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Two Stages in the Production Process of Late Joseon Portraits: Sketches and Reverse Coloring

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In museums, portraits come to us as completed works. Although the subjects of portraits were depicted at a specific time and place in the past, they are removed from that historical context and presented to us in isolation.

Introduction

This paper examines portraits from the late Joseon Dynasty (17th–19th century) within the context of their production process, rather than considering them only as completed works. Today, the extant portraits are typically viewed as finished products and displayed as “results,” but this conventional approach neglects many crucial aspects of the portraits. These works emerged from specific times and locations, and they were conceived and produced through a fairly rigorous sequence of stages. In order to deepen our understanding of these portraits, this study investigates two of the overlooked stages of portrait production: sketches and reverse coloring.

The Korean word *chobon* (草本) refers to an initial sketch that artists make when they first conceive of the entire painting in their mind. Such sketches serve as drafts that depict the subjects in the first stages of the portrait production.¹ Despite the wealth

of insightful scholarship about Joseon portraits, the portrait sketches have only recently begun to receive scholarly attention.² There are at least two reasons for this scholarly neglect: very few portrait sketches have survived, and they were never regarded as finished works. Usually, the sketches were destroyed once the portraits were completed, since they were viewed as the mere groundwork for the completed works (*jeongbon*, 正本).

Another major feature of the Joseon portraits was *baechae* (背彩), a technique of applying colors to the reverse side of the painting, which was used for both the sketches and the completed portraits. Since a layer of backing (*baejeop*, 裱接) is typically applied to the portraits, it is only possible to examine the reverse side of the portraits during the conservation process, when the backing is removed. Thus, the study of this technique has not progressed much, since most portraits still remain intact and uninvestigated. However, the portraits in the collection of the National Museum of Korea recently underwent a scientific examination that yielded rich materials, and revealed traces of reverse coloring, even with the backings affixed (Yu Hyeson and Jang Yeonhui 2007 and 2008).

¹ “The final copy [of the Annals] is printed only after the *chobon* proof has been revised three times” (*Sukjong sillok*—fourth month, 23rd day in 1690, the 16th year of King Sukjong).

² A few studies and exhibitions have considered portrait sketches, at least in part (Tongdosa Museum 1992; Hongik University Museum 2001). The first exhibition and catalogue devoted solely to portrait sketches was “Portrait Sketches of the Joseon Period” at the National Museum of Korea in 2007.

¹ The term “*chobon*” is more often used in the context of written or printed documents. For example, *chobon* were often produced during the publication process of *Joseon wangjo sillok* (朝鮮王朝實錄, Annals of the Dynasty of Joseon). It is recorded that

Based on these materials, this paper examines the portrait sketches and reverse coloring, which were two of the most integral stages in portrait production.

Production Process of Joseon Portraits

The nature of portrait sketches and reverse coloring becomes clear when the full production process of portraits is comprehensively examined. This process essentially consists of two distinct stages: the sketch stage, followed by the stage to create the final portrait. The sketches are the rough works that depict the sitters in the early stages of the production, while the portraits refer to the completed works, which are based on the revised and improved sketches. Another type of division can be made between the three types of subject depicted in a portrait: the process of making a portrait of a real, living person is called *dosa* (圖寫); copying a pre-existing portrait is *mosa* (模寫), and making a posthumous portrait is *chusa* (追寫) (Cho Sunmie 1983, 148).

Portrait sketches were produced in a number of different ways, depending on the subject. If the subject was alive, the painter sketched the person in real life. When copying another portrait, the painter placed a piece of paper over an existing portrait and traced it. For a posthumous sketch, the painter likely created the portrait sketches from the recollections of the deceased's family and friends, in the absence of an extant portrait. The remaining records and portrait sketches allow us to reconstruct the usual production process for the portraits as follows.³

Part 1 – Making sketches on oiled paper

1. Prepare the oiled paper.
2. *Moktancho* (木炭草, charcoal sketch) or *yutancho* (柳炭草, willow charcoal sketch): On the oiled paper, draw the rough outlines of the sitter using willow charcoal.

³ In 2007, as part of the exhibition on portrait sketches at the National Museum of Korea, a team of experts reproduced a portrait of Yi Uihyeon (李宜顯 1684-1764) from the 1744 album *Gisa gyeonghoecheop* (耆社慶會帖, *Commemorative Album of King Sukjong's Entry into the Club of Elders*). The reproduction required an analysis of the pigments, which was conducted by the conservation science laboratory of the National Museum of Korea. The reproduction was made by the Jeongjae Institute of Cultural Heritage Conservation (靖齋文化材保存研究所).

3. *Meokseoncho* (墨線草, ink outline sketch): Go over the rough outline with ink to make it more precise.
4. *Baechae* (背彩, reverse coloring): Observing the ink lines on the front, apply colors to the reverse side.
5. *Seonyeomcho* (渲染草, sketch with color wash technique) or *pilmyocho* (筆描草, sketch with focus on lines): On the front of the paper, detail the face through shading, either by applying a color wash technique or by drawing very fine lines. Either method is performed in close accordance with the colors on the reverse, which are visible through the translucence of the paper.

