

BLOOD, BIRTH, IMAGINATION: ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND SOUTH KOREAN  
POPULAR CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines ethnic nationalism in South Korea through four case studies in popular culture. My central argument is that the state government of South Korea mobilizes popular sentiment around hegemonic notions of national and ethnic belonging, creating a Korean imagined community that encourages members to accept the state as sole arbiter of their identity. Koreans are encouraged to read both past and present from the perspective of particular ideological positions which favor the socio-political status quo. Chapter One examines actress Lee Young-ae in the context of the “Korean Wave” and national branding. Lee Young-ae is a “state celebrity” in whose body the dual discourses of ethnic purity and national advancement synergistically advance. Chapter Two involves discourse analysis of Hines Ward’s 2005 trip to South Korea after winning the Super Bowl MVP title; while American news outlets Orientalize this self-proclaimed “Korean African-American,” in South Korea he is reappropriated, demonstrating how certain mythic and blood based notions of national belonging can be advanced in the process. In my third chapter, I critically examine the Seodaemun Prison History Museum. Here, interactive displays encourage children to make real the bloody history of Japanese colonization while leveraging their antagonism towards a reviled Japanese Other in the present. In Chapter Four, I study a children’s art display dealing with a territorial dispute between Korea and Japan. Students at Gyeyang Middle School drew pictures about Dokdo, a pair of islands claimed by both countries, and their work was

displayed in a Seoul subway station. These images depict state sanctioned violence committed upon an abject Japanese Other. Historical injustices inform notions of national belonging, defining Korean identity as that which is not Japanese. Finally, in my conclusion I examine how the global economic crisis may affect Korean ethnic nationalism in the years to come.

For the eleventh of January, 2006

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While teaching in Korea from the summers of 2005 to 2006, I came to be close friends with two Korean men who worked in the city. I was introduced to both of them by their “English names”<sup>1</sup> John and Terry, and spent a good portion of my free hours in their care. My time with John, Terry, and their families were moments that I have since come to greatly treasure. These times were infallibly those in which I felt most at home in Korea, where the burden of feeling out of place was mitigated by their friendship. It is to these two men and their families that I owe my greatest debt of thanks, though there are of course many others.

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My brother Bradley and his wife Anna are also deserving of praise. I still recall strolling through the Mall of America with my brother; my nineteen-year-old self convinced that I would be perfectly content delivering greasy pies for Pizza Hut the rest of my days. He looked over his shoulder and asked me simply “would you really?” I paused and said “No. No, I guess not.” I needed him to ask me that, and I needed to

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<sup>1</sup> Much like students of a foreign language here, Koreans often adopt names reflective of their studies.

answer out loud. The next week I applied to, and was accepted at, Winona State University in Minnesota. Anna has been a source of continued inspiration in her professionalism, drive, and humility. She also makes a mean squash soup.

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<sup>2</sup> Soon to be released on DVD.

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## INTRODUCTION

The impetus to write this thesis comes from thirteen months of living in South Korea as an EFL<sup>1</sup> teacher. After graduating from the University of Minnesota Duluth with a degree in Anthropology and Cultural Studies, I found employment at a private school, or *hagwan*, in one of the recently developed satellite cities around Seoul. The choice to live and work in South Korea wasn't deliberate, but it wasn't entirely random either. Previously, I had been to Hong Kong and Beijing with friends, and knew I wanted to return to East Asia, preferably for a longer period time. The choice of South Korea essentially hinged on the savvy marketing of an extremely active cadre of private school recruiters online; that is, I put "work overseas" into a Google search, and came up with a predominantly South Korean set of contacts and resources.

I soon settled into cordial email correspondence with a man name Charles, a Korean-born American who had returned to South Korea and was now making his living in part through the recruitment of EFL teachers. Since he had lived most of his life in America, his English was impeccable, but he was also fluent in Korean. I found in him a trustworthy and often surprisingly frank ambassador of sorts, and I quickly agreed to work with him at "Tops Academy" in a booming suburb outside of Seoul.

My new home, called Gurishi, contained over 300,000 people, but is geographically around the size of Bowling Green, Ohio. I lived in a third floor apartment in an entertainment district off a main street, and walked a scant twenty minutes to work every weekday. Although

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<sup>1</sup> English as Foreign Language

there was a relatively fair-sized population of foreigners<sup>2</sup> in Gurishi, around sixty at my best guess, I could easily go weeks without seeing another *waeguk saram*<sup>3</sup> such as myself.

My workday would typically start around 11:00am and end at six in the evening. I was responsible for approximately 120 students aged five to fifteen, the majority of these nearer the lower end of the age spectrum. I taught six classes a day in addition to supplemental one-on-one classes arranged by the *Hagwan* (private English school) director on an ad hoc basis. At night I exercised in a gym across the street, and on the weekends I took extended adventure-tours by foot with my dog Biscuit. My life in Korea, once jagged and nerve-wracking, would eventually take on the more rounded contours of routine; the sheer repetition of everyday practice wearing down the rough edges of life as a foreigner in a historically xenophobic country, where news media would move from one foreign threat to another, and foreign friends of mine from Malaysia and the Philippines would often invoke irritated disparagement from shopkeepers who mistook them for Koreans.<sup>4</sup>

## I: Theoretical Framework

My thesis, in the broadest sense, deals with ethnic nationalism in South Korea, which I conceive of as an imagined category used to naturalize state power and repress potential threats to the ruling political structure's legitimacy. Though I argue that hegemonic notions of national identity are constructed, often through popular culture, I recognize that these categories are none-

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<sup>2</sup> The bulk of English speaking foreigners in South Korea are EFL teachers. The Korean government requires EFL teachers to hold a passport from one of the following six nations: The United States, Canada, The United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, or New Zealand

<sup>3</sup> Foreigner (most notably a white foreigner)

<sup>4</sup> Prior to Japanese occupation Korea was known as the "Hermit Kingdom," a dubious honorific now reserved for North Korea. My own experience with anti-foreigner sentiment is mostly second-hand, though I have been sharply accosted a handful of times while walking, told to "go home," and had the F-bomb lobbed in my direction more than once.

