CHUNG CHANG-SUP
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I hope that my existence will be assimilated to the materiality of tak [mulberry bark], the symbol of Korean people’s sensibilities. Adjusting the dampness of tak’s fiber and observing the passage of “time,” I experience the “planeness” that can be also felt from the surface of granite or earthenware. I do not want to create an artificial world of intentions on the surface of the material; instead, I am experimenting in a naturalist perspective on art in which my consciousness and the meaning of tak’s materiality would be united. Recently I began to add colors to tak. Still, this process avoids the artificiality of “applying” colors on the surface. What I pursue is a status in which colors are subtly faded and blurred into yellowish tint or bluish gray in the sediment of time. The realm in which traces of my body seeped into the materiality of paper becoming one with it — this is the stage that I always aspire to. Painting without painting, creating without creating, this is what I will.
It will not be an exaggeration to say that the history of Korean culture has evolved with that paper. Korean traditional paper, known as *changhoji*, is mainly made out of the material *tak* (mulberry bark), and is well known for its durability and strength. However, Chinese traditional paper, known to be blinding white in colour, is extremely weak and easy to tear. Our ancestors literally covered their most intimate living spaces with *tak* paper, including the flowers, the windows and the doors of bedrooms. It is a wonder how they used such flimsy and fragile material as part of their living space. One can observe from such practice, certain perspectives of time and space. As the floor paper changes gradually in colour through different hues of yellow and brown, a sense of time accumulating is created and leaves residues of the past. Through the screen of *tak* paper, one can distinctively sense the wind, light and the flow of time outside his or her room, which allowed us to experience both feelings of being inside and outside. The paper screen reflects the change of time from the outside; when the sun rises, the paper screen is suffused with light, when the sun sets, the light thins away as it would in a black ink painting. This is the realm of creation with no intention of creating. The reflection of the rising moonbeam and the shadow of bamboo leaves was a vivid canvas of natural phenomena by what one could ponder on within human conditions.
My work process with paper is not a coincidental projection of work process on a given product of paper. Rather, in battering and kneading *tak*, I unknowingly put my breath, odour and finally my soul into the process, thus becoming a part of the process itself. From here, I fall into a trance where I lose myself and my consciousness. Then, there is furtive spread of after-images of arcane patterns and incidental imageries in my mind. This is neither a result from the analytical approach to nature, nor reverence to the formalist credo for primary elements. On the contrary, I aspire to be outside of the academy of the styles, forms and theoretisation.
Stripping myself of all knowledge and intentions, I bask in liberation. The childhood recollections and the dregs of memories hidden away in the corner of my life are my only encounters. Through tak paper, I wish to meet another “me”. My ultimate goal is to depict a world without depiction, a world without creating from the intention of the unintended. As a long truth seeker gets a glimpse of the God, I believe that Oriental spiritualism and Occidental materialism are harmonized on the crossroads of my lonely journey. My paper works, like the surface of old granite immersed in time, indicates an alternative way to rediscover material, time, self and nature through their residues, traces and coincidences.
In the works of Chung Chang-Sup there are a few painting maneuvers which run counter to ordinary notions of painting. This can be ascertained from “Paintings I Do Not Paint,” which was the title of his preview held in Ho-Am Art Gallery in 1993. His minimalist tendency takes the form of his distancing himself from physical painting. He stirs up some skepticism about the necessity of painting and inquiries about whether paintings need any physical performance of painting. Painting literally derives from a physical act. Therefore, a painting cannot exist unless it has been painted, because nothing comes from nothing. Despite this axiomatic reasoning, it seems clear that his reason for avoiding physical involvement in painting is to cast off conventional ideas. First of all, this would suggest that he does not deal with the usual painting materials and paintbrushes. Still, there is something more which is not bound with the simple getting rid of conventional ideas.

“I dissolve the raw material of mulberry paper into pulp. The quality of the paper depends on how long it was soaked and how long its natural fiber is. I scoop up the pulp, spread it on a canvas, tap and knead it, and my conversation with the paper mulberry begins. Abandoning my own will, instead I await its spontaneous response,” he says.

It sounds a little bit confusing. “Paper mulberry” is not, as its name suggests, a kind of a paper. It is the mane of the tree which is the raw material for making mulberry paper. Paper mulberry has a property of uncertainty, while at the
same time it is a concrete entity. The catalyst brings out in the paper various subtle, delicate, and random effects. On deeper inspection, there are variations of deep resonance arranged by his careful attention to the material and the surface which give shape to the exquisitely subtle, semitransparent monotones. There is hardly a tinge of color. Only the embedded layers of the mulberry paper on the canvas, sometimes merged and sometimes dispersed, provide viewers with textural variety. In a sense his works are creating textural strata.

One can capture his process of tackling the paper mulberry briefly. Spreading it on the canvas and waiting for it to develop is the gist of the whole process. There is no premeditated intention or artificial will but just waiting for its random effects. Just waiting is the only thing he can do for the development of his work. The artist himself and the raw material of the mulberry pulp acquire parity with each other. In other words, the artist is not the principal body, conducting his plan one-sidedly on the canvas, but rather artist and canvas interact. The artist makes the best use of the properties of the paper mulberry, of the varied ways in which it may develop.

His interest in textual strata can be traced back to his works of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when he was engaged with the Informal style, long before he began his “Mulberry Series” with light colors and ink on Korean rice paper in the 1970s. For nearly four decades he has been dealing with only one subject—strata. Lee Yil, a noted art critic, recalls Chung Chang-Sup’s works of his Informal era, “Some parts of his canvases have crumpled layers of a rough matière
which looks like hard tree bark, while, in contrast, some have shallow layers which look like the spacious margins of Oriental paintings.” This perfectly expounds Chung’s recent works as well. There are very few who can constantly devote themselves to one subject but in remarkably idiosyncratic ways.

