

KOREAN RICE CULTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL GENRE PAINTING

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I. Introduction

When we talk about Korean history, we can't help but mention the agricultural civilization primarily being that of rice farming. The rice culture in Korea has developed its own technique, different from that of China or Japan. In relation to the history of East Asia, it is not too much to say that what they understand about Korea depends on how well they understand the history and development of rice agriculture.

Although Korea has a 4,000 year history of rice farming, rice did not occupy a high percentage of farmland in the premodern age. By 1919 there was only 36% of gross farmland under rice cultivation, but it was the single most widely raised crop. Due to this fact, rice almost replaced currency. Rice was regarded as a sacred offering as well as the food of high society. Furthermore, rice, with a gradual expansion of farming area since the Choson Dynasty, has remained the most important product of Korean agriculture. The development of rice culture subsequently encouraged rapid population growth, which greatly influenced economic and social development.

In this paper, we will explore how rice farming developed and how its cultural manifestations added a peculiar but rich dimension to the national culture in Korea through the modern period. Our aim is to show that rice culture was an integral part of Korean culture and history in the premodern period and arguably still remains so. By examining rice-farming technology on the one hand, and painting of

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rice farming on the other, and analyzing their link, we may effectively reveal the importance of rice farming in Korean culture and history.

Painting was not only one of the major cultural domains which left relatively strong traces, but also vividly reflected various features of rice farming, the major economic activity in the premodern era, in Korea. Rice farming as an object appeared in painting as early as the late Koryo Dynasty and became the main theme of agricultural genre painting, which blossomed in the late Choson Dynasty.

II. Historical Development of Korean Rice Culture and Agricultural Civilization

1. Origin of Rice Culture and Early Agricultural Civilization

A. Origin of Korean Rice Culture

Recently the study of agricultural history in Korea has greatly developed. Specifically the study on "the spread of transplantaion methods" in the late Choson Dynasty(1592~1910) was an important epoch-making event that has expedited this change. Because farming was the nucleus of culture and industry in the premodern age, the study of agricultural history has recorded various achievements affecting socio-economic growth, such as advanced farming techniques, further population increase, and social changes. But since the eighteenth century, Korea has been going through a period of transition to the modern age. This has little known in the rest of the world. Duning the Japanese colonial period(1910~1945), Japanese historians told the world that all Korean rice development took place during the Japanese colonial period. But this is not ture.

In fact the development of rice cultivation has a long history in Korea. Remains of rice dating back to 2000 B.C have been excavated in Kimpo, had more recently in the Ilsan area near Seoul, and those dating back to 1000 B.C. in the Namkyung area around Pyongyang. All this shows us that rice in Korean has a 4,000-year-long history that began at the time of Old Choson(the prehistoric period of Tankun, Kija, and Wiman Choson). We also know for a fact that rice

came into Korea from the north, based on the older rice excavated in the northwest coastal region, and knowing that they were a 'Japonica type' rice seed, we can confirm that Korea handed down the rice culture to the south and further on to Japan.

The chronicle 'Samkukji wiji Byunjin Jeun'(a chronicle on the frontiers during the period of the three States of old China) states that "people raised the five grains (五穀) and rice". Another passage from the book Samkuksaki(『三國史記』), a history book on the period of the old Three Korean Kingdoms) also says "people started clearing paddy fields in the south swamp area". In the fourth century A.D. many large-scale reservoirs were constructed in the west coast area, and at the turn of the sixth century A.D. in the east coast area many large irrigation facilities were built. It is assumed that rice cultivation was done mainly around swampy areas using a primitive direct seeding method in the paddy fields. In a few special cases the dry tilling method, another type of dry-field farming, was used with the fallow system.