the-less extremely powerful and “make sense” to those who identify in this way. In short, I agree with authors such as Gi-wook Shin, who, in *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, argues that Koreans’ intensely felt national identity comes from deep convictions of “common blood and shared ancestry” (Shin 17). Shin, citing Emile Durkheim, contends that Korean ethnic nationalism is a form of “mechanical solidarity” that enhances the idea of similarity between members of a society, and can “grow only in inverse relationship to personality” (Durkheim in Shin 17). But, while Durkheim would have seen this type of nationalism drop off with modernization, in South Korea the opposite seems to be true; ethnic nationalism has indeed garnered strength when leveraged as a protective bulwark against malignant forces of globalization and the taint of an Othered Japanese menace, both of which are (re)constituted as threats that would ostensibly seek to undermine group cohesiveness.

I use the concept of imagined communities postulated by Benedict Anderson in 1983 to describe the productive power of the state in terms of ethnic nationalism. As Anderson describes, the rise of modern nation-states cannot be understood as simply the rise of legal or bureaucratic apparatuses. While nation states may set laws, extract punishments, impose taxes, wage wars, and indeed, have the necessary ability to back their administrative power with force (police and military), their true power lies in the extent to which they can convince, through new technologies of print media, a wide spectrum of otherwise disinterested people to see themselves as *subjects* of the state. Though these newly minted citizens would never meet most of the people whose opinions the news media ostensibly came to embody, they could nevertheless imagine themselves as having something in common with all of them. This direct and mutually beneficial relationship between the project of state authority and the capitalistic expansion of mass media evokes what Anderson terms “official nationalism,” or a national imagined

community constructed by the state around ideas of inclusion and exclusion. In the South Korean case, these ideas are advanced through mythological ideas of blood, patriotism, and heritage.

It is my contention that the South Korean government mobilizes popular sentiment to produce a Korean imagined community that will look favorably upon preservation of the status quo. The state acts hegemonically to contain possible resistances; people are convinced of the authority of the state government because it becomes the chief author of national narratives, inscribing on the public body what it is to be Korean, subverting the force of potential counter-discourses by making them virtually impossible to articulate. This process is what Arjun Appadurai refers to as the state claiming “coevality” with the nation. The state, in this case, refers to the special interests of the ruling class, and particularly those of the state government, which is, after all, concerned primarily with justifying its own authority. The nation, on the other hand, represents the interests of “the people,” which, although impossible to condense into any array of perspectives, is none-the-less representative of an inherent threat to state legitimacy. Since the interests of the national body are divergent, multi-perspectival, and marked by “disjunctures and difference,” the state must smooth over these fissures if it is to sustain its legitimacy and power (Appadurai 1990).

The four chapters of my thesis deal with the nuts and bolts of the state ethno-nationalist project. I rely heavily on Roland Barthes’ idea of mythology throughout; to describe how constructed ideas of nation come to seem natural for those who are subject to them. The idea that ethno-nationalist narratives are natural hides the role of those power structures which work upon the raw material of history, crafting, in this case, a seamless trajectory of state authority from past to present and into a distant future (Barthes). I also draw on the work of heritage

scholars such as James Abrams, Scott Magelssen, and David Brett, as they provide more exacting theoretical implements for nuanced dissection of specific case studies.

## **II: Chapter Breakdown**

*Blood, Birth, Imagination* is comprised of four chapters in two parts. Each chapter offers a sustained examination of a different case study dealing with the state ethno-nationalist project. Parts I and II are thematically distinct yet complimentary sections that roughly divide my work in terms of analytical scope. A more detailed discussion of these four chapters should elucidate this summary more clearly.

In Chapter One I argue that Korean actress Lee Young-ae constitutes what I term a “state celebrity” in that her celebrity is fundamentally dependent upon the success of the state, and vice versa. As an originating and driving force behind the “Korean Wave,”<sup>5</sup> Lee Young-ae becomes part of a state project of national branding. That is, the success and international appeal of the popular culture products of South Korea, in particular the Korean Wave, become the *sine qua non* of South Korean economic advancement within a global capitalist frame, and the state touted pre-condition for social advancement promised to domestic citizens.

Coeval with Lee Young-ae’s celebrity at home comes the state’s need to inscribe in her body discourses of “natural beauty.” She is constituted as fundamentally pure and is ideologically imposed upon an equally sacrosanct and powerfully evocative set of national myths. Here, the state becomes the sole arbiter of a monolithic Korean identity that is based on heritage discourse, or mythologized notions of blood and birth. Potentially disruptive alternate

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<sup>5</sup> This term is described in detail in chapter one.

forms of imagined community are thus subsumed under the hegemonic initiatives of state control.

Chapter Two concerns American football star Hines Ward and his 2005 trip to South Korea. Ward, born in Korea of a Korean mother and African-American G.I. father, traveled to South Korea after winning the MVP award in Superbowl XL. This trip was dubbed a “homecoming” by media sources in both America and South Korea. In America, media outlets such as ESPN drew on Orientalist discourse to frame the story. Hines Ward was portrayed as a hero who, by traveling to the exotic, cruel, and hopelessly backwards Korean peninsula, could instill in his homeland a measure of Western civilized virtue. However, South Korean media outlets constructed Ward as a local hero in very different ways. Newspapers like the *Korea Times* and the *Chosun Ilbo* championed his enormous success while discursively embedding him in the Korean imagined community, espousing Ward as a truly “Korean” celebrity despite both his lack of familiarity with the country, and his mother’s vehement distaste for the treatment she endured as the mother of a bi-racial child living in South Korea before they emigrated to the United States before Ward was two years old (Cho & Faiola).