Part 2 – Creating final portraits on silk

6. Fasten silk to a wooden stretcher and then process the silk by way of *agyoposu* (阿膠泡水, applying watered glue and alum to silk), which fills in the holes between the silk strands, thereby enhancing the colors and preventing them running.
7. Place the silk (still fastened to the stretcher) over the completed sketch, and trace the ink outline onto the silk.
8. Apply colors to the back of the silk, in accordance with the ink outlines on the front, which are visible through the silk.
9. Finish by shading (again, either by the color wash method or by drawing fine lines) to the front of the silk canvas, while observing colors on the reverse, as seen through the silk.

Throughout the entire process, the original portrait sketches functioned as the specific guidelines of the final work, and thus provided a preview of the intended effects before the portrait was finally painted on silk. The patrons of the portraits had detailed discussions about these sketches, as they tried to decide how the final works should look. The portrait sketches also provided the criteria for deciding formal aspects of the final portrait, including the composition, color scheme, reverse coloring, shading, lines, and so on.

Types of Portrait Sketches

Sketches on Oiled Paper or Untreated Paper

Most Joseon portraits were painted on silk, although there are a few exceptions that were executed on paper. On the contrary, almost all of the portrait sketches were drawn on paper, but they were drawn on two different types of paper: oiled (*yujibon*, 油紙本) and untreated (*jibon*, 紙本).

Most portrait sketches were drawn on paper treated with oil, since the oil makes the paper semi-transparent. This effect allowed colors applied to the reverse side to infiltrate onto the front, like today's tracing paper. Therefore, painters could do preliminary tests of tonal effects, created by combining the colors on the front (*jeonchae*, 前彩) and back (*baechae*, 背彩). Testing the colors on oiled paper was a necessary step for the painters before proceeding to the final portraits on silk. The surviving portrait sketches on oiled paper, such as those housed in the National Museum of Korea, reveal that the semi-transparent paper becomes brown and discolored over time. Yet, in its original state, the oiled paper was likely semi-transparent yellow, the same as plain untreated silk. Oiled paper might also have been prepared in order to create a copy of a pre-existing portrait. The oiled paper would have been placed over the original to enable tracing, since the semi-transparent paper revealed the original placed underneath.

Despite the ostensible benefits of using oiled paper, some surviving works were executed on untreated paper. Some of these works are recorded to be final portraits, while others seem more likely to be sketches for a finished portrait on silk. For example, the *Portrait of Yi Wonik* (李元翼, 1547-1634) (Fig. 1) was painted on a few pieces of untreated paper that were pasted together. Both the brushwork and coloring are very lively and spontaneous. Considering that multiple pieces of untrimmed paper were haphazardly pasted together, the painting was probably a sketch for a portrait, rather than a final work. The painter may have used thin, untreated paper rather than oiled paper, since the former was also well-suited for making sketches.

The *Portrait of Yi Wonik*, examined above, leads us to reconsider the *Self-Portrait of Yun Duseo* (尹斗緒, 1668-1715) (Yu Hyeseon *et al.* 2006, 81-95), in the collection of Nogudang (綠雨堂) in Haenam, and the *Portrait of Yi Insang* (李麟祥, 1710-1760) (National Museum of Korea 2009, 273-75) (Fig. 2). To the naked eye, both of these paintings seem to be on untreated paper, but microscopic and X-ray fluores-



Fig. 1. *Portrait of Yi Wonik* (李元翼, 1547-1634). Joseon Dynasty, 17th century. Ink and color on paper, 165.5 x 81.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

cence (XRF) analysis has recently revealed that both paintings have colors applied to their reverse side. The traces of reverse coloring on untreated paper indicate that the paper used for both paintings was extremely thin, such that it revealed what was painted on either side.

In addition to the reverse coloring, the *Portrait of Yi Insang* shows traces of revisions in the area of both the ear and chin, and a sketch-like treatment of the robe. These two features are often observed in



Fig. 2. Part of *Portrait of Yi Insang* (李麟祥, 1710-1760). Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 58.0 x 33.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea)



Fig. 3. *Portrait Sketch from Chilbunjeonsincheop* (七分傳神帖, *Album of Portrait Sketches that Transmit the Spirit*), (c.1750). Joseon Dynasty, 18th Century. Willow charcoal on paper, 31.9 x 21.8 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

portrait sketches. The *Self-Portrait of Yun Duseo* also demonstrates traces of the reverse coloring and a simple description of the robe. In addition, according to the collector, the work has been preserved rolled without any backing or mounting (Cheon Juhyeon *et al.* 2006, note. 9). Again, these features strongly suggest that the *Self-Portrait of Yun Duseo* may have been a portrait sketch, rather than a final portrait.

