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Stuff that matters to Wayne

Was Japanese Artist Sharaku Actually Korean Kim Hong Do?

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Being married to a Korean it's hard not to be interested in Korean controversial issues. One of the more famous examples would be the Korean Dok-Do Island which Japan has given another name and tried to claim as their own. It's a glorified rock, but, of course, it represents nationality and borders so it's pretty serious. A new one that my student Eun Chae (ps. thanks for the free content!) introduced me to today is really interesting. Without further adieu, here is her short essay on the topic which sums up well the 'mystery'. Enjoy. ----- In Korea, if somebody asks who is the greatest painter in the country, most people would answer 'Kim Hong Do'. Kim Hong Do was a painter working for royalty, many artists at that time wanted to be him and sometimes they drew the same landscapes. In Japan, one of the most famous painters is 'Toshusai Sharaku'. However, scholars cannot be convinced that Toshusai Sharaku is Japanese because he suddenly appeared in 1794 and worked only for ten months and disappeared. Some scholars suggested that Kim Hong Do might be Toshusai Sharaku for several reasons and as a result, there is a hypothesis that Toshusai Sharaku, who is the one of the best three portrait painters, was actually Kim Hong Do, the greatest artist in Korea. The strongest evidence in support of the suggestion that Kim Hong Do is Sharaku, is that both Sharaku's productive period and Kim Hong Do's latency period are the same. Toshusai Sharaku suddenly appeared in 1794 and painted about 140 creations for ten months. Conveniently, at that time in Korea, King Jung Jo sent Kim Hong Do to Japan as a secret agent. Therefore, many people theorize that Kim Hong Do changed his name to Sharaku and drew paintings for financing his mission. In addition, it is difficult to establish where Sharaku was born or how Sharaku died. Thus it is no wonder that scholars hypothesize that the most the most convincing suspect is Kim Hong Do. As a secondary piece of evidence to prove that Sharaku and Hong Do are the same person, both shared a similar painting method. Kim Hong Do had his own personalized brush stroke which, at the end of the stroke, curved up. Comparing the two painters' drawings, Sharaku's brush stroke line looks very similar to Kim Hong Do's. Moreover, Kim Hong Do often drew Buddha with six toes in his painting, which is unusual. Surprisingly, Sharaku also drew six toes on his Buddha, exactly the same way Kim Hong Do drew. Some of Sharaku's poems were translated into the Korean language of that era, which was unusual. Some of Sharaku's Japanese poems made no sense when they were read by the Japanese reader. However, when Sharaku's poem translated into the Korean language of that time, it was perfectly comprehensible. In addition, found within one of Sharaku's poems, there are a word 'danwon (??)', which is a reference to his nick name. Furthermore, spanning across the breadth of his various works are other subtle references to the man Kim Hong Do. In conclusion, Sharaku and Hong Do have several things in common, including their perfectly matching productive and latency periods, their painting methods. To cement the evidence, the blazingly obvious references of Hong Do in Sharaku's poetry and the clearly Korean literary style leave little doubt that they are one and the same. However, even with the existence of such strong proof, there have not been found any official documents in either countries conclusively proving that Sharaku was indeed Hong do. This topic has become an increasingly popular topic in both Korea and Japan after both respective countries aired mystery shows alluding to the possibility of the shared identity. Neither countries boldly took a position but instead simply left the strong inferences for the viewer to decide.

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