representative artist Lee Ufan. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985) were the two influential postcolonial texts for the conclusion of this thesis. Zen references made when reading Asian artist's contemporary artworks can be abundantly found. Eastern Zen Buddhism appeared for some communities in the 1960s as a possible alternative to Western Christianity. Zen has attracted the interest of the West in the post-war period, when cultures and knowledge were more freely shared across the borders. Zen Buddhist monk can meditate their entire life without reaching the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Then, is it possible that any art can really express the concepts of Zen Buddhism, Tao, Confucianism or all together like it has been repeatedly claimed? Many Western art writers claimed that Asian contemporary artworks are the outcomes of these Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, despite Asian artists repeatedly making clear that they do not understand them very well. The artists' statements indicate that they were inspired by something entirely irrelevant to Zen and other Eastern religions. Yet their subaltern Eastern voices are entirely dismissed and, instead, misrepresented by Western art critics.

This thesis identified three types of reading Asian contemporary art through the lens of Zen. The first type is Western art critics misunderstanding the Asian artist's contemporary artworks through the lens of Zen, purely based on the artist's Asian heritage, without any attempts to investigate artist's statements or artworks. This type of Zen reading of Asian art

is favourably received without any critical inquiries. Both the perception and reception are naïve. This leads to the second type, where the Zen reading of Asian contemporary art is re-adopted and continuously being readopted by many. Thirdly, Zen reading is also adopted by Asian art critics in response to the Western's favourable perception of Zen as Eastern philosophy. It is with the intention to differentiate the Asian artist's works from that of the Western artist's in the similar ways that Japanese intentionally promoted Zen as the superior Eastern philosophy and ways of living.

The first chapter discussed the socio-political background of *Dansaekhwa*'s emergence in the 1960s and its resurgence in the 2010s. The discussion of the socio-political background is often omitted in interpretations of *Dansaekhwa*. In contrast, studies of Western Minimalism commonly seek to understand the political backdrop of its artists and their works. *Dansaekhwa* gained popularity in the 1960s and the 2010s under governments that systematically suppressed freedom of speech with state-controlled blacklists. It may not just be a coincidence that *Dansaekhwa* emerged and resurged during times when such civic freedoms were heavily censored by the state. *Dansaekhwa* was partly by-products of the suppressive governments that systematically censored freedom of expression in the 1970s and 2010s. *Dansaekhwa*'s minimalist aesthetics perhaps gave artists and galleries some measure of protection from censorship and the consequences of speaking out. This chapter provides the discourse concerning socio-political history that has not been discussed. Understanding socio-political backdrops of the time of *Dansaekhwa* is somehow not deemed to be important unlike readings of any other Western contemporary art movements. This chapter provides the investigations into socio-political backdrops of *Dansaekhwa*.

The second chapter investigated *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks by analysing the artist statements of Lee Ufan and Park Seo-bo. Asian artists' voices are entirely omitted in Western readings of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's art as well as other artworks made by artists of Asian descent. The assumptions made by Western art writers that Asian art is influenced and or inspired by Zen, have become the default popular conclusion to read Asian contemporary artworks. Park Seo-bo and Lee Ufan never mention a positive influence from any Eastern religions. Indeed, Park Seo-bo and Lee Ufan were aware of widespread contemporary art movements during the 1960s and 1970s because they travelled overseas as well as were exposed to such through the availability of art magazines. *Dansaekhwa* artists including Lee and Park Seo-bo were participating in contemporary discourses by not making and not drawing to protest against the mass-production that led to endless capitalist consumptions. Also, they were exploring the aesthetics of abstract and minimalist qualities with subdued colours and tactilities of Korean mulberry papers. Also, Lee Ufan was interested in phenomenology and site-specificity of sculptures. These qualities can be compared to other contemporary art movements of the time, such as Minimalism, Arte Povera, Dadaism, Earth Art. The association of Zen with rock gardens traces back to an unfounded statement made by German architect. This type of appreciation of Eastern aesthetics was re-adopted by many without any critical inquiry. This misconceived Zen reading has become the norm in reading Asian aesthetics. Appreciating Lee Ufan's boulder installation as beautiful Zen only reflects an unwillingness to understand Eastern artists' works and their voices even though they are readily available. Lee Ufan clearly stated it is a misunderstanding to associate his work with Zen.