Painting Techniques Used in Portrait Sketches

Extant portrait sketches were drawn with various kinds of materials (including charcoal, ink, red ink, or color pigments), and with different painting techniques. In this section, I will divide portrait sketches into four categories—*moktancho* (木炭草, charcoal sketch), *meokseoncho* (墨線草, ink sketch), *seonyeomcho* (渲染草, wash sketch), and *pilmyocho* (筆描草, fine brush sketch)—and examine the defining features of each type. However, it cannot be ascertained whether

the extant portrait sketches were produced as sketches of living people, posthumous sketches, or copies of existing portraits.

First, *moktancho* refers to charcoal sketches made in the earliest stages of the portrait production process, which are commonly termed “rough sketches drawn with willow charcoal” (*yutanyaksa*, 柳炭略寫), since the charcoal was usually obtained by burning willow wood. Examples are found in an album called *Chilbunjeonsincheop* (七分傳神帖, *Album of Portrait Sketches that Transmit the Spirit*), named after the title which is affixed to the cover. The album consists of 17 portrait sketches on oiled paper, one willow charcoal sketch on untreated paper, a portrait of Kang Sehwang (姜世晃, 1713-1791), and various colophons. The album was made by Im Wi (任偉, b. 1701), who collected portrait sketches by his son, Im Huisu (任希壽, 1733-1750) and then wrote colophons for some of them. He also included works by other



Fig. 4. *Portrait of Chae Jegong* (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799). Joseon Dynasty, late 18th century. Willow charcoal on paper, 72.5 x 47.2 cm. (Suwon Hwaseong Museum).

painters, including the *Portrait of Kang Sehwang* (Cultural Heritage Administration Korea 2007, 262-77; National Museum of Korea 2009, 213-16).

The *Portrait Sketch* (Fig. 3) was originally executed on separate paper, but was later included in the album *Chilbunjeonsincheop*. The sketch is a *yutancho*, in which the painter carefully drew the sitter at first sight, using rather soft willow charcoal. Such examples of *yutancho*, illustrating the initial stages of sketching, are quite rare, since the *yutancho* was usually expunged when the painter inked over the sketch. Another rare example of *yutancho* is the sketch for the *Portrait of Chae Jegong* (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799) (Fig. 4), which shows more refined lines than those found in the willow charcoal sketch from the album. The subject's face and official cap are defined in firm lines of willow charcoal, and only the collars and shoulder of the official robe are drawn. There are

no traces of colors applied to either the front or back of the sketch.

Second, the *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (宋時烈, 1607-1689) (Fig. 5) from 1680 is a good example of the *meokseoncho* stage (墨線草) of sketches, wherein the painter outlined the subject solely with ink on thin paper that was slightly treated in oil. In this portrait, the paper is so thin that one can discern traces of the woven bamboo mold on which the paper was formed. Another *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (Fig. 6), attributed to Kim Changeop (金昌業, 1658-1721), is also a *meokseoncho* in which the painter repeated brushstrokes on the body to define the contour and size of the sitter's robe. Thus, it is a *meokseoncho* that aimed to bring the body into focus.

The other two categories of portrait sketches refer not so much to the stage of production, but to the method of depiction. The third type is *seonyeomcho* (渲染草), which indicates a portrait sketch in which the volume of the sitter's face is expressed with light ink, light color washes, or light pigments. After the contour of the face is outlined in ink, the artists applied the color wash method to create shading without visible lines. An example is found in the *Portrait of Im Suryun* (任守綸, 1680-1752) (Fig. 7) from the *Chilbunjeonsincheop*. Im Huisu seems to have given his utmost attention to capturing the sitter's most notable physical features, given that he used somewhat simpler description than that shown in the album called *Myeonghyeonhwasang* (名賢畫像, *Portrait Sketches of Renowned Officials*), which will be examined shortly (National Museum of Korea 2009, 214-15). It is not known whether the portrait sketches on oiled paper in the *Chilbunjeonsincheop* were ever transferred onto silk as final works. According to Im Wi's colophons, which are written beside the sketches, Im Huisu was not commissioned by the subjects to paint the works; he created them simply out of a need to express himself. Despite this unusual circumstance, Im Huisu still applied colors to the back of the paintings in order to enhance their quality as portrait sketches. In some of the sketches from the album, the faces are painted on the back with flesh-colored pigments. XRF examinations have revealed that other sketches, whose reverse sides are still inaccessible, also show traces of reverse coloring (National Museum of Korea 2009, 273-75).

The *Myeonghyeonhwasang* consists of 33 portrait sketches on oiled paper, portraying dignitaries who



Fig. 5. *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (宋時烈, 1607-1689). Joseon Dynasty, late 17th century. Ink on paper, 36.5 x 56.5 cm. (Private collection).



Fig. 6. *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (宋時烈, 1607-1689), attributed to Kim Changgeop (金昌業 1658-1721). Joseon Dynasty, late 17th- early 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 37.0 x 50.5 cm. (Private collection).