Studying the record of 'Shilla Jangjeuk'(a document on census registration) which refers to the rice culture method of the four villages near Chongju city during the unified Shilla Kingdom era, we see that 45.5% of all farmland was paddy fields. For more detailed documentation, there is another record from the 'Kesunsa Sokdungki (開仙石燈記)' (a record on the outdoor stone lantern of Kesun temple) in Damyang county, Chonnam Province. The record, written in 891, states that a monk bought three pieces of land with 100 rice bags from two people and donated that land to a Buddhist altar. From this document, we see that rice culture was the one-year fallow system, and with several kinds of rice seeds and the expansion of new facilities, we can also see the growth, of the rice culture method in that period. In addition 'Maehyang monument (1309)' at Samil-po, Kosung, a ruin of the Koryo Dynasty, shows most paddy-field farming was still based on the fallow system. In a poem of that time, 'Sunmyungdo', a kind of 'early rice', an early ripening rice variety, was introduced. 'Sunmyungdo' means they could harvest the rice at about the time cicadas begin to chirp.

'Early rice' like this, together with a paddy-field system, was the center of the rice culture, but this shows us that the fallow system was unavoidable due to the problem of weeding and preserving soil fertility. Even though it seems to show us that rice culture had become

fairly well developed, the relative importance of rice culture was considered lower than that of dry-field farming. But since the late period of the Koryo Dynasty, this type of primitive rice farming method was being developed into the consecutive planting method. And finally the records of the late Koryo Dynasty indicate that rice culture was considered more serious than dry-field farming. It also shows that a settled direct sowing and consecutive planting method was in practice and a labor-saving transplantation method was being tested.

B. Agricultural Civilization during the Bronze Age and the Three Kingdoms Period

Agriculture has a long tradition in Korean history. We have found farming pictures inscribed on bronze plates. The pictures show early agricultural customs. The obverse side of a bronze plate, used in religious services, shows a brace of birds facing each other on a Y-shaped tree. This is regarded by some as showing the 'Sot-De(숫대),' a wooden pole for shamanistic ritual. On the reverse side of the plate side and to the right of the plate are two men plowing a dry field with a weeder and another men hoeing the ground. At the left is a woman putting grains into a net-covered vessel. The compressed sketches in two separated spaces on the back of the bronze symbolize the course ranging from spring plowing to autumn harvesting. Through this bronze, we can imagine the shamanistic aspect of wishing for richness and productivity, as well as the farming life of the Bronze Age.

Agricultural civilization during the Three Kingdoms era may have been more plentiful. First, as to the Koguryo Dynasty, we can understand one facet of farming life through the wall paintings of 50 ancient tombs. To the north side of the east room in the Anak third tomb (around 357 A.D.) is a drawing of a mill. This painting, which shows a stone-headed hammer raised from a treading post, accurately depicts the person's actions and facial expression. On the east wall of an old tomb's passageway in Dukhung-ri is a painting of oxen and horses. This painting indicates that, in addition to farming, the ox was used as a means of transportation. The painting depicts a delicately described ox-cart of the era with a man of high social status. Two persons shown leading oxen in this mural signify the system of

differentiated social classes of the time. On the top of the south wall of the front room in the same tomb is the legendary painting of the Altair and the Vega. The figure of the Vega pulling an ox is also good proof that oxen were used for farming.

Major aspects of farming life in the Shilla Kingdom can be seen from clay figurines that show, for example, 'a statue of a man carrying a hoe on his shoulder,' or 'a man carrying an A-frame (지게)', in which the hoe and a pot carried on the shoulder are magnified to a large scale, although detailed descriptions are consistently absent. All these provide a glimpse of agrarian culture during that period. These materials are not directly connected with rice culture, but nevertheless reflect the progress of agrarian culture.