The third chapter investigated the Western minimalist movement, because this thesis understands the *Dansaekhwa* movement and Lee Ufan's works as localised aesthetics of the wider global art movement Minimalism. Comparing Western Minimalism and *Dansaekhwa* highlights how artists' voices were the main sources of investigation for Western Minimalism, whereas interpretations of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's works by Western art scholars and writers demonstrate a noticeable absence of artists' voices. Many similarities can be found between *Dansaekhwa*, Lee Ufan's works and the broader Minimalist movement. The act of not making and exploring phenomenological experiences of time and space were two main features that pertain to both. Nevertheless, the use of Korean traditional mulberry papers, repetition of shapes, lines, dots, the use of subdued colours added a different aesthetic outcome that point to a localised Minimalism in Korea. These features of *Dansaekhwa* show that the works by this elite artist circle contributed to the global art movement yet retained a style and tone shaped by the specific socio-political context of South Korea.

The fourth chapter explored a few pivotal postcolonial theories about the European gaze onto the Other. It also looked at how Zen was sold to the West as a superior Eastern thought by Japanese art scholars as a political strategy. Zen was received favourably and became popular in the West. Then, the fifth chapter examined contemporary Asian artworks to show how they have been seen through the lens of Zen. The Asian artists' voices were completely silenced even when they were fully available. It led to a misunderstanding of Asian artworks as Zen and Eastern thought inspired. However, all of the case studies in chapter five indicate that those artists engaged with contemporary thought and issues

irrelevant to Zen or Eastern religions despite what many Western art writers have claimed. This discrepancy shows that Asian artists' voices are often silenced and overshadowed by Western art writers' voices when seeking to understand contemporary Asian artworks. Thus, contemporary Asian art is frequently orientalised and exotified by applying a Zen interpretation based seemingly on the artists' Asian heritage. Furthermore, their subaltern voices are entirely silenced in the process, despite their availabilities. The last section of chapter five looked at the art scholar Simon Morley's problematic reading of *Dansaekhwa* in his journal articles in the 2010s. Morley described Korean art as indigenous, inferior, directionless, and Western art as everything opposite. His views can be seen as a continuation of those colonial-age writings that perpetuated racial hierarchies, investigated in Said's *Orientalism.* Morley also boldly claimed and reinforced the misconception that *Dansaekhwa* is the outcome of all three Eastern religions—Zen, Confucianism and Taoism—without providing any supporting evidence.

This thesis provided highly needed discourses to discuss problematic Zen readings of Asian contemporary art, in particular of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's oeuvre. Most Asian contemporary art is often baselessly deemed to have been inspired by Eastern religion and philosophy Zen. This default lens of Zen readings on Asian contemporary art have not been challenged or discussed in Art History field and this thesis provides much needed thorough discussions on highly misconceived Zen readings based on orientalist assumptions on Asian contemporary art. This thesis also provides the needed discourses on investigations of socio-political backgrounds in the developments of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks. It also provides much needed spaces for the Asian artists' voices that are repeatedly omitted, despite their ever-presence, when comprehending their works. The analysis with the

acknowledgement of *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's artworks as part of the wider global contemporary art movements, strengthened the arguments that *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's oeuvres were clearly stimulated by contemporary philosophy and art movement, instead of Zen and other Eastern thoughts, as it is widely claimed by Western art critics.

This thesis challenged the widespread misunderstanding of Asian contemporary art based on orientalist assumptions without much critical inquiries sought. The Zen understanding of Asian contemporary art has been consumed and re-adopted in naivety. It is the outcomes of the subaltern who are, with unconscious biases, deemed unable to speak for themselves but need to be represented, or just silenced and not heard. European gaze onto the Asian contemporary art through the default lens of Zen based on stereotypical assumptions on the East, only further orientalises the Orient.

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