I see the Hines Ward story in an international context as a concrete example of the global meeting the local. Specifically, careful analysis and interpretation reveals that Ward is appropriated as a signifier of essentialized Koreanness at the same time he is mobilized by the Western media as essentially American. Ward is indigenized in a deliberate attempt by the Korean state to bolster its international reputation. In the process, local Koreans are given spectacular displays that seem to offer a glimmer of hope to the disenfranchised and nationally derided population of bi-racial children living in Korea. But this is a false hope since acceptance is clearly predicated on stardom. With their only option to strive towards this nigh impossible

dream, bi-racial Koreans are seduced by fantasies of global display while at the same time suffering from social immobility at home.

Part I, composed of these first two chapters, is thematically distinct from Part II. Part I couches Korean ethnic-nationalism more deliberately in the global capitalist free-market context of pan-regional and international culture flows. That is, I examine how discourses of ethnic-nationalism surrounding the celebrities Lee Young-ae and Hines Ward are leveraged by the state as a conditional response to processes of globalization, international and inter-regional media currents, and wider struggles of identity between a problematically constituted Occident and Orient. I argue that these discourses constitute an attempt to create a distinctive national brand image for South Korea. The culture industries produce an image of Korea that is profitable as an entertainment and tourist export, while concomitantly producing a hegemonic set of values and beliefs about what it means to be Korean for those who wish to identify (and be identified) as such.

Part II, consisting of Chapters Three and Four, deals with ethnic-nationalism in a more deliberately limited context. My case studies here are geographically and spatially grounded locations from which Korean identity is, in some way, performed and/or enacted upon bodies. Analysis of an interactive cultural heritage museum and a children's public art display evince narratives of Korean identity constituted in direct opposition to a dehumanized, menacing Japanese Other.

That Koreanness would be defined as that which is *not Japanese* should not be surprising. As I note in Chapter Four, Koreans have directly experienced Japanese rule and oppression at various times in history, most notably during their brutal formal occupation from 1910 to 1945. During these thirty-five years Japan waged a ceaseless campaign against Koreans



(and Koreanness) at every level in an attempt to stamp out any real or perceived threats to their rule. Schools taught Japanese primarily, children were instructed to worship Japanese deities, farmers were systematically driven from their lands through racist reformation laws, Koreans were replaced at every level of government by Japanese, Japanese police exercised total discretion in meting out punishment, and Korean women were used by the Japanese army as virtual sex slaves used for “comfort” by scores of Japanese soldiers until they withered beyond use or simply died off from malnutrition and disease.

My arguments in Part II respect the reality of this history while examining why it is that these real events continue to be spun out in narratives by the state in service of a hegemonic Korean imagined community. That is, why are the Japanese still being cast in the role of perpetual aggressor over sixty years after their occupation of the Korean peninsula? I contend that the Japanese are mobilized as a politically expedient Other to legitimize the mutually supporting discourses of both an ethnically pure Korean national body, and the supremacy of the ruling government as arbiter of that purity. By so doing, the state government claims intrinsic coevality with the nation, and is thus able to suppress, contain, or simply exclude the possibility of alternate articulations of Korean identity.

Chapter Three involves analysis of a tourist attraction / heritage site outside of Seoul. Seodaemun prison was used by the Japanese to house Korean freedom fighters during the period of occupation from 1910-1945. In the late 80's, Seodaemun was re-opened by the Korean state as an educational site meant to both inform and invigorate the patriotic spirit of national citizens through immersion in a three-dimensional, interactive, pageant of death and depravity. Again, the Japanese are cast in the familiar role of national boogey-man as they torture, maim, and rape Korean nationalists in eerily lifelike animatronic displays.

I argue that the success of Seodaemun lies in its ability to interpellate citizens, and children specifically, by emitting an aura of authenticity foregrounded in the (re)enactment of real historic occurrences in the ostensibly unaltered site in which they occurred. Though this authenticity is “real” in large part, it is also imagined in that the state has framed the site in such a way as to emphasize certain elements over others. For example, though the prison saw service under Korean tyrants such as Park Chun-hee in the sixties and seventies, where equally patriotic freedoms fighters were doubtless subject to similar torture, emphasis here is on the history of the site as the tangible location of Japanese aggression. Indeed, visitors are encouraged to interact with certain exhibits, letting a Japanese jury sentence them to death, feeling the tight confines of a torture box, or experiencing the sudden drop of the hangman’s stool.

By targeting children as the prime beneficiaries of these lessons, the state attempts to claim the legitimacy of national struggle both in a mythologized past, and into the future. The Japanese in this case, as in the Dokdo chapter, exist primarily as the Other upon which a state-promulgated Korean imagined community may constitute itself. The children’s interactions with the site both underscore its authenticity, and make its messages seem relevant in the present day through incorporation of anti-Japanese graffiti, which becomes an exhibit in its own right, one all the more convincing due to the seemingly spontaneous nature of the children’s unlawfully articulated sentiment.

A territorial dispute with Japan over the *Dokdo* islands is my focus in my final chapter. These two jagged outcroppings, lying approximately forty miles east of South Korea in the Sea of Japan, are the focus of intense nationalist energies directed by the state. Though South Korea physically possesses the islands, their status in terms of international law is still ambiguous, and

has been for over five hundred years. Recently, politicians in South Korea have used the islands to rally popular support, raising the specter of an imperialistic Japanese Other in the process.

A children's art display in a Seoul subway station will provide the basis for the crux of my arguments in this chapter. As part of a deliberate state strategy to interpellate<sup>6</sup> docile citizens, children were encouraged to draw pictures relating to the Dokdo issue. A majority of these pictures depict extreme violence being perpetrated upon the Japanese people (or Japan itself) by a righteous South Korea. The pictures are noteworthy both in their cartoonish brutality and the extent to which the Japanese are treated as abject. That is, the Japanese are depicted quite vehemently as filth and refuse that threatens to contaminate the conversely pure and unspoiled land of Korea.

Overall, this study will shed light on some of the specific processes and strategies by which the South Korean government maintains its role as chief architect of national identity. It is a simplified picture in that I have intentionally located study in digestible "snapshots" of cultural activity, drawing connections to outside elements when appropriate, but choosing to limit my study to that which is most observable, direct, and clearly attendant to the issues at hand. I believe that by pursuing this policy, I leave open the possibility of theorizing a Korean ethnic nationalism that is not harmful to Korea's neighbors, or to its citizens.

