

# Symbolic Design of Red Camellia from Jeju April 3rd Incident in South Korea

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**Abstract.** The 'Jeju April 3rd Incident' (hereinafter 4.3) happened in 1948 and is an essential keyword for understanding the Jeju culture of the Republic of Korea as it affects today. It was severely damaging that one in ten of the island's population was sacrificed during the period. Research on 4.3 is being conducted in various aspects; however, academic studies in design approaches have not yet progressed. From the perspective of Design History, the study aims to clarify 'how the red camellia flower was used as a symbolic design of 4.3' and 'how it has become a part of the visual culture in the Republic of Korea. This study will help understand the 4.3 field from a stereoscopic point of view and suggest a new interpretation that public awareness of the incident could increase due to the usage of the red camellia flower symbolic design.

**Keywords:** Jeju April 3rd Incident, Camellia, Symbolic Design, Design History, Visual Culture.

#### 1 Research Concerns

Jeju Island is the largest island in the southern Sea of Korea, where six hundred seventy-seven thousand people live there [1]. Citizens attacked the police station against state violence in return, and the government used this event to justify intervening in the matter further with violence. The beginning of the event date was March 1st, 1947, when the United States military took control before the Korean government was officially established. The residents were systemically massacred through armed conflict until September 21st, 1954 [4].

In Jeju Island, the red camellia flower [5] represents the 4.3 as a symbolic design. The residents use the camellia symbol in their daily lives, and this study assumes that the camellia was designated as an official symbol in the Republic of Korea during 2018. The incident was severely damaging, resulting in the sacrifice of one in ten of the island's population during that period, and it triggered a split between communities. The symbol has been involved in the historical process of social change related to the 4.3, from the 1940s to modern times. Therefore, the camellia holds various meanings in Jeju, such as representing the victims, forgiveness, reconciliation, and co-prosperity. Despite the significance of the camellia symbol in Jeju, it is not widely regarded in Korean society and design studies.

Since the early 2000s, there has been increasing discussion about the design results produced and distributed in Korean society. The critical evaluation of Korean Design History has been actively discussed through mediums such as design journalism-focused magazines [6]. Design historian and critic Min-soo Kim (1961~) has emphasized the importance of tracing the historical trajectory through prevalent images, which has emerged as a crucial step in critiquing the visual culture of the present time [7]. Understanding this historical context is seen as a prerequisite for establishing the aesthetic identity of future design.

Within the aforementioned context, this study focuses on the symbolic design of the red camellia associated with the 4.3. The design originated as a badge in 2008 and has seen increasing usage in the 2010s, becoming an integral part of Jeju's visual culture. According to critic Kim, designed artefacts such as the camellia badge can serve as evidence for interpreting social phenomena. In the case of camellia badges, the truth of the government-suppressed massacre became accessible with the advent of democratization in Korea. The researcher suggests that the camellia design played a significant role in effectively promoting awareness of the 4.3. The study aims to offer a new interpretation that enhances public awareness of these events by examining the camellia's design history and cultural significance.

## 2 Appearance of Camellia

Yo-bae Kang (1952~) is an artist who actively expressed social reality through his art, mainly focusing on the political and social situation in the Republic of Korea during the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Korean society was influenced by the military government led by Chung-hee Park (1917~1979) [8]. Kang witnessed the public's resistance to the dictatorship of the military government, which eventually led to the Doo-hwan Chun (1931~2021) [9] regime in the 1980s—this period marked the beginning of a nationwide democratization movement [10].

In the 1980s, there was a growing momentum in the participatory art movement in Korea. This movement found its embodiment in the theory of national art presented by the group Hyeonsildongin (Reality Coterie), which was formed in 1969. The coterie criticized the conventional abstract art that was detached from reality and argued for the expression of the nation's reality through art, incorporating elements of Korean traditional culture. As a result, artists who conveyed their perceptions and perspectives of

reality through specific artistic forms began to emerge in the late 1970s. They formed several organizations to sustain their realistic art activities [11].

Artists aligned with the Minjung(people's) Art movement [12] directly confronted the problems of reality in their artworks and expressed critical views on social issues. Kang's art is also a part of the Minjung Art movement, which directly confronts the problems of reality and expresses strong opinions on society. His work represents his contemplation of social reality, his involvement in the democratization movement, and his desire to reveal the truth of his hometown, Jeju, and express the essence of 4.3 through his artistic practice within the context of the real-life participatory art movement. Kang painted the history of Jeju Uprising [13] series for three years. Paintings served as a momentum to firmly connect the artist and account of Jeju. In 1992, Kang held an exhibition entitled 'The History of Jeju Uprising,' presenting 50 works from the series. The exhibition was evaluated as an attempt to make Jeju Uprising known to the global world and to open a new prospect for historical painting. Since then, Kang has constantly been painting under the theme of Jeju's nature and history [14].



