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## abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of school symbols design during the Japanese colonialism period in order to figure up the current visual culture of Korea. Therefore, this study considered the process, which the school symbols have been learnt as a characteristic Korean symbols, and analyzed the origins and motifs of school symbols design from the perspective of formative art. In addition, this study examined how the origin of this visual format was connected to the formation of the Korean culture and society form including the current educational sites, local governments and companies design.

## keywords

Korean School symbol design, school emblem,  
Korean visual culture in colonial era.

## History and cultural transformation of Korean school symbol design

Focused on middle school founded in Japanese colonial era.



Figure 1 The symbols of public girls' school in colonial era (left) and the medal of the Japanese Women's Patriotic Association(愛國婦人會)(right).



Figure 2 The symbol of Busan public girls' school (left) and the medal of Japanese Navy League(海軍協會).



Figure 3 The symbols of Songdo private school and Jungdong private school. They used Mugunghwa(Korean National flower) motif in their symbols.



Figure 4 The various examples of Korean school symbols after the liberation(1945).

The purpose of this study is to observe the history of the symbolic representation of educational institution and how they were changed with time. School symbol represents educational philosophy of a school and distinguishes a school from another. More specifically, the symbols are the visual output of the attempting students' sense of identity and belonging. To explore the origin of school symbols, changes in the formal quality of school symbols in modern Joseon is reviewed. For that matter, this study analyzes on the Daehan Empire era where the traces of symbol designs could be found, as well as on the Japanese colonial era where the symbols were widely used. Furthermore, the study observes different cases of how these visual symbols were reproduced in the field of education as well as in the society after Korean liberation.

The School symbols in Korean society most likely came from or certainly based on the result of introducing national symbols which had been developed from Korean empire era, to the field of education. Creation of school symbol was natural in the context of national modernization. However, through becoming imperial subjects in the educational field of in the Japanese ruling period, school symbols functioned as a daily medium to utilize and control human resources efficiently. School clothes were changed to uniform style around March First Movement in 1919 and school symbols were more diversely used around Gwangju Student Independence Movement in 1929. The school symbols borrowed Japanese style design or design representing Japanese imperialism. This indicates that the school uniforms and symbols not only function as a set of attires but they also function as a tool to enforce Japanese idealism on the students, consequently controlling the colonial human resources.

As Japan rushed into wartime system after Sino-Japanese War in 1937, school symbols were revised towards strengthening Japanese intentions. Prior to this, colonial Joseon's visual system had been greatly influenced by Japan, yet in the case of educational symbols, it was prohibited to utilize any visual language that implicates Korean empire, and instead

by 1937, symbols were replaced to display various motives that represented Japanese emperor and Japanese imperialism. Public schools used motifs of Japanese style such as the cherry blossoms, pine trees, chrysanthemum, orchid, Japanese apricot flower and etc. It seemed that they aim to cultivate the discipline of colony and attitude of Japanese emperor's subjects suitable to the situation under the war system, and to make students being familiar with Japanese culture because, in this situation, Joseon and Japan should be the one perfectly.

On the other hand, nationalist educators and students found their own ways to fight back at the idea of Japanese Imperialism by adroitly reveling national or imperial symbols of Daehan empire that had existed before on the school emblems. Nationalist private schools used motifs of Mugunghwa flowers and its leaves for their emblems, or manipulated Mugunghwa to seem like paulownia- the Japanese culture based visual motif. It was intended to help students learn of the independence spirit so as that they could maintain ethnic identity, in spite of being surrounded by the heterogeneous culture and ideas flooding the education as manipulated by the Japanese imperialists.

Like this, school symbols were a thing with which governing group and governed group conflicted with each other under special background of colony - each party had its own meaning and form about school symbols. However, in a country without any distinctive visual system, school symbols may have had a significant meaning, yet its form have adopted Japanese traditional motives or motives that were used in the militarism. As school symbols are created and perceived a part of a students' life, these formal qualities became the prominent style of Korean's school symbols.

Consequently, the symbolic meaning in colony did not involve adequate exploration of the connection to the characteristics of ethnic culture and modern visual format, but established its form by adopting the form which was introduced from the outside.

Even after the liberation of Korea, Japanese style visual form could be observed throughout the symbols of schools, local government, and corporates. School symbol showed continuation of familiar design formality rather than disclosing educational philosophy of a school.

The visual culture from Japanese colonial era, in perspective of the ideal of school symbols, do not easily correlate to those that came after the Korean liberation by their definitions and visual layouts. Throughout this, it could be known what process and results are brought in to form a new culture by experiences of cultural and historical discontinuation. Furthermore, this study suggests that direction for constructing Korean subjective visual culture and concrete methods should be contemplated based on present historical ground.

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