I do not consider Korean ethnic nationalism as an evil to be eradicated, but a fact of social life, a dense, interlocking web of living significations based on thousands of years of actual (if problematically invented) history and tradition. My final two chapters, for instance, deal with anti-Japanese sentiment. It would be foolhardy to think that animosity towards Japan is strictly "imagined" since Japan was in fact responsible for a state strategy of imperialist expansion which led to the occupation, and subsequent brutally repressive control, of the Korean

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<sup>6</sup> I use "interpellate" as Althusser does, to describe how people are constituted as subjects.

peninsula. Koreans living today can still be reminded of this history through an aging population of grandmothers and grandfathers whose bodies and hearts still bear the scars of colonialization. However, this history has largely become the fodder for politically expedient scapegoating, and part of an extremely destructive arsenal of state hegemony, as I argue. If South Korea is to stake its claim as one of the leading democracies of East Asia, and a major contender in the global capital market as their state policy makes so clear, then the government must respond to the concerns of a growing and diverse citizenry in an open, inclusive, and transparent manner without relying on static and inflexible notions of the Korean national body.

## CHAPTER I

### NATIONAL BEAUTY, NATURAL BEAUTY: LEE YOUNG-AE AS STATE CELEBRITY

*Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from*

-Roland Barthes

Since the great economic strides of the Park Chun-hee era<sup>7</sup>, “advancement” has been a central tenet of the South Korean nation-state. Ideas of national strength, independence, and international stature have informed the basis of how economic and cultural policies are drafted, implemented, and executed in South Korea. I argue here that celebrity is an important ingredient in the Korean strategy of national advancement. Stars like Lee Young-ae become intrinsically bound with the interests of the state, each advancing the other’s legitimacy. I call this type of icon a “state celebrity,” in whose body the objectives of the South Korean polity are indelibly inscribed. The crafted state celebrity is also incorporated inter-textually within a “national brand image,” which works synergistically towards dual objectives. First, to sell the notion of Korean strength to those beyond her borders; and second, to sell this idea to those within her borders, effectively serving a hegemonic agenda, and in both cases reinforcing state-sponsored ethnic nationalism.

The power of Lee Young-ae as a national symbol is directly relational to the invisibility of her construction as such. I examine two pervasive media discourses on this star, using Roland Barthes’ idea of mythology to guide discussion. In each case, I am interested in the way Lee

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<sup>7</sup> Park Chun-hee was South Korea’s president from 1961 to 1979. Brought into power through a military coup, and assassinated by his own head of the Korean CIA, Park’s regime was characterized by violence and repression of civil liberties in the name of national solidarity and defense. However, he is generally regarded as among Korea’s greatest leaders. Park revitalized Korean industry, and introduced sweeping reform that launched the Korean economy to globally competitive standards in a relatively short time span.

Young-ae is constructed to hide the relationships of power that brought her into being as a public person. In the words of Barthes, I demonstrate how “history evaporates” in Lee Young-ae. In the first instance, she is construed as a “national beauty,” meaning that she functions as a cultural, economic, and political extension of the state, whose viability thus rests, in no small measure, squarely on her shoulders. Secondly, she is touted as a “natural beauty,” a discourse that reinforces the idea of Korean strength as a quality derived from the connection of purity and heritage. These discourses are not exclusive, and in fact their power depends on mutual reinforcement within the complex field of signification that is South Korean popular culture. It is my aim to lay these complexities of signification bare through contextualized analysis of an array of cultural texts. Specifically, my arguments rely heavily on newspaper articles about Lee Young-ae and a critical reading of a Korean-produced feature-length Munhwa Broadcasting Company documentary on the star, as well as a semiotic analysis of her film *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*.

### **I: National Beauty: Lee Young-ae, the Korean Wave, and the Construction of a State Celebrity**

The trajectory of Lee Young-ae’s stardom is fundamentally aligned with larger Korean aims of national advancement. This is evinced most clearly through discussion of her fame in terms of the “Korean Wave,” South Korea’s attempt to construct a profitable national brand image around the export of its cultural products. I argue here that this intrinsic connection creates a state celebrity. As I use it, state celebrity signifies a media persona of significant notoriety in whose body the ideology of state legitimacy is inscribed, and in whose fame the material survival of the state in terms of global capitalism is, in some significant measure,

invested. The state celebrity serves a hegemonic function in terms of domestic consumers by interpellating them *a priori* in a nationalist paradigm of advancement and, as we shall see later, ethnic purity<sup>8</sup>.

Lee Young-ae was born in Seoul in 1971, and graduated from Chung-ang University with an M.A. in Theater and Film (leeyoungae.net). She got her start on Korean television in the early 1990s, and has gone on to become one of the most influential, trusted, and recognizable celebrities in South Korea today. She has earned a dozen awards for acting, including eight for best actress (leeyoungae.net), and was voted “most trustable spokesperson” by SBS radio listeners in 2007 (Asianbite).

While her early career was marked by relative obscurity, Lee Young-ae shot to stardom and pan-regional acclaim with her role in the blockbuster thriller *Joint Security Area (JSA)* in 2000 (Leung). *JSA* was the most profitable box office draw in Korean history until that time, surpassing even the mega-hit *Shiri*, which was boastfully dubbed by local press “the little fish that sank *Titanic*” (Leong 27). *JSA* brought Lee Young-ae a degree of acclaim unknown to most Korean stars up to that point, but it was the 2003 to 2004 television drama *The Jewel in the Palace* that fixed her role as a state celebrity throughout much of East Asia.