Fig. 1. In 1992, Kang's exhibition of about 50 works on the theme of his hometown and 4.3 caused a great stir in Jeju society, and a number of newspaper articles presented comments on his exhibitions and works. Ju-heon Lee, '4.3항쟁' 화폭에 되새겨 연작 역사화 새 장 연다 '4.3 Uprising' A series of historical paintings will open a new chapter, reflecting on the canvas, Vol.1127 p. 9, Jeju, KOR: Hankyoreh News, 1992, Jan.



Fig. 2. The newspaper presented in Figure 1 is an article when Kang first held an exhibition under the theme of 4.3. Figure 2 is an article from 1998. About seven years later, the article uses the expression "상징symbol" (the red circle marked above) of 4.3 and introducing the "The Camellia Has Falls" a painting that can be said to be the original prototype of the symbol. Joo-sik Kim, 탐라史 의 거대한 벽화 '4.3'항쟁의 파라노마 The Paranoma of the '4.3 Uprising', a huge mural of Tamla History, p. 14, Jeju, KOR: Kyunghyang News, 1998.April.

The appearance of the camellia as a symbol for the 4.3 can be traced back to a painting "The Camellia Has Fallen" shown above in Figure 2 by artist Kang. The image created in 1992, and necessarily appears to persuade the public about the connection between 4.3 and camellia. The lower right of the picture captures the moment when a camellia falls in the form of a whole cluster. In the upper left corner, someone hits another person in the white snow field, making the impression of a colour contrast with scarlet blood [15]. Kang conceptualized victims as falling camellias, and many Jeju residents who have seen this idea shared the familiar pain. Therefore, the understanding of the meaning of camellias and their recognition as a symbol would have been shared within the region.

In Jeju, a cultural custom forbids the planting of camellias in yards. Camellia flowers possess a unique characteristic of dropping from the tree while their petals remain fresh and vibrant, lingering on the ground without browning for an extended period. This visual trait instils a sense of eeriness and fear, establishing an association between camellias and 'unexpected young death.' The notion of linking camellias to death, victims, and the 4.3 predated Kang's painting, originating from the inherent biological feature of camellias falling in clusters. Consequently, when Kang's visual representation in the

form of the painting 'The Camellia Has Fallen' emerged in 1992, it garnered significant recognition within Jeju society. Enduring years of oppression, the shared and sublimated pain experienced through art culminated in the acknowledgment of Kang's work as a pivotal piece. This study presents a new interpretation, suggesting that Kang's artistic creation visually manifested pre-existing abstract concepts and established more explicit impressions and connections between the flower and the incident. These connections continue to hold influence in contemporary times. The process of concretization played a vital role in solidifying the camellia as a symbolic design representing the 4.3.

However, his work did not possess a strong propagating power as a medium. The narrative characteristics of his paintings made it challenging for viewers to grasp their meaning at first glance. Moreover, since the paintings were displayed in exhibition halls and accessible only to visitors, their reach was inherently limited. In the following chapter, the research approach from a design and cultural perspective could shed light on the successful spread of the camellia as a symbol of the 4.3. The distribution of the camellia as a badge proved to be an effective means of dissemination. This approach would delve into the production, consumption, and distribution of artefacts, examining how their design played a role in their widespread acceptance. The camellia badge can be seen as a suitable media that reached the public through the design process.

## 3 Spread of Camellia Symbol

### 3.1 Politics and the Camellia Badge



Fig. 3. Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, Camellia Badge, Jeju: KOR, Designer Kyunghoon Park, 2008.

The camellia badge displayed in Figure 3, produced for the 60th Anniversary of the 4.3 in 2008, exemplifies its significant contribution to the formation and dissemination of the camellia symbol. Designed by Kyunghoon Park (1961~), he mentioned during the interview [16] that in the 1990s, he embraced the metaphorical visual expression presented by artist Kang and incorporated it into the promotional materials he produced. The badge featured a simplified depiction of the camellia, characterized by clear outlines and distinct colours. The design's simplicity, intuitiveness, affordability, and ease of production rendered it a powerful tool for spreading the symbolic design of the camellia for the 4.3. Camellia badges emerged nationwide through the press and social media outside the province. The campaign to wear a camellia badge has increased social

interest with the participation of famous Korean celebrities [17]. As 4.3 and camellia badges were frequently exposed through the broadcast, 4.3 Peace Foundation got requests for badges even after the Memorial Day Ceremony. The use of badges increased rapidly before and after the 70th Anniversary, and the meaning of the badge spread as an essential presence at the events related to 4.3.