2. The Method of Rice Culture and Agrarian Culture Since the Late Koryo Dynasty

A. The Rice Culture and Its Character Since the Late Koryo Dynasty

The method of direct rice sowing and consecutive planting commonly known to the public since the Late Koryo Dynasty established itself as a well-developed practice as shown in an agricultural manual "Nongsa Chiksol (『農事直說』, 1429)" written during the reign of King Sejong of the Choson Dynasty. Rice seedings of that period were of wet-field types, such as early rice, which is an early ripening rice; late rice, which is a late ripening rice; and, dry rice, (upland rice) which is a dry-field rice of the present time. According to another agricultural manual 'Kumyang Chamnok (『衿陽雜錄』, 1492), there were twenty-seven varieties of rice: seven types of early rice, seventeen of late rice, and three of dry rice. As shown in the Nongsa Chiksol, rice cultivation methods of that period included water culture (sowing directly in a paddy field) and dry culture (sowing directly in a dry rice field). Also in practice was the transplantation method.

It is important to have found evidence of the practice both of water and dry culture in Korea only, which is the unique rice cultivation method in the world. The dry culture method was labor-intensive and therefore was not practiced due to the shortage of labor at that time. After all, water culture was the method of rice cultivation generally used. Looking into the method of water culture, the farmer

hand-sowed the sprouted rice seeds in a paddy field. Early rice, the early ripening rice, was sown in an irrigated and fertile paddy field. Late rice, was sown in a sterile and poorly irrigated paddy field. Especially in the case of late rice, intensive fertilizing and improving of the soil by bring it from another place were used.

When the wet-field method was ruled out by a long drought during the sowing season, the dry-field method was used instead. For the dry-field culture, like crops in a field, they first made ridges in a dry field, and then sowed late-ripening rice mixed with powdered fertilizer. In this case, rice was raised just like field crops until the rainy season that turned dry fields into paddy fields. At that time, the rice transplantation method was used to some extent in Kyungsang and Kangwon Provinces. This method was used mostly by large farm owners for convenience in weeding and seed savings. This method was used only under special soil conditions. As for the rice-transplanting method, they first prepared a rice seed plot, abot one tenth of a paddy field, than scattered seed. When the young rice plants had grown to about 9 centimeters high, farmers transplanted each pack, made up of four or five young seedlings, into a paddy field.

In this way, rice farming, based on Korea's unique pactice of direct sowing and consecutive cultivation, had its special feature utilizing labor-saving land use, different from that of Late Choson. Fertilizing and weeding methods were also at a primitive state, simply stressing expansion of the cultivation boundary through land clearing. Around 1432, paddy fields accounted for only 20 percent of all agricultural land. But in some southern areas(Kyungsang, Cholla, and Chungchong Provinces), paddy fields took up more than 50percent of the land. Although there were some variations, rice, followed by millet and soybeen(278 counties), was widely cultivated. Because rice was used for tax payment, and as the principal food of high society and offerings for religious services, the government controlled rice culture with special attention.

B. Agricultural Civilization Depicted on Buddhist Paintings of the Late Koryo and Early Choson Dynasties.

There are several Buddhist painting that depict parts of the Late Koryo Dynasty's farming customs. A good example is Miruk Haseng

Byunsang-do(彌勒下生變相圖) drawn by Maejun (梅田) in 1350. The scenes of spring and autumn plowing shown at the bottom of that painting clearly depict the image of farming life of that time. Two farmers plowing with two oxen without connecting the two oxen with a yoke has special significance. This scene, describing the worldly troubles of life, if regarded as a scene of spring plowing, displaying farming life of those days. The scene of one or two oxen plowing from left to right is inherited as a typical plowing scene of agricultural genre paintings in the Choson Dynasty.