*The Jewel in the Palace* (henceforth *Jewel*) is a historical period costume drama set in the early sixteenth century. Lee Young-ae plays Seo Jang Geum, who is purported to be the first female royal court physician in Korean history (Chua & Iwabuchi). Like *JSA*, *Jewel* features Lee Young-ae in the familiar role of adjunct to the national ruling class. In *JSA* she served the South Korean political-military structure, which she worked with to discover a killer along the demilitarized zone. In *Jewel*, Lee Young-ae worked for the Dynastic aristocracy as a medical

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<sup>8</sup>Though my description of Lee Young-ae as state celebrity is specific to South Korea, similar processes are evident the world over. For an outstanding analysis of celebrity / state interrelations in India, see *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India*, by Preminda Jacob.

attaché. In each case Lee Young-ae becomes synonymous with the nation. Her triumphs and struggles are not hers alone, but become interchangeable with those of the system that produced her. This trope of “woman as nation” should be a familiar one to academics of all stripes. I will not engage with this body of scholarship in any detailed way here, though I am indebted to scholars such as Caren Kaplan, Mino Moallem, and Davia K. Stasiulis for their work along these lines.

In South Korea, *Jewel* was watched by an average of 47% of the population over the course of its broadcast (visitkorea “Korean TV”). Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi call *Jewel* “the drama series that has the greatest impact on all the predominantly ethnic-Chinese locations in East Asia...” (Chua & Iwabuchi 6). In Hong Kong, *Jewel* was “the most-watched of any program in the last 25 years” (Chien). Viewers in Vietnam and Taiwan also followed the travails of Seo Jang Geum, so much so, in fact, that state media were soon scrambling for government protection (Chien). *Jewel* even saw success in Japan, an already saturated market that has been traditionally averse to Korean popular culture (Osmos).

Overall, *Jewel* grossed \$40 million worldwide in direct sales. But this figure does not include profits from related ventures such as *Jewel* themed restaurants and an amusement park in Hong Kong, along with Korean packaged travel excursions to sites in Korea that are heavily featured in the program (Hua). In fact, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that *Jewel in the Palace* “drew large numbers of fans from abroad who flocked to locations where it was filmed” contributing “to the achievement of a record 6 million [tourist] arrivals” (OECD). This tourist dimension calls attention to the ways media texts operate within wider cultural and economic systems.



The success of Lee Young-ae as a state celebrity cannot be reduced to a single movie, program, or even the trajectory of a career seen through cultural texts. Such notoriety must not be separated from wider trends concerning the global flow of popular culture traffic in East Asia. I view Lee Young-ae not as a forward marching procession of texts to be analyzed, but as a dynamic part of broader and infinitely more complex shifts in the production and consumption of popular culture in East Asia. In short, as social and political theorist Chua Beng Huat notes, while critical analysis of particular popular culture products are necessary,

...the larger analytic interest should be oriented towards the structures and modalities through which the products partake in the social and economic material relations within the different locations where the products are produced, circulated and consumed (Chua 2004, 204).

These “structures and modalities” are best evinced through discussion of national brand image and “the Korean Wave,” which is the focus of my next set of arguments.

The “Korean Wave” is the widely accepted designation given to the recent popularity and spread of South Korean popular culture products within Asia, and to some extent the global market (Shim 2006). In the popular press, Korean films, television dramas, music, and food are said to have been embraced by Asian youth to a historically unprecedented extent. For example, Associated Press writer Dean Visser writes:

Call it “kim chic.” All things South Korean -- from food and music to eyebrow shaping and shoe styles -- are the rage across Asia, where pop culture has long been dominated by Tokyo and Hollywood (Visser).

*New York Times* columnist Norimitsu Onishi is equally complimentary in a 2005 article entitled “Roll over, Godzilla: Korea Rules.” Onishi credits *Jewel in the Palace* in the first sentence of the article as chiefly responsible for predicating a situation where “South Korea... is emerging as the pop culture leader of Asia” (Onishi).

The success of the Korean Wave as a media trope typifies just how strongly the Korean government has embraced the production of popular culture as a cornerstone of capitalistic national advancement. In his article “The Growth of the Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave,” Dooboo Shim calls this paradigm shift “the Jurassic Park factor,” and relates how, in 1994, “the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology proposed... that Korea should develop cinema and other media content production as a national strategic industry” (17). What the team emphasized, and what got the public’s attention the next day via newspaper, was that the total revenue from the movie *Jurassic Park* equaled the foreign sales of 1.5 million Hyundai cars (Shim 2006).

By most indicators, the Korean Wave has been a successful cultural export. Annual import / export data from South Korean broadcasters, for example, confirms that in 1995 South Korea imported \$42.2 million in programs while exporting only \$5.5 million. In 2004, imports dropped to \$31 million, while exports rose to a staggering \$71.4 million, an approximately thirteen-fold increase (Park Chung-a cited in Shim 2008, 27). Korean productions have enjoyed remarkable success at home as well. The domestic market share of Korean films has risen from 50.1% in 2001 to 63.8% in 2006, a significant increase if we consider the immense marketing clout of international blockbusters such as the *Spider-Man*, *Harry Potter*, and *Mission Impossible* series, just to name a few (Hae).

Clearly, the Korean Wave does seem to describe both an expanding cluster of media discourses and an objective rise in actual production and consumption of South Korean popular culture among a wide audience. However, for the purposes of my argument, I am interested more in the ideological “success” of the Korean Wave as a state promulgated discourse of national strength than I am in the material success of Korean popular culture in foreign markets.

Here, the Korean Wave is synonymous with the strategic enhancement of “national brand image,” which is carefully managed under the belief that “national images affect attitudes toward the ability of a country to attract investment businesses and tourists” (Kahle 106). In sum, all Korean popular culture becomes involved in the vast project of selling the idea of Korea to potential tourists.

In this way, Korean popular culture fits with what tourism scholar Stephen Smith calls “generic product,” or “the conceptual commodity produced by an industry” and mobilized towards the advancement of a national brand (229). In other words, popular culture is subject to a process of commodification under state direction. All media personae are subject to a process of folding into promotional strategies through, to cite just one example, the Korean tourism industry’s advertising campaign “Korea, Sparkling!” which relies heavily on celebrity endorsement (visitkorea “sparkling”). I therefore interpret the Korean Wave, and South Korean popular culture more generally, as operating discursively to foreground the *polity* of Korea, rather than its popular culture, within a global capitalist paradigm of competition and national advancement.