**Fig. 4.** Jeju 4.3 Incident 70th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony, 19th President Moon, wearing a camellia badge and displayed camellias behind him. Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation.



**Fig. 5.** The attended victims and bereaved families were seen wearing camellia badges during the 70th Anniversary. In accordance with the cultural custom of wearing dark-coloured clothes at memorial events, the small red badges stood out due to their conspicuous characteristics (except for certain religious person). Videomug.

The use of the camellia symbol extended beyond individual daily lives on the island to official events hosted by the central government. Adopting the camellia as a symbol

at national events signifies the successful bottom-up process of the symbol's recognition. The memorial service attended by President Jae-in Moon [18] in 2018 demonstrates the transformation in the use of the symbol over time. At the "70th Anniversary 4.3 Victims Memorial Ceremony," shown in Figures 4 and 5, all participants, including President Moon, wore camellia badges. On this day, white chrysanthemums [19] and red camellias were also laid on the tombstone. In addition, real camellias were used for decoration, and variously designed camellia graphics appeared repeatedly on the large screen behind the podium. The 70th Anniversary 4.3 Victim Memorial Ceremony dramatically reveals the appearance of the symbolic design of camellia.

The recognition and awareness of the 4.3 increased among the public using the camellia symbol at official events and its promotion through mass media. The widespread use of camellia badges and their appearance in textbooks and educational materials increased awareness and recognition of camellia as a symbol for 4.3 among the public and future generations. The concept of "Jeju 4.3 = Camellia" gained recognition through national events attended by the president in 2018. News reports and article coverage helped spread the symbolic design to a broader audience beyond the Republic of Korea, and this meant the spread of awareness. A "4.3 Recognition Survey" [20] conducted by the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation revealed that the national awareness of the 4.3 increased by 10.6% around the 70th Anniversary. This was attributed to the promotion of the symbolic camellia design.

 Table 1. Distribution Status of Camellia Badges.

	Jeju Special Self- Govern- ing Provin- cial Gov- ernment	Jeju City Hall	Seog- wipo City Hall	Metro- politan and Pro- vincial Office of Educa- tion	MOU	Govern- ment Offices in Main- land	Individ- uals	Groups
Quan- tity of Distri- bution	178,685	41,200	31,000	50,000	59,900	30,000	69,279	157,251
Distri- bution Depart- ment	4.3 Sup- port Fac- ulty	Autonomous Ad- ministration, Resi- dence Community Center		Schools	Demo- cratic Peace and Hu- man Rights Network	15 Mu- nicipali- ties	4.3 Peace Memo- rial Museum and post mailing	

Total: 617,315

This table is based on Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, 2008~2018 Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation a Ten-Year History - Distribution Status of Camellia Badges, (Sep.30, 2018), Jeju: KOR, 2018, p. 297. As can be seen in the table above, public institutions and

educational institutions have requested a large number of camellia flower badges, and there has been demand not only in the province but also outside Jeju Island. This study also suggests that the production, distribution, and expansion of users of these camellia flower badges were active in 2018.

### 3.2 Design Analysis of the Camellia Badge

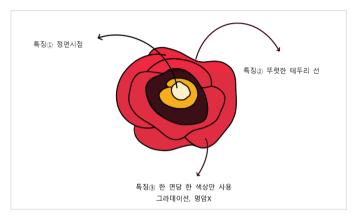


Fig. 6. Camellia Badge Design Analysis Seoul: KOR, 2022.

The camellia badge, placed in Fig. 6, is designed in shape shown above - top view-point - hence, it is a design that is undoubtedly distinguishable as a 'camellia.' The yellow centre of the flower and overlapping red petals are portrayed, indicating that colours reveal the features of the camellia. Camellia badges were designed using clear outlines, and single colours were used on each cell. Since there is no gradation of the colour, it is expressed two-dimensionally.

It also makes colour-contrasts with the background according to the cultural custom of wearing dark-coloured clothes at memorial events. The vividness of the object is an essential factor in the process of spreading symbols. One of the important assumptions in this study is, if the symbol were not the camellia, 4.3 would not have been spread to the public as the current recognition. Due to the clear outlines, the contrast of colour, and the simplified design, camellia badges are perceived more intuitively than the painting 'The Camellia Has Fallen.' Therefore, in terms of simplicity, efficiency, and economic feasibility, which are the conditions for symbols to spread, the camellia badge is considered as an artefact that spreads camellia as the symbolic design of the 4.3.