Looking at the scene of autumn plowing on the right side, we can see several scenes: harvesting rice at the bottom, threshing with a flail(도리깨) at the top, and sweeping the removed rice into a vessel. A person inside a nearby cave serenely watches this scene. These two scenes realistically depict the abundance of spring and autumn farming as well as the supervising class. At the bottom, Jijang Sipwang-do(地臟十王圖) of the third king of the Sung Dynasty(第三宋帝大王) of Okchun temple, in a Buddhist painting of the Choson Dynasty, is a very descriptive plowing scene. This is the scene of "Hyungsul Jiok(刑舌地獄)", the hell of plowing on a tongue" which signifies taking out the tongue of a criminal who committed a crime by words and plowing on it. There is also a scene of 'the hell of plowing on a tongue' in another Jijang Sipwang-do(地臟十王圖), an art work of the early Choson Dynasty, and the ox and plow there contain Korean features. In this way, farm work such as plowing and rice harvesting are shown on the Buddhist paintings in the late Koryo and early Choson Dynasties.

III. Rice Culture and Development of Farming Genre Painting in Late Choson Dynasty

1. The Development of Rice Culture and Social Changes in the Late Choson Dynasty

Rice culture in the early Choson Dynasty, as mentioned previously, had a fairly advanced technical system according to the Nongsa Chiksol(『農事直說』). But due to the long and severe spring drought and heavy rainfalls from July to September, and geographical

conditions (70 percent of the territory being mountainous throughout the whole country), rice culture was still uncertain. By the 17th century, the transplantation method, which was used in limited areas, had rapidly expanded through technical innovations.

With this change, rice culture expanded widely, and the planting system involving paddy fields also changed immensely. The direct sowing and dry-field culture methods also changed, and agricultural genre paintings of that time reflect those changes.

A. Technical Innovation of Transplantation Method in the Late Choson Dynasty

The transplantation method, which was technically inferior to the direct sowing method used in the early Choson period, had been changing in the early 17th century since the Imjin Waeran (壬辰倭亂), the Japanese invasion of 1592-1599. One agricultural manual of the early 17th century, Hanjungrok (『閑情錄』), shows a record of transplantation method only, but another agricultural manual written in 1655, 'Nongka Jipsung (『農家集成』)', describes many new techniques in the transplantation method. In this way the transplantation method was handed down to three provincial areas (Kyungsang, Cholla, and Chungchong) in the early 17th century and was then expanded throughout the nation in the late 17th century. But the apparent expansion did not coincide with the fact that the transplantation method was also the most popularly exercised in rural areas.

The 17th century's transplantation method was at a low level due to the rice seed-bed fertilizing technique, which was a special farming method devised to improve labor productivity in well-irrigated paddy fields. Cultivating widespread land impoverished by the Japanese invasion, acutely required a more labor-saving technology. The transplantation method was introduced due to its labor-saving advantages, especially regarding weeding. This method was particularly introduced by the landlord class which had been clearing land on a large-scale since the war.

Rice-farming technology was remarkably innovated during the 18th century. In the early 18th century, the transplanting method spread to paddies that depended solely on rainfall for water. In the late

18th century, this was expedited within each area with the improved land productivity to labor productivity. Now in a paddy field where rice was transplanted, weeding was done three or four times per crop, almost equivalent to that of the direct sowing method. At the beginning of this period, previous farming policy which prohibited the transplanting method was greatly disregarded. Many counter-plans to overcome the serious uncertainty of production had been developed. The 'Dapjung Jongmo (답중종모)' method, planting barley after harvesting rice and the 'Keun-ang(견양)' method, preparing a dry seed-bed for rice extracted from the dry-field cultivation method, were typical techniques. There were policies encouraging early cultivation and recommending seeds strong enough to survive a disaster.

Now, let's look at the period of the early 19th century. The transplanting method took up 70-80 percent of nationwide rice cultivation and was more widespread than ever before. Suh Yoo-Ku (서유구), a famous agriculturalist at that time, stated that the trend of eating boiled rice became more popular than ever before. A new practice, Bun-dap(번답, converting dry field into paddy field), introduced to avert disaster, had difficulty in expanding irrigation facilities, and so they could not solve the problem of uncertainty of production due to the lack of modern engineering skills.