Concomitantly, the Korean government has invested heavily in infrastructure and promotion of its culture industries, which are developed for economic gain in the same way as tangible resources like computer chips or steel. For example, the government has designated “cultural technology,” or the technology that makes mass mediated popular culture widely available, one of six “key technologies that should drive the Korean economy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Shim 2008, 28). Similarly, the Korea Communications Commission, operating under the direct control of President Lee Myung-bak, promotes “national advancement through communications” (KCC “Vision”), and includes “expansion into overseas markets” as a stated

objective. In fact, in September 2008 the KCC announced a proposed 100 billion dollars in new spending in the next four years, representing an increase in their total operating budget of more than 43%. At the same time the KCC predicted the creation of over 291,000 new jobs in the next five years (KCC “New Growth”).

To promote the Korean Wave, the government set up a website called “Hello!Hallyu”<sup>9</sup> that provides news and biographies relating to top Korean stars, and discloses the filming locations of popular films and television dramas like *Jewel in the Palace* for tourist travel (Foong). Also, overseas agencies such as the Korean Cultural Service New York publish and distribute material such as *The Korean Wave as Viewed through the Pages of the New York Times* to maintain the appearance of continued Korean popular culture vitality (Korean Cultural Service).

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) is responsible for Korea’s official brand “Dynamic Korea<sup>10</sup>,” including all attendant promotional efforts such as commercials, cultural events, contests, celebrity appearances, and news items (Korea.net). A subsidiary of the MCST, the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOIS) is involved in national branding in a quite different way. Since June of 2006, the KOIS has organized over 3,200 college-aged volunteers to “disperse the spirit of Dynamic Korea and enhance Korea's image abroad.” These students spend a few weeks traveling internationally and “working as civilian ambassadors promoting Korea and the nation's logo ‘Dynamic Korea’ (College Students to Promote). A team sent to Nepal noted that the local Nepalese were already familiar with certain Korean pop stars such as the performer “Rain.” They concluded in their final report that “it is necessary to take advantage of the popularity of Korean cultural contents (*sic*) to... further improve promotional

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<sup>9</sup> “Hallyu” is Korean for “Korean Wave”

<sup>10</sup> Not to be confused with “Korea, Sparkling!” which is strictly a tourism promotion.

methods” (College Students Make Waves). The fact that these students are explicitly referred to as “ambassadors” emphasizes the state’s role in promoting its cultural products.

Lee Young-ae is an excellent example of the type of “cultural content” the KOIS volunteers are trying to promulgate. She is associated with the Korean Wave through her roles in both *JSA* and *The Jewel in the Palace*, as I have mentioned. But she typifies the Korean Wave more convincingly in media discourse, where she is lauded quite directly as a driving force of the Korean Wave. For example, in the *Korea Times* there is a story about Lee Young-ae winning the grand prize in the Andre Kim<sup>11</sup> Awards. The reporter notes that the grand prize was awarded for “helping lead the Korean Wave or ‘hallyu’ around Asia” and that the award goes to those “who have helped boost Korea’s profile around the world” (Garcia). Another article in the Korean paper *Chosun Ilbo*, entitled “Korean Wave Brings Different Strokes for Different Folks,” discusses tourist appreciation of Korean celebrities. A survey of 227 Asian tourists in Korea revealed that 72 percent of them “said they came to Korea to meet a Korean Wave star or visit a film set.” Lee Young-ae is pictured among other stars, and it is revealed that she is a favorite among the Taiwanese (Korean Wave...).

I have argued that Korean popular culture is foregrounded as a state project. So far, I have been primarily interested in how the Korean Wave is managed as a state project by Koreans. But the primacy of the state in understanding the Korean Wave is also strongly suggested by negative reactions foreign governments and consumers have had in terms of the penetration of Korean popular culture into their markets. For instance, due to the popularity of *Jewel in the Palace* and its deleterious effect on local productions, both China and Taiwan introduced legislation limiting the amount of airtime Korean dramas could receive. Ling Chi Wang, professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California Berkeley, is quoted as saying

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<sup>11</sup> A Korean fashion designer

“from the point of view of China, an excessive amount of Korean soap operas will undermine national prestige, self-confidence and nationalism” (Chien). A Vietnamese state-run newspaper went so far as to say that the success of Korean programming constituted one of the “10 most embarrassing cultural events” of 2001 (Visser). Finally, in Japan, a comic book called “Hating the Korean Wave” has sold over 360,000 copies. In it, a young woman proclaims: “It’s not an exaggeration to say that Japan built the South Korea of today.” Elsewhere, the book remarks that “there is nothing at all in Korean culture to be proud of” (Onishi). This sort of adverse backlash suggests that governments and citizens of countries affected by the Korean Wave may not view Korean popular culture as harmless entertainment, but as products that threaten the material conditions and honor of their own countries. In this way, the Korean Wave must be viewed through the lens of competitive global capitalism as a matter of state-to-state competition, again emphasizing Korean popular culture as a state project of advancement.

In summation, I view Lee Young-ae as a state celebrity who, as part of the Korean Wave and a broader project of national branding, becomes synonymous with the position of the state and its aim to strategically advance South Korean economic interests in relation to their global competitors. Thus, Lee Young-ae becomes a powerful locus of national identification. This thesis has three primary and inter-relating effects of consequence here. First, it discursively emphasizes the prominence of the Korean *polity*, not Korean popular *culture* necessarily, in the minds of foreign consumers since this project is understood primarily in its relation to international global capitalist competition. This allows an analysis that can appreciate the role cultural proximity plays in the formation of a discursively operable “East Asian Popular Culture,” while at the same time addressing the role that nations, or conceptions thereof, have in the construction of such an imagined community.