Fig. 7. *Portrait of Im Suryun* (任守諭, 1680-1752) from *Chilbunjeonsincheop*. Joseon Dynasty, 1749. Ink and color on paper, 23.8 x 11.5 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 8. *Portrait of Jo Yeongjin* (趙榮進, 1703-1775) from *Myeonghyeonhwasang* (名賢畫像, Portrait Sketches of Renowned Officials). Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper 41.2 x 31.8 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 9. *Portrait Sketch of Chae Jegong* (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799), front and back. Joseon Dynasty, c.1791. Ink and color on paper, 65.5x50.6cm. (Suwon Hwaseong Museum)

were active during the reigns of King Yeongjo (英祖, r. 1724-1776) and King Jeongjo (正祖, r. 1776-1800).⁴ This album really exemplifies both the use of oiled paper as the paintings' ground and the technique of reverse coloring. Considering the superb use of the color wash method, these portrait sketches are exquisite *seonyeomcho* that were most likely executed by professional painters. The faces have as much detail as final works. On the right side of the *Portrait of Jo Yeongjin* (趙榮進, 1703-1775) (Fig. 8), the artist made some sketches of the beard and eyebrows in different

styles. The painter also tested several different shapes of the facial hairs so as to select the most appropriate, and revised accordingly in preparation of the final work. As opposed to the highly detailed face, the artist made a very rough sketch of the subject's body with casual and lively brushstrokes.

The *Portrait Sketch of Chae Jegong* (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799) (Fig. 9) provides a glimpse of the degree of precision which could be achieved in *seonyeomcho* sketches through the elaborate color wash method. It is important to note that the painter precisely applied the reverse coloring to the face, and even separately colored the white and the pupils of the eyes on the reverse side of the painting. Perhaps most unusual, after finishing the face, the painter applied white pigments to the front in order to confirm the size of the body and the contour of the robe.⁵

4 All of the subjects from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album are half-length figures facing 3/4 towards the right, but they are painted on various sizes of oiled paper. Some of the subjects are depicted from head to chest, with the focus on their faces, whereas others are portrayed from head to waist, to show the official rank badges on their chest (*hyungbae*, 胸背) or belts (*gakdae*, 角帶). All of the sitters are wearing official hats (*samo*, 紗帽) and attire, with the exception of Yi Jango (李章吾 b. 1714), who is depicted wearing a woven horsehair hat (*tanggeon*, 宕巾), typically worn indoors, and unofficial attire (*yabok*, 野服) (National Museum of Korea 2009, 182-83).

5 In the sketch for the *Portrait of Chae Jegong* (Fig. 9), which was executed when the subject was 72 years old, the uppermost shoulder line agrees well with that of the *Portrait of Chae Jegong, Age 72*, which is in a private collection in Buyeo. However, the lowermost

Fourth, *pilmyocho* (筆描草) is characterized by the use of repeated minute lines on the face to achieve volume, as shown in the *Portrait Sketch* (Fig. 10). The boundless repetition of precise brushstrokes in the sketches gives the subject's skin a smooth appearance, recalling the brushwork of the final portraits.

In terms of the production stage, these four types of portrait sketches can be listed in the order of *moktancho meokseoncho seonyeomcho* or *pilmyocho*. While *moktancho* and *meokseoncho* refer to the sequential order of the production, *seonyeomcho* and *pilmyocho* represent different manners of description, both of which happened during the final stages of the portrait sketches.

The descriptive manners used in *seonyeomcho* or *pilmyocho* closely resonate with the style of the final portraits of the time. For example, the 17th-century *Portrait of Yi Wonik* (李元翼, 1547-1634) (Fig. 1), which seems to be a sketch rather than a final work (as discussed above), recalls the general style of final portraits from the 17th century. Specifically, the artist utilized delicate lines and light coloring, instead of rendering with an excess of lines and applying deep coloring. Meanwhile, the sketches from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang*, which were produced in the 18th century, mirror the stylistic trend of 18th-century portraits, in which the color wash method and shading are used to create more realistic portraits. The *Portrait Sketch* (Fig. 10), which is classified as *pilmyocho*, was produced in the 19th century. Thus, it illustrates the style that prevailed in 19th-century portraits, wherein shading is created with numerous tiny, fine lines, making the subject appear more three-dimensional.

Reverse Coloring (*Baechae*, 背彩)

The *baechae* technique of applying colors to the reverse side of a painting was used for both sketches and final portraits in the Joseon period. In the records from that time, this method is called either *baechae* (北彩) or *baeseol* (北設). Kim Gwangsu (金光遂, b. 1696) told King Yeongjo about an ancient Chi-

shoulder line of the sketch corresponds to that of the *Portrait of Chae Jegong, Age 73*, which is in Suwon Hwaseong Museum. This important example shows that the same portrait sketches could be used more than once (Yi Hyegyong 2007, 37-41).

nese painting that he had examined, wherein colors were applied to the reverse side and then covered with a backing layer of paper (*Seungjeongwon Ilgi*—fourth month, second day in 1745, the 21st year of King Yeongjo). Reverse coloring has also been noted in Buddhist paintings of the Goryeo period (高麗, 918-1392), but was used more elaborately in the Joseon portraits (Chung Woothak 1997, 27-29, 49-57; Bak Jiseon 1996, 62, and 2009, 15). In addition to portraits, *baechae* was also employed in the Joseon period for blue-and-green landscape paintings and for official paintings recording court events.