Chung Chang–Sup’s mulberry paper works are mostly monotone in tint with a semi-transparent quality. Viewers can encounter different sentiments from peering through the strata of the material. Viewers lapse into emotional memory lanes at each and every turn of the strata.

“The mulberry series I am making these days is too attached to my childhood memories and to my hometown, like glove and hand. The first thing that washes my newly opened eyes in the morning is soft sunlight subdued through rice-paper doors. Looking at silhouettes of cosmos and chrysanthemum flowers which are pasted on the rice-paper sliding doors, I eat a bowl of snowy rice and laver with soybean-paste soup. That’s what I grew up with. These everyday happenings turn me to nostalgia for my childhood.”

Cozy memories of tender sunlight filtered though the rice-paper door and silhouettes of cosmos and chrysanthemum flowers blended with the flavor of soybean-paste soup can fondly remind most Koreans of their childhood homes. Chung’s mulberry paper works enable him to return to the bosom of nature as well as to lapse into his essential sentiments.
Return 77-O 1977. Mixed media on paper. 197 x 110 cm / 77 1/2 x 43 1/4 inches.
Return 77-M. 1977. Mixed media on paper. 197 x 110 cm / 77 1/2 x 43 1/4 inches.
Return one No. 8, 1977. Mixed media on paper. 90 x 90 cm / 35 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches.
Tak 8512, 1985. Tak fiber on canvas. 240 x 140 cm / 94 3/4 x 55 1/8 inches.
Tak 85/58, 1985. Tak fiber on canvas. 140 x 140 cm / 55 1/2 x 55 1/2 inches.
Tak 81-113, 1985. Tak fiber on canvas. 340 x 190 cm / 134 x 74 1/2 inches.
Tak 86033. 1986. tit fiber on canvas. 240 x 140 cm / 94 5/8 x 55 1/8 inches.
Tak 39909. 1990. Tak fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/16 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation 93814. 1993. Tak fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/16 x 48 1/16 inches.
Meditation 94952: 1994. Text fiber on canvas. 144 x 102 cm / 4′ 8 1/2″ x 3′ 4 1/8″ inches.
Meditation: gilf 1993. Tak fiber on canvas. 144 x 122 cm / 4’ 9” x 4’ 8” inches.
Meditation 3,152-8. 1993. Tall fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/8 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation 35500-8. 1995. Text fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/4 x 48 1/8 inches.
Meditation 94514. 1994. Tissue fiber on canvas. 244 x 722 cm / 96 1/4 x 282 1/2 inches.
Meditation 33202. 1993. Tak fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/8 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation 59471A, 1994. T manufactured fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/8 x 48 1/8 inches.
Meditation 94703, 1994. Taka fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/8 x 48 1/4 inches.
Meditation 94817. 1994. Tall fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/16 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation 990-8 1999. Tuss fibers on canvas. 200 x 100 cm / 78 3/4 x 39 3/4 inches.
Meditation, 1994. Tak fiber on canvas. 200 x 100 cm / 78 3/4 x 39 3/8 inches.
Meditation 9402. 1994. Toli fiber on canvas. 200 x 100 cm / 78 3/4 x 39 3/8 inches.
Detail of 1990. Talc fiber on canvas, 260 x 390 cm / 102 3/8 x 153 7/8 inches.
Meditation 92013. 1992. Text fiber on canvas. 130 x 162 cm / 51 1/8 x 63 3/8 inches.
Meditation 92014, 1992. Tiki fiber on canvas. 82 x 142 cm / 32 5/16 x 55 7/8 inches.
Meditation 91207. 1990. Tak fiber on canvas. 162 x 130 cm / 63 7/8 x 51 1/8 inches.
Meditation 91010, 1991. Tak fiber on canvas, 130 x 162 cm / 51 1/8 x 63 3/4 inches.
Meditation, 1995. Tak fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/8 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation 37101. 1995. Text fiber on canvas. 344 x 122 cm / 135 1/8 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation, 351/5, 1995. Tusk fiber on canvas. 244 x 122 cm / 96 1/16 x 48 1/32 inches.
Meditation. 1999. Tobacco on canvas. 44.9 x 91.2 cm / 17 1/2 x 36 1/4 inches.
Meditation 9609, 1996. Tak fiber on canvas. 260 x 160 cm / 102 3/8 x 63 inches.
Meditation. 1998. Tak fiber on canvas. 162 x 112 cm / 63 25/32 x 44 1/16 inches.
Meditation. 1996. Tak fiber on canvas. 63 x 112 cm / 24 11/16 x 44 3/32 inches.
Meditation 96410. 1996. Tal local on canvas. 130 x 150 cm / 51 3/16 x 59 1/16 inches.
Meditation 96500. 1996. Text fiber on canvas. 130 x 150 cm / 51 3/16 x 59 1/16 inches.
Meditative Space. 1996. Talb fiber on canvas. 130 x 150 cm / 51 5/8 x 59 1/8 inches.
Untitled. 1993/4. Tab fiber on canvas. 154 x 130 cm / 75 3/8 x 51 1/4 inches.
Meditation 21222, 2001. Text fiber on canvas. 181.8 x 227.3 cm / 71 1/2 x 89 1/2 inches.
Meditation 23801. 2003. Tak fiber on canvas. 60.8 x 227.3 cm / 23 1/2 x 89 1/2 inches.
Meditation 981007. 1998. Tak fiber on canvas. 130 x 162 cm / 51 1/8 x 63 1/4 inches.
Meditation 241102, 2004. Talc fiber on canvas. 73 x 91 cm / 28 7/8 x 35 7/8 inches.