# 4 Value of the Camellia Symbol Design

Visual communication is not merely a 'perception phenomenon' but also an 'interpretation' within a cultural environment. The term 'graphic design' inherently encompasses a complex socio-cultural knowledge and practice rooted in historical experiences and associations. It should be capable of reflecting the new content and dynamics emerging

in modern society. Design should demonstrate how images are created and communicated within a culture through historical processes, such as the use of 'words' and 'writing' by people within that culture. Furthermore, design should have the ability to create new visual languages that challenge the obsession with existing forms and techniques [21].

This insistence on 'design should be able to create new visual languages that can break up the obsession' is related to using camellia as a symbolic design in response to the suppression of state violence. The design can subvert dominant narratives and highlights previously untold stories. By incorporating diverse perspectives and challenging established power structures, design can disrupt the traditional hierarchy of historical narratives and centre marginalized voices [22]. This can lead to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of history, fostering empathy and promoting social cohesion.

Design can serve as a potent instrument for promoting inclusivity, representation, and the dissemination of historical truth. By interrogating established narratives, amplifying marginalized voices, and facilitating meaningful engagement, design plays a vital role in fostering a more inclusive society that recognizes and values diverse perspectives, acknowledges historical realities, and advances social justice. Through its visual language and communicative power, design has the capacity to cultivate empathy, understanding, and transformative social change. By giving voice to the victims and challenging official narratives, the symbolic camellia design has emerged as a formidable tool for conveying alternative viewpoints and highlighting the sacrifices endured during the 4.3. Through participatory design processes, individuals willingly embrace the symbol, forging a sense of unity and collective agency. Design provides a platform for collective storytelling, memorialization, and the sharing of personal narratives, fostering empathy and understanding among individuals and communities.

The researcher considers using a natural and visually appealing object like the 'camellia' helps soften the intensity and bitterness associated with the tragic events of 4.3. Furthermore, the symbol allows for indirect expression and argumentation, allowing individuals to delve deeper into the history or move on. The camellia represents the sacrifices made by the Jeju people and their perspective, challenging the official narrative presented by the Korean government. As a prominent symbolic design element, the camellia badge has played a significant social role in promoting awareness and fostering a sense of solidarity. The badge is a visible symbol of remembrance and empathy, creating a shared identity among wearers. It represents a collective effort to acknowledge their suffering and advocate for social justice. Wearing the badge becomes a visible act of resistance against forgetting, ensuring that the memory of the Jeju 4.3 Incident remains alive in the public consciousness.

Furthermore, the camellia badge is a powerful tool for education and awareness-raising. By wearing the badge in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, individuals transmit historical knowledge and promote empathy among younger generations. The badge serves as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging past injustices and working towards a more inclusive and just society.

The camellia badge has a profound social role in promoting awareness, fostering solidarity, and encouraging collective action. It serves as a visual representation of remembrance, empathy, and resistance against the erasure of history. Reflection on the Jeju 4.3 Incident and the role of design in promoting public awareness and engagement prompts further exploration and discussion. Design studies offer research perspectives such as semiotics, visual communication, participatory design, social justice, and national identity, shedding light on the complexities of historical representation, memory construction, and design's potential to influence social consciousness. By delving deeper into these areas, the research can develop and enhance the value of design in shaping public discourse, fostering empathy, and creating a more inclusive and informed society.

#### 5 Conclusion

In chronological order, Jeju had a cultural association with death, particularly in relation to fallen camellia flowers. Kang's artwork, metaphorically representing the victims of the 4.3 as a camellia, emerged as a familiar flower symbol in Jeju, intricately connected to death. Kang's visualization of the abstract connection between camellia, death, and the 4.3 incident embodied its significance. Recognizing the metaphorical expression, Park embraced the camellia as a symbol and designed badges in its form, distributing them to the private sector. The camellia symbol and the Jeju 4.3 incident were intertwined with the political landscape of the Republic of Korea, becoming a significant consideration for the election of a president from a specific political party. As the symbol gained social discourse and usage, President Moon and his government, upon assuming power after nine years, organized the 70th anniversary event, elevating it to a major occasion. Since then, the design featuring the camellia symbol expanded beyond badges, encompassing various media such as digital platforms, banners, posters, news coverage, and educational curricula. The image used during the president's event is regarded as an official endorsement of the symbol by the state, signifying its recognized status. Consequently, efforts have been made to preserve its meaning and identity by passing down the symbol through educational initiatives to future generations.