As you can see, the transplantation method in the Late Choson period had several different characteristics. In the 17th century, it was promoted primarily by the new rising landlord class due to the wide development of land and the lack of a labor force. After the mid-18th century, transplantation farming methods evolved remarkably, contributing to small-farmers' economic stabilization with improved land-productivity.

In the meantime, the traditional direct sowing and dry culture methods used greatly improved. The direct sowing method, with the advent of new techniques, was used only in certain areas such as valleys, where weeding was relatively easy. The dry-field culture, a special technique to cope with drought with the appropriate rice seed, was centered in the middle and northwestern areas of the Korean peninsula. Along with special farming tools, devised to reduce labor needs, livestock power was used for farming. Together with the development of the transplanting method, the direct sowing method,

with its special techniques, was used for dry-field farming.

B. Social Changes along with the Expansion of Transplantation Method

In the late Choson era, various social changes ensued from the extensive use of the transplantation method. Farmers engaged in large-scale farming in order to accumulate wealth through the transplantation method. Due to this, the dissolution of the farming class was widely expanded. As the rate of dependence on rice culture increased, the uncertainty of productivity due to periodical natural disasters caused severe famine and disaster every three or four years, and furthermore, brought about one million deaths in 1809.

In spite of its limited land area, this method of rice farming brought about a rapid population increase (more than 3 percent per year during the 17th and 18th centuries). With nearly double the population of the early Choson, the population density of agricultural land in 1825 was 3.68 persons per hectare compared to 2.19 persons in 1550.

In the three southern areas (Kyungsang, Cholla, and Chungchong Provinces), population density reached almost 4.68 persons per hectare. Eventually, the population increase produced intensive small farmers utilizing limited farmland to the maximum extent with a great number of farm laborers. This type of a new rice culture, as opposed to field crops, greatly improved land productivity by increasing the labor density. The development of rice culture, along with that of the market economy, improved the lives of small farmers, and effected the collapse of the traditional class system, strengthening a landlord system. This also meant the growth of farmers' social consciousness as a basis for a typical farming culture.

2. The Development of Farming Genre Paintings in the Late Choson Dynasty

The pictures of farming customs developed as a part of genre painting. This focused primarily on the age-old farming life epitomized by rice culture. It was not by accident that agricultural genre pictures appeared extensively in the late Choson Dynasty.

They reflected the growth of farming, especially centering around rice culture of the late Choson era, and were a historical change in art with the advent of 'real scenery landscape painting(진경산수)', and 'genre painting'. Thus, agricultural genre painting was a way of grand self-expression for mature farmers in positions of improved farming productivity. The scholar's images of an easy and graceful scene set in a peaceful landscape were not realistic, but the common people related easily to the genre artwork. The growth of people's awareness brought about the development of these agricultural genre paintings, as well as popular culture, such as folklore(민화), devil posts(장승), and dance masks(탈춤). This popular culture directly connected with a trend toward realism.

A. The Influence of Chinese Farming and Weaving Paintings

During the Choson Dynasty, the Chinese farming and weaving paintings(경직도) were introduced and used as material to inform a king whose easy-going court life kept him unaware of the common people's difficult farming circumstances. During the reign of King Sejong(1396-1450) in the early Choson Dynasty, 'Binpungmuil-do' describing customs of Chinese farming society was painted by Byun Kei-ryang(변계량, 1369-1436). And in 1489, the 'farming and weaving painting' drawn by Noosuk of the Sung Dynasty was introduced.

In the late Choson Dynasty, at the end of the 17th century (around 1696), a 'farming and weaving painting' by Pae Mun-jae was published in China. This type of Chinese farming and weaving painting influenced the advent of farming genre paintings in the late Choson Dynasty. The 'Sake-do(사계도)' depicting four seasons on a folding screen by Kim Du-ryang(김두량) in 1774, is a model influenced by Pae Mun-jae's farming and weaving painting. The 'Sake-do' elaborately depicts country life with the four seasons' popular customs in the background. The scene of threshing in the autumn is very similar to the 17th and 20th scenes of Pae Mun-jae's farming and weaving painting. The painting shows a landowner, a typical Korean harvesting scene, in contrast to the Chinese paintings where there are no such landlords. This painting depicts a ricefield at two different stages, before and after harvesting the rice. The scene of

fowl pecking at rice grains accurately portrays a country atmosphere. It shows that although the form of painting was borrowed from the Chinese, the substance was completely Koreanized.