King Yeongjo himself articulated the reasons for this technique during an interesting dialogue with his subjects, while appreciating a portrait of King Sejo. King Yeongjo remarked that “over time, all of the color pigments of the portraits of famous military commanders have worn away, since the faces were only painted on the front, without reverse col-

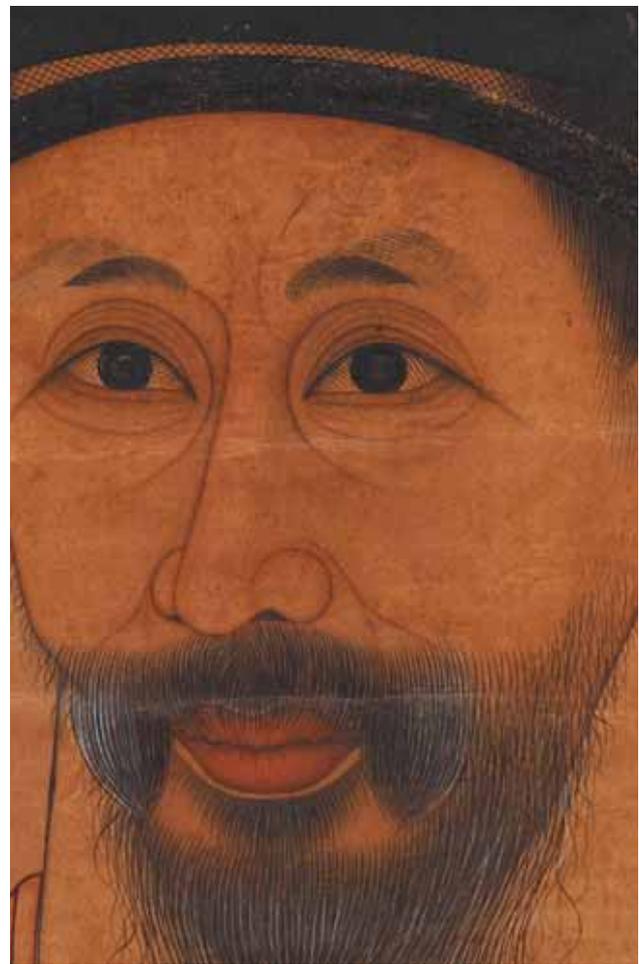


Fig. 10. Part of *Portrait Sketch*. Joseon Dynasty, 19th century. Ink and color on paper, 64.5 x 50.8 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

oring” (*Seungjeongwon Ilgi*—ninth month, second day in 1735, the 11th year of King Yeongjo). In other words, color pigments on the front of a painting are relatively exposed to light and friction, and thus are more susceptible to deterioration and exfoliation. Under such circumstances, reverse coloring would have been well received by both painters and patrons for offering enhancing the effect of the colors especially in the facial features.

When opaque pigments, mostly made from minerals, are applied to the front of a canvas, traces of the brushstrokes are revealed or stained. On the other hand, when the back of the painting is colored, the colors are seen through the weave of silk, resulting in more subtle coloring effects. Among the various painting techniques of the time, Joseon scholars favored reverse coloring, which allowed painters to represent subtle facial features and complexions.

Reverse Coloring on Portrait Sketches

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the technique of creating fine coloration by using colors on both the front and back of portrait sketches on oiled paper began. The contents of the portrait sketch album, *Myeonghyeonhwasang* in the collection of National Museum of Korea show that the tradition of using reverse coloring on portrait sketches was firmly established as early as the 18th century. The album allows us to examine reverse coloring, since its portrait sketches are currently preserved as loose leaves without any backing. In order to better understand how painters used reverse coloring in the portrait sketches of the late Joseon period, I will classify the reverse coloring techniques shown in the album.

In all of the portraits from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album, the faces are painted with colors on the back. However, each portrait displays different methods and areas of application. In making the faces, various hues of pink were applied to the back of the canvas, and the painters seem to have applied the colors differently in order to represent the unique facial complexion of each sitter. In particular, the method for depicting the eyes demonstrates the various forms of reverse coloring for the face, which can be divided into three general categories: applying the same colors for the eyes and the rest of the face, coloring the face and leaving the eyes unpainted, or applying white for the eyes and coloring the face separately. The method for depicting the subject's

beard and other facial hair also varies. For subjects with white beards, the painters sometimes did not apply reverse coloring, because the white on the back would overlap with the color of beard applied on the front. On the other hand, as seen in the Portrait of Yi Changui (李昌誼, 1704-1772) (Fig. 11), the painters sometimes colored the mustache and beard white on the back of the silk and then drew the individual hairs on the front.