Second, it is a politically tractable argument because it calls attention to the way Korean citizens, as consumers of popular culture, are interpellated as *a priori* national subjects. Understanding popular culture in this way is useful because it addresses the question of private capital interest. That is, how can the state be implicated in the actions of private media corporations? Louis Althusser addresses this issue in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” where he cites Antonio Gramsci as suggesting that “the distinction between public and private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law” and as such the state is “the precondition for any distinction between public and private.” Therefore, in relation to state ideological projects, Althusser concludes “it is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are ‘public’ or ‘private’. What matters is how they function” (Althusser 80).

And finally, since Lee Young-ae is so intimately connected to these processes as a state celebrity, it opens up a discussion of how her body works to justify other mechanisms of state power. Specifically, her body becomes inscribed with notions of blood and purity that serve a hegemonic ethno-nationalist agenda. By tying Lee Young-ae’s “natural beauty” to a mythologized notion of purity, the state essentially curtails any potential dissent by hiding its own operation. In the Barthian sense, the state thus presents Lee Young-ae as an “ideal servant” in whose body history, or the functioning of state power, seems to evaporate.

## **II: A Tree has only one Root: Lee Young-ae as Natural Beauty**

Lee Young-ae’s role as a state celebrity is predicated first and foremost upon the purity of her image. Actually, the twin discourses of “national” and “natural” beauty are like the ouroboros, the snake who eats its own tail. Lee Young-ae’s purity makes her more appealing as

a state celebrity, which in turn requires her to be marked as more pure and so on, the snake growing longer with each bite. In this section, I examine a Munhwa Broadcasting Company (MBC) documentary on Lee Young-ae to support my contention that state-promulgated tropes of purity constitute a frame that hides the operation of the state as supreme arbiter of national identity. These discourses of ethnic purity, or as I collectively term them, “natural beauty,” are inscribed in the body of Lee Young-ae through the documentary, but also gain strength from surrounding discourse of the Lee Young-ae persona as it is presented in television commercials.

MBC is one of the four largest media corporations in Korea, and is quasi-independent. The government created the Foundation for Broadcast Culture (FBC) in 1987, which now owns 70% percent of MBC stock. Officially, the FBC was created to ensure journalistic objectivity; however, there are many conflicts of interest intrinsic to its place within the organizational structure of MBC. For instance, the Korean Broadcasting Commissioner gets to select the ten-member board of the FBC based strictly on the advice of the state-owned Korean Broadcasting Commission itself (the KBC), and the speaker of the national assembly (Kwak 2005). In this way, MBC typifies media corporations in South Korea more generally, where, as media studies scholar Ki-Sung Kwak argues, “the relationship between the state and television broadcasters has mainly been concerned with serving the interests...of the state” (Kwak 2003, 232). Analysis of the documentary itself makes this conclusion extremely seductive.

In 1998 MBC released an hour-long program called the “Diary Star Documentary” about Lee Young-ae. A video crew follows Lee Young-ae for several days as she socializes with her parents, visits extended relatives, goes shopping, relaxes in her apartment, and takes meals in restaurants. A female narrator speaks over the images in Korean, which has since been translated and subtitled into English.



I viewed this documentary in three parts on Google Video. It was posted by a fan of Lee Young-ae named “wy woo,” who is also responsible for updating a regular blog featuring news and fan produced videos dealing with the star (wy woo). I had some initial reservations about using material translated from Korean by a fan, but I have since come to resolve this hesitancy. First, the English seems to have been translated by wy woo directly from the meanings in Korean, creating an awkward sounding narrative that ironically suggests a more authentic literal translation. Second, wy woo’s blog indicates an intensity and duration of Lee Young-ae fandom that would make accurate translation a matter of personal pride, rather than commercial necessity. Finally, and most importantly, fan translated material of this type is virtually all that is available to a non-native Korean speaker such as myself, so it will have to do in any case.

The documentary begins with a close-up of the alabaster face of Lee Young-ae. Shimmering strands of ebony hair dance across her face, animated by a light breeze. A deep serenity is settled in her expression and the camera pulls back. Lee Young-ae is cloaked entirely in white, angel wings affixed to her back. We see a small cadre of photographers buzz around as she perches in front of a charcoal backdrop, frantic camera flashes only adding to the ethereal quality of the scene. The narration begins in a smoothly toned female voice:

Korean star LYA [Lee Young-ae] is very pretty. Because of her job, she can change her image continuously. But nobody can deny she is a very beautiful lady. This time, she dresses like an angel as a model for filming. For the angel look, nobody is better than LYA (MBC).

This brief introduction sets the tone for the rest of the video.

A dichotomy is created between Lee Young-ae the celebrity persona and Lee Young-ae the person. Though she may change her image, the viewer is told, her essential beauty remains untouched, representing what I describe as “natural beauty.” This essential beauty of Lee Young-ae provides the narrative thrust of the rest of the video. Her outward celebrity is

mentioned only when it can demonstrate the extent of her inner purity, which takes on three essential qualities. First, her body itself is pure, exemplified through the director's overwhelming use of white in the video's visual motif, juxtaposed with Lee Young-ae's artificially lightened skin. Second, her relationship with her family is sacrosanct and grounded in tradition and lineage, suggesting a purity of ethnicity grounded in physical place. And finally, images of food, family, and care of the body merge to suggest an ethnically informed notion of purity.

The MBC documentary constructs whiteness as the visible extension of natural beauty through a description of Lee Young-ae's skin care and personal hygiene regimens. For instance, one scene shows Lee Young-ae in her apartment drying her hair before the mirror. The narrator intones:

It only takes a short time for YA [Young-ae] to get ready. She only needs to brush her teeth, wash face and dress up. Young-ae shot her first cosmetics CF<sup>12</sup> when she was 19, but in fact, YA doesn't like to make up. Besides make up, she focuses more on skin care. Cleaning is most important for fair skin. (MBC).

There are two things noteworthy in this description. First, there is a clear emphasis on "fair skin." In terms of the MBC documentary, "fair skin" not only means smooth and blemish-free skin, but also white skin. This is seen in the introduction to the documentary, where an extremely pale Lee Young-ae is posing in an angel costume of all white.