'Mokdong Osu(牧童午睡)', another work of Kim Du-ryang, simply shows an extremely peaceful and leisurely country image of herdsman resting on a hill, allowing the cattle to roam freely. This indicates that Chinese farming and weaving paintings had become inherent in Korean culture. Anonymous works also show Chinese influences. One such picture shows a peasant wearing a horse-hair hat with a long band. Another scene depicts threshing in an uncommon rice-plant bed(稻床). But breaking away from the Chinese influence, agricultural genre paintings gradually evolved and developed into a class of their own.

B. Fomentation of the Late Choson Genre Paintings

In works of the Yun Du-suh(윤두서) family, around 1700, we can see the seeds of agricultural genre paintings. The images of farmers at work can be seen in the works of Yun Du-suh: 'gathering greens(나물 캐기)', 'making straw sandals(짚신삼기)', 'cultivating paddy and cattle-raising(耕畚牧牛圖)' and in the work of his son, Yun Yong(운용), 'gathering greens'. In the painting of cultivating field and cattle-raising, there are two trees crossing over each, and to the opposite side in the shade of a small tree, there is a herdsman enjoying his nap. In front of that person, who is resting his head on his elbow, there are two oxen leisurely feeding on grass.

In the middle of the picture, a peaceful country landscape, plowing by driving oxen, is depicted realistically. In 'gathering greens,' although it hints that a farmer's figure is climbing up on a high mountain to pick herbs, it looks rather like a person climbing down the mountain picking herbs with a weeding hoe. Besides these works, 'Sugongsicha-do(手工施車圖)' described the people who engaged in production activities and greatly affected the increase of agricultural genre paintings.

C. Development of Agricultural Genre Paintings

Full-scale development of agricultural genre paintings can be found in

the works by Kim Hong-do(김홍도) in the late 18th century. A journey genre picture, one of his early works, was drawn when he was 34 years old (1778). He was still fairly strongly influenced by the Chinese farming and weaving paintings. That journey genre picture, a sense of the real genre picture, on an eight-fold screen drawn by Kim Hong-do, reflects his travels to various parts of the country. Most scenes display authors or leaders. The threshing scene on the third screen forms a model of a harvesting scene thereafter. In a harvesting scene which depicts the striking of rice on the stump of a tree, a noble landlord is overseeing the work in full dress. In the meantime, a genre picture-album of Kim Hong-do of works drawn after his fortieth year, shows more refined brush strokes with distinct features.

Through his paintings of 'plowing', 'Gonu(고누) play', 'the scene of a light meal between regular meals', 'rice threshing', 'shoeing a horse', 'making a seat', and 'weaving', he vividly depicts the farmer's life. Especially 'rice threshing' is by far more dynamic than before. The figure of a nobleman is presented very comically, with a long pipe between his teeth, lying down on a mattress over the stacked ricesheaves, and observing a working scene, shows much humanity. From his relaxed, comfortable position with one foot resting on the other, he seems to enjoy the pleasure of harvesting to the fullest. In this working scene, the formation is fairly dynamic and displays various images. The still use tree stumps as instruments for threshing. People carrying rice on A-frame carriers (지게), sheaving rice, on preparing to strike rice with both hands raised are also shown. There are also some people shown sweeping up grains together with brooms.