In depicting the official hats, artists either did not use any reverse coloring or else only used light ink on the back to color the two wings of the cap. For both styles, the patterns of the wings are roughly drawn on the front. Notably, one unique phenomenon can be seen in the reverse coloring of official hats. In the *Portrait of Yun Dongseung* (尹東昇, 1718-1773) (Fig. 12), the painter rather discursively brushed flesh color, black and white over the main part of the hat. Similar examples are found in portrait sketches from the album. It seems that, since the main part of hat was eventually going to be rendered in dark black, the painters used that portion of the canvas to preview the effect of lighter colors of reverse coloring on the front.

Depictions of the official robe also demonstrated variations in reverse coloring technique. Sometimes the white collar of the robe was painted in white and no coloring was applied to the back of the robe, but sometimes the back of the robe was colored and the white collar was not. However, in most cases, no reverse coloring at all was used for the official robes.

The *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album mainly consists of half-length figures with a focus on faces, and each page of the album demonstrates the fine color wash method employed on both the front and back. Despite these shared features, reverse coloring was applied in various ways, and the coloring on the front also shows different details. This might indicate that the portrait sketches from the album were executed by different painters. It is also important to note that the painters used different manners of coloring to suit different subjects. For example, two of the portrait sketches from the album demonstrate different ways of coloring on both the front and back, even though they depict the same person, whose identity remains unknown (Figs. 13-14). It seems likely that the painters tested different ways of coloring in order to find the most appropriate for the person being depicted.



Fig. 11. *Portrait of Yi Changui* (李昌誼, 1704-1772), front and back, from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 51.2 x 35.5 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 12. *Portrait of Yun Dongseung* (尹東昇, 1718-1773), front and back, from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 48.3 x 37.3 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 13. *Portrait Sketch*, front and back, from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 38.5 x 24.7 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 14. *Portrait Sketch*, front and back, from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 32.6 x 20.6 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 15. *Portrait of Shin Im* (申鉉, 1639-1725) and its X-ray photograph. Joseon Dynasty, 1719. Ink and color on silk, 151.0 x 78.2 cm. (National Museum of Korea)

Reverse Coloring on Final Portraits

Portrait sketches were typically preserved without backing, allowing us to examine their reverse coloring. In contrast, the reverse coloring of final portraits can usually only be examined if a work is being repaired or conserved, which necessitates the removal of the layers of paper backing. However, the National Museum of Korea recently conducted X-ray photographic analysis in order to examine reverse coloring of portraits whose backings remain intact.

Different types and thicknesses of pigment are penetrated in varying degrees by the X-rays, thus allowing us to determine where and how pigments are applied to the paintings. For example, pigments with high density are shown bright in X-ray photographs, since they offer a low degree of penetration. Used in conjunction with microscopic examination and XRF analysis, X-ray photography gives us a more accurate way to examine traces of reverse coloring on the final portraits, even if the backing is still affixed. I will

now discuss the nature of the reverse coloring found in the final portraits that were scientifically investigated at the National Museum of Korea.

The X-ray photograph of the *Portrait of Shin Im* (申鉉, 1639-1725) (Fig. 15) reveals that the face and forehead were painted with colors on the back, but the pupils were not. Interestingly, the pupils were painted with black ink on the front, whereas the sclera (whites of the eyes) were colored with lead white (*yeonbaek*, 鉛白) on the back, with no colors applied on the front. In contrast, in the *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (Fig. 16), the entire face is colored in the back, without any regard for the eyes. This manner of reverse coloring can also be seen in other portrait sketches. In a few of the portrait sketches from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album, the painters used white on the front to paint the sclera, but in most of the final works, the white coloring is applied only on the back. For most portraits, including the *Portrait of Shin Im*, the beard is either unpainted in the back.



Fig. 16. *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (宋時烈, 1607-1689) and its X-ray photograph. Late Joseon Dynasty. Ink and color on silk, 89.7 x 67.6 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 17. *Portrait of Seo Jiksu* (徐直修, b. 1735) and its X-ray photograph, by Yi Myeonggi (李命基 b. 1756) and Kim Hongdo (金弘道 1745-after 1806). Joseon Dynasty, 1796. Ink and color on silk, 148.8 x 72.4 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 18. *Portrait of Yi Jae* (李緯, 1680-1746) and its X-ray photograph.
Joseon Dynasty, late 18th century. Ink and color on silk, 97.8 x 56.3 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 19. *Portrait of Yi Chae* (李采, 1745-1820) and its X-ray photograph.
Joseon Dynasty, late 18th century. Ink and color on silk, 99.2 x 58.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

Thus, in the X-ray photographs, the beard area always appears dark, as only the strands of beard that were painted on the front are shown.