In conclusion, the camellia as a symbolic design has been successfully utilized for public awareness and engagement, leaving a lasting impact on Jeju's cultural fabric. Further exploring the research perspectives of design studies could continue to enhance the value and impact of design in shaping public awareness, fostering empathy, and preserving the memory of historical events like the 4.3. Design can challenge dominant narratives, introduce marginalized voices, and contribute to a more inclusive and informed society when used sensitively and ethically. The case of the camellia symbol in the context of the Jeju 4.3 Incident demonstrates the transformative potential of design in shaping public consciousness and fostering empathy and understanding. Through the contents of the research described so far, it is predictable that it will continue as a practical design in the future. Therefore, this study suggests that it is time for social discussion on developing the value of symbolic camellia design.

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- 8. Chung-hee Park, 박정희 Pak-Chŏng-hũi 차正熙, Park Chung-hee, the President of South Korea from 1963 to 1979, presided over a transformative era characterized by remarkable economic growth commonly referred to as the "Miracle on the Han River." Despite the notable advancements achieved during his tenure, Park's leadership was marred by a prevalent authoritarianism that stifled political dissent and curtailed civil liberties. Employing strict censorship measures and the banning of opposition parties, his regime exhibited a notable disregard for democratic principles. Nevertheless, Park's assassination in 1979 evoked a complex and contested legacy, as his accomplishments in fostering economic development remain intertwined with the controversies surrounding his authoritarian rule.
- 9. Doo-hwan Chun, 전두환 Jeon-du-hwan- 全斗煥, was a prominent political figure in South Korea who served as the President from 1980 to 1988. He rose to power through a military coup in 1980, following the assassination of President Park Chung-hee. Chun's presidency was characterized by authoritarian rule and widespread human rights abuses. His government implemented strict censorship, suppressed political dissent, and curtailed civil liberties, leading to significant protests and social unrest. Chun's tenure ended in 1988 with the transition to a more democratic government following widespread public demand for political reform.
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- 12. Minjung Art, 민중미술 min-jung-mi-sul 民衆美術, A social transformation movement centered on progressive artists in the 1980s. National art people's art has created a critical reflection on the existing oppressive and formalistic art and has created a modern function of art that actively expands the visual sensibility and perception of reality and life

- in society, politics, and daily life. In addition, along with the flow of the democratic movement and cultural community of the time as well as the art world, the social role of art was restored, and the perception of a critical perspective was revived.
- 13. Designating or Justifying 4.3 is ongoing discussion in Korean society. During the interview with the designer Kyung-hoon Park, naming 4.3 as an 'incident' will cause misunderstanding of the history. Since it contains the concept of 'accident' which happen by disaster. It may be different to name 4.3 depending on what background someone have while living in Korea, but this paper is marked according to the official name that is still used. However, aforementioned context was cited by Hakgojae Gallery hence, the researcher did not change the term in respect of the quote.
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- 16. May 26, 2022, an interview with artist Kyunghoon Park and the researcher, Jeju: KOR. Kyung-hoon Park, 박경훈 Bak Gyeonghun 朴景勲, He donated the copyright to the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation in 2021.
- 17. Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, 2008~2018 Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation a Ten-Year History Distribution Status of Camellia Badges, Sep.30, 2018), Jeju: KOR, 2018, p. 297.
- 18. Jae-in Moon, 문재인- Mun-jae-in 文在寅, Jae-in Moon is the 19th president of the Republic of Korea, serving from 2017 to 2022. He was selected after the impeachment by candlelight vigils, and he took a different step from the previous administration on the Jeju 4.3 incident.
- 19. White chrysanthemums, 국화꽃 Gukwakkot 菊花꽃, is a flower used as a memorial in Korean funerals, and it is a flower that can be commemorated with more diverse meanings than the camellia flower in 4.3.
- 20. Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, 2008~2018 Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation a Ten-Year History 4.3 Recognition Survey, Nov 7~Dec7, Jeju: KOR, 2018, p. 206. The Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation conducted a "4.3 Recognition Survey" from November 7th to December 7th, 2018, to confirm the degree of understanding and awareness of 4.3. According to a survey conducted by 17 cities and provinces, 78.7% of the people knew Jeju 4.3. Compared to 68.1% undertaken in 2017, the national awareness of 4.3 increased by 10.6% around the 70th Anniversary, resulting from the symbolic design promotion project.
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