We see at a glance that such pictures were drawn with great interest and affection for farming customs. From the 'scene of a light meal between regular meals', we also see the same character. Many agricultural genre pictures similar to those of Kim Hong-do are found. Anonymous works describing Korean living customs, such as 'welcoming the first full moon of the lunar new year', 'inn landscape', and 'farmhouse harvesting' are regarded as the result of rapidly increased demand for agricultural genre paintings.

D. Agricultural Genre Paintings in the 19th Century

The most important agricultural genre painting of the 19th century is the farming and weaving painting, a decorative painting, drawn on ten-fold screen by Yi Han-Chul (이한철, 1808-1880). There are scenes of the lunar festival on the 15th day of the first lunar month on the first screen, the weeding of a barley field on the second screen, plowing on the fourth screen, rice-planting while playing peasants music on the fifth screen, and threshing on the ninth screen. Besides this work, during this period, the painters were generally unknown because agricultural genre paintings, just like folk stories, had become a tradition in the farmers' lives. As a model of agricultural genre painting, we can cite traditional pictures drawn by Ki-san (기산, Kim Jun-kon). Ki-san's pictures, drawn mainly in the late 19th century, were so common that Korean language titles were given to them. In addition to these works, there were many anonymous agricultural genre paintings displaying various farm activities each with its own individual style.

IV. Conclusion: Korean Rice Culture and Characteristics of Agricultural Genre Painting

In Korea, rice culture has approximately a 4,000-year-long history. Farmland devoted to rice cultivation increased from 20% of total farmland in 1432 to 36 percent by 1919, and had affected the life and culture of Korea. The deep influence of rice culture is shown in the song, 'Nongka Wolryung-ka', (농가월령가, about a farmhouse's annual functions divided in to months), and 'Sesiki (세시가지)', a record on various seasonal events. It also had a great impact on the structure of Korean life and fundamental culture. Besides rice, a symbol of wealth and the nation's staple foodgrain, rice straw, a by-product of rice culture, was used as a basic material for making straw sandals, thatched roofs, and daily utensils.

The development of rice culture, prompted by the spread of the transplanting method in the late Choson Dynasty, generated new peasant culture such as agricultural genre paintings. Although agricultural genre paintings were initially influenced by Chinese

farming and weaving paintings, they soon developed their own style.

Korean-style farming customs were expressed in paintings depicting the pleasures of farming, the rest after working, and the abundance of the country. Agricultural genre painting naturally broadened its base owing to the growth of farmers' awareness along with the propagation of practical science and the development of rice culture. The most typical farm working scenes depicted on agricultural genre paintings are 'plowing', 'rice-planting', and 'harvesting'. These three scenes have close relations with rice culture.

Taking a look at the elements of the characters, there is an ox pulling a plow and tilling the ridge, and the furrowing of a field by a figure holding the plow. Occasionally, farmers are shown breaking the earth with a forked rake and tilling after an ox. Typically, farming and daily life were mixed with a landscape setting. Cooperative customs for farm work are naturally displayed in pictures of 'rice-planting', and 'harvesting'. But looking at a typical scene of harvesting, one can see a noble landowner, an owner's agent, and a farmer. The social status relationships between people of those days are naturally shown. The features of characters in early drawings symbolized a different class system to that of the relaxed feudal class system later. Farm life centering around rice culture firmly settled down and was substantially enriched by agricultural genre paintings, expressing the features of farmers who formed the majority of the population.

It is unusual in the long Korean history that the joys and sorrows of the peasant were expressed. The society of late Choson, the period of transition to the modern age, through agricultural development centered around rice farming, shows it had an 'open-structure' expressing the farmer's life in the form of art. Low hills touching the mood of the Korean landscape and the naive impression of agricultural genre paintings with widespread remote mountains in the background suggests that rice culture was deeply embedded in Korean life.

On the basis of our historical research, we would further argue that to Koreans, rice still represents more than just a commodity to be exchanged for currency. It continues to form a way of life in Korea. It has been an integral part of the national culture and will remain so for a long time to come.

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