Most of the late Joseon portraits, including the *Portrait of Shin Im*, show traces of reverse coloring in the robes. However, in the two 17th-century portraits—the *Portrait of Hong Gasin* (洪可臣, 1541-1615) and a portrait said to depict Jo Ui (趙誼)—the X-ray photographs revealed no traces of reverse coloring in the official dress (*dallyeong*, 團領). In those two works, the colors and patterns of the official dress were rendered in black ink on the front (Yu Hyeseon and Jang Yeonhui 2008, 263-276). In the case of the *Portrait of Jo Gyeong* (趙敬, 1541-1609), also 17th-century, the official dress was colored in black ink and color pigments on the front. Reverse coloring does not seem to be applied with the exception of the collar, sleeves, and rank badges on chest, although much of it has scraped off. The face was painted pink on the back (Jang Yeonhui *et al.* 2008, 85-93) like the other portraits. On the other hand, one 17th-century

example of reverse coloring for the official dress is the *Portrait of Yi Jungro* (李重老, 1577-1624), where the black official dress was colored blue-gray on the back, while the front featured a thin layer of black organic pigments (Bak Jiseon 2009, 25-27; Cho Sunmie 2009, 492-493). This work represents a rare example of reverse coloring used for the official dress in the 17th century portraiture. Further discussion on the periodic characteristics of reverse coloring awaits more research materials.

The painters' distinctive manners of reverse coloring can be examined through the X-ray photographs, which clearly reveal the directions and flows of the brushstrokes on front and back. In the *Portrait of Shin Im* (Fig. 15), the painter consistently wielded the brush up and down, while the painter of the *Portrait of Seo Jiksu* (徐直修, 1735-?) (Fig. 17) applied long, steady brushstrokes on the back of the robe. The painters of both the *Portrait of Yi Jae* (李緯, 1680-1746) (Fig. 18) and the *Portrait of Yi Chae* (李采, 1745-1820) (Fig. 19) applied colors on the back



Fig. 20. *Portrait of Yun Geup* (尹汲, 1697-1770) and its X-ray photograph. Joseon Dynasty, c.1762. Ink and color on silk, 151.5 x 82.8 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

of the robes, following the contour of the robes, as seen most clearly in the left sleeve in the *Portrait of Yi Chae*. Perhaps this indicates that the painters developed the technique of reverse coloring by paying more attention to the characteristics of the robes depicted.

The *Portrait of Yun Geup* (尹汲, 1697-1770) (Fig. 20) from 1762 accentuates the artist's superb ability, including fine reverse coloring. The painter employed very orderly brushstrokes when painting the face and the official dress on the back, and the collar under the ear was thickly painted on the reverse side. The collar appears bright white in the X-ray photograph, but microscopic examination reveals that no



Fig. 21. Part of *Portrait of Jeong Gyeongsun* (鄭景淳, 1721-1795) and the microscopic photograph of the iris. Joseon Dynasty, 1777. Ink and color on silk, 68.2 x 56.3 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

colors were applied to the front of the canvas in that area. Thus, it would seem that the bright white consists entirely of thick applications of lead white on the reverse side. In other words, the painter creatively employed reverse coloring to create a sense of depth in the collar, while bringing the beard into relief.

A closer examination of the area of the official hat in the *Portrait of Yun Geup* reveals traces of brushstrokes to test the effect of the reverse coloring, a technique also noted in the portrait sketches. During the sketch stage, the painters often used the main area of the hat to test colors that would be applied on the face, and a similar technique was used by the painters of the final portraits. This was also a way to reduce the waste of pigments. In light of the production cost and efforts, the painters sought the most efficient way of making the portraits, while minimizing their use of materials. In the portrait sketches, the painters usually did not apply any reverse coloring to enhance the body of the hat, but the painters of the final portraits often did color the back of the body of the hat, as shown in the traces of reverse coloring revealed by removal of the backing of several works (Bak Jiseon 2009, 25-27; Cho Sunmie 2009, 71, 87, 204, 492). In addition, the final copies also show evidence of complete reverse coloring on the embroidered rank badges on the chest, the chairs, the colored and patterned mats (*chaejeon*, 彩氈), and other small items. In the *Portrait of Jeong Gyeongsun* (鄭景淳, 1721-1795) (Fig. 21), dated to 1777, the pupils and iris of the eyes were painted in gold on the back, a technique also seen in the *Portrait of Seo Maesu* (徐邁修, 1731-1818) from 1792 (Yu Hyeseon and Jang Yeonhui 2008, 282-286). These examples show that the reverse coloring technique became more refined over time.

Conclusion

This paper reconsiders the portrait sketches (*chobon*, 草本) and the reverse coloring technique (*baechae*, 背彩) used to create late Joseon portraits, two areas which have long been overshadowed by the completed works.

During the Joseon era, the production of a portrait was an exceptionally complex process, which encompassed reviews, revisions, supplementations, or entire reworkings made according to joint deci-

sions by the subject, patrons, reviewers, and the artist. At each stage, the portrait sketches were used to model and preview the style and manner of depiction that could best capture the shape of the subject, the coloring, and the overall tone of the portrait. Painters made several different portrait sketches for the involved parties to examine. Notably, in addition to the standard official titles and names of the subjects, two of the portraits from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album (the *Portrait of An Jip* (安傑, b. 1703) and the *Portrait of Sim Seongjin* (沈星鎭, b. 1695) also feature an ink inscription reading *jeongboncha* (正本次), which means “one that will be used for making the final copy.” This label seems to indicate that the sketch was selected as the final draft of the portrait, through comparison with other versions. Similarly, the *Portrait of Yi Hangbok* (李恒福, 1556-1618), in the collection of Seoul National University Museum, is inscribed in red ink with the character *yong* (用), which also suggests that it was a portrait sketch “would be used for making the final copy.”

Since multiple sketches were required to make a portrait, the painters developed efficient and economical sketching methods. Viewed in this light, it is interesting to note that most extant portrait sketches, including those from the *Myeonghyeonhwasang* album, are half-length figures wherein the painters paid considerable attention to the rendering of the faces. It would seem that the painters first and foremost focused on the faces, where the essence of the subject’s persona could be discerned. But they expended little effort in rendering the robes, which were usually drawn quite roughly and conventionally, with no reverse coloring. For instance, when the rank badge was drawn on the chest, the painters sometimes simply described its patterns in ink, as seen in the *Portrait of Yun Geup* (Fig. 22), or else marked its position but left the patterns undrawn, as seen in the *Portrait of An Gyeomje* (安兼濟, b. 1724) (Fig. 23). The painters of both of these portraits omitted the individually specific patterns on the rank badges, instead substituting them with the standardized type. One notable exception is the *Portrait of Song Sunmyeong* (宋淳明, b. 1708) (Fig. 24), where the patterns of the official robe were described in detail and reverse coloring was employed.

Examples of portrait sketches that depict full-length figures require further attention in this regard. Full-length sketches, such as those done for the



Fig. 22. *Portrait of Yun Geup* (尹汲, 1697-1770) from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 38.3 x 33.5 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 23. *Portrait of An Gyeomje* (安兼濟, b. 1724) from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 53.2 x 34.5 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig. 24. Portrait of Song Sunmyeong (宋淳明 1708-?) from *Myeonghyeonhwasang*. Joseon Dynasty, 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 40.5 x 26.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

Portrait of Yi Wonik (17th century) (Fig. 1), stand in sharp contrast to the half-length sketches, where the painters focused primarily on the faces. Given that the full-length sketches were usually produced before the 18th century, it is possible that portrait sketches may have developed from full-length figures to half-length figures, with more focus on the faces.

However, when painters drew particularly important portraits, such as that of the king, they paid more attention to the body and attire, even in the portrait sketches. The record from the *Seungeongwon Ilgi* (承政院日記, *Daily Records of the Royal Secretariat*) describes the appraisal of the sketches executed for the portrait of King Gojong (高宗, r. 1863-1907) in the ninth year of his reign (1872). It is recorded that the painters made several portrait sketches of the king dressed in various attire, including a royal hat (*bokgeonbon*, 幅巾本), a winged cap (*ikseongwanbon*, 翼善冠本), a dragon robe (*yongpobon*, 龍袍本), or a

military uniform (*gunbokbon*, 軍服本) (*Seungeongwon Ilgi*—second month, tenth day & fifth month, third day, in 1872, the ninth year of King Gojong). For important subjects, such as kings and royalty, painters usually produced larger portrait sketches, focusing on more than the faces. For instance, in two portrait sketches of Emperor Sunjong (純宗皇帝, r. 1907-1910), the painter Kim Eunho (金殷鎬, 1892-1979) depicted not only the face in great detail, but also the entire upper half of the subject. The artist also drew a full-length figure of a relative of the king in the *Portrait Sketch of Duke Yi Jun* (李俊公, 1870-1917), in National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea.

In terms of reverse coloring, portrait sketches and final portraits used similar techniques, such that the methods applied in the sketch were often also adopted in the portrait. This pattern indicates that the techniques tested in the portrait sketches were possibly chosen for the portraits. However, in the sketches, the subjects are usually shown half-length, with the focus on their faces, with limited use of reverse coloring outside the face area. In the final portraits, on the other hand, reverse coloring is often applied to broader areas including the hat, robes, chairs, patterned mats, floral straw mats (*hwamunseok*, 花紋席), or other small items.

The portrait sketches represent the intermediate stages of the portrait-making process, but they often depicted the characteristics and personalities of the subjects even more directly than the final portraits. Reverse coloring is the representative practice which influenced the overall tone of the Joseon portraits. This technique was designed and elaborately employed throughout the production process to maximize the pictorial effects of the final work. But these two crucial steps of portrait production have long been overlooked in previous studies of portraits, which have focused solely on the completed works.

Joseon portraits were produced through an arduous process which required agreement among the subject, patron, painter, and critic. By taking note of this process, we can begin to uncover a wealth of hidden information in the portraits that reveals much more about the context in which they were produced. Hopefully, in the future, a rich variety of materials and investigative methods will be employed in this respect to further illuminate the characteristics and periodic changes of Korean portraiture. ㄸ

TRANSLATED BY LEE SEUNGHYE

This paper is a revised and extended version of “Types and Techniques of the Late Joseon Portrait Drawings” (Lee Soomi 2010). This paper, which includes a more in-depth discussion of reverse coloring, was previously published in 2011 in the catalogue of the special exhibition at the National Museum of Korea, *The Secret of Joseon Portraits* (肖像畫 祕密).

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