This whiteness is also characteristic of Lee Young-ae more generally. For example, she is widely known by the nickname "Oxygen Woman," most likely in reference to her commercial for an "O2" hair conditioning treatment (Koreanet). This commercial begins with Lee Young-ae with her eyes closed, her head hanging near her chest with an oxygen mask lying limply in her

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<sup>12</sup> Commercial Film. In South Korea, television commercials are generally called "commercial films," though it is unclear what criteria (if any) are used to distinguish this genre from simple "commercials."

hands. A heart monitor beeps as a jagged line representing her vital functions traces a ponderous line across the screen, slowing quickly and soon flat-lining in a steady whine. Then, miraculously, a close-up of the product appears and the scene cuts to Lee Young-ae breathing from the oxygen mask.



**Figure 1** The “Oxygen Woman”<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2** A more “naturalistic” Lee Young-ae

The sound of deep inhalation mixes with an audio-track of enchanting female vocals. Lee Young-ae gazes up at us from her oxygen mask (fig. 1); she has been brought back to life (Mix).

What is most immediately striking about this commercial is how white and impeccable Lee Young-ae’s face appears. This is no doubt the result of computer manipulation. All her pores have been blended out of sight, and indeed, she has lost a great deal of her nose as well. It is an especially striking image when compared with a more “naturalistic” Lee Young-ae (fig. 2) taken from a different commercial (Mix).

At first glance, this suggests an effect of Westernization and the export of European beauty standards. Nina G. Jablonski, for instance, argues in her book *Skin* that global cosmetics companies have created a situation where “in many Asian countries, most women diligently avoid spending time in the sun and use skin lightening agents to further whiten their skin...” (159). But preference for light skin among Koreans may actually have a much longer history. In her book, *Is Lighter Better?*, Joanne L. Rondilla cites a young Korean-American woman saying

<sup>13</sup> Both images in this chapter are screen shots taken from cited video.

that “in Korea, lighter skin color was more desirable as marriage material... because it represented the status of the person throughout history” (9). I am inclined to accept both of these explanations.

However, I feel that the first account, that white skin is simply another Western cultural export, is not entirely satisfactory. It assumes incorrectly that Koreans will passively accept whatever the more sophisticated creative minds at Revlon have to offer. They are thus posited problematically as passive subjects, denied even a fleck of agency. Jablonski reproduces the very hegemonic structures she purports to challenge. I therefore find the second explanation more useful in terms of the present discussion for two reasons. First, it allows the possibility of a Western hegemonic explanation while at the same time affirming the prevalence of local systems of power/knowledge. Second, it better describes the narratives of purity that these commercials, and the MBC documentary, promulgate. That is, white skin is represented not as a cosmetic artifice to be applied, but as the result of a process of exposing a natural beauty that exists in some miraculous inner sanctum.

Consider Jablonski’s remark about women who “avoid spending time in the sun.” In this case it is clear that the ideal of pale skin is natural, and therefore achieving this end is primarily a matter of preserving skin from harsh outside elements. Of course, this strategy may be used in tandem with consumption of products that promise whitening, which seems to refute my hypothesis. Yet even these companies use the language of natural beauty in their commercials, positioning their products discursively in such a way that suggests that they are merely aids working to coax forth that which has always existed within. The O2 conditioner commercial is a prime example of this. The whiteness of Lee Young-ae that comes through the use of the product is presented semiotically as a sort of natural life force, akin to the act of breathing.

Recall as well the MBC documentary's claim that "YA doesn't like to make up. Besides make up, she focuses more on skin care. Cleaning is most important for fair skin." The word "cleaning" here evokes a process of removal such as cleaning dirt and cleaning pores. The absence of impurity makes fair skin, suggesting again that fair skin comes from within and must simply be allowed to express itself. This idea is further reinforced by the idea that Lee Young-ae does not like to wear make-up; she is not applying foreign substances *on* her skin, she is cleaning *off* her skin.

Later in the documentary the narrator mentions again that Lee Young-ae's "skin is very good in nature," but there is a caveat here. We learn that "YA is 27 years old now. She is not at a very young age for a woman... Recently, a few acnes grow on her face... She has to put more effort to keep her skin good." (MBC) I believe this further reinforces the narrative of naturally fair skin. Her skin is "very good in nature" after all. As she ages however, blemishes might appear which she will have to confront if she hopes to "keep" her skin good.

The evidence presented above demonstrates that white skin is discursively connected to the notion of natural beauty. This idea claims that natural beauty is already present within the body, and that one should seek to *keep* skin good rather than *make* it good. Taken alone however, this may not be totally convincing. However totalizing an explanation it may be, the role of global cosmetics firms in shaping world standards of beauty cannot be ignored. It is necessary therefore to provide more evidence in support of my contention that Lee Young-ae's beauty is linked intrinsically to the idea of "naturalness" or purity.

The presence of Lee Young-ae's family in the video is significant, and represents a broader narrative strategy to situate Lee Young-ae within a mythological frame of lineage and homeland. For instance, Lee Young-ae is said to still live with her parents, and much of the

documentary shows her in situations of “everyday life” with both her mother and father. When she travels to the countryside to visit her grandmother, she bows deeply to the old woman as the narrator moralizes: “a family is like a tree. Although there are many leaves on the tree, it only has one root” (MBC). Everything about this scene is directed towards connecting Lee Young-ae with a mythologized, authenticated past. Her grandmother, connected with a rural pilgrimage, represents lineage and connection with an agrarian past. The exaggerated deep bow that seems so out of place serves as an homage to a regrettably decaying custom, removed from common practice by the demands of modern life. Finally there is the narration, which should be read as speaking not only to the roots of family, but to the roots of nation as well.

Another scene of the documentary shows Lee Young-ae’s mother grinding something into a yellow cup. We quickly learn that she is making a beauty formula by mixing together cucumber, rice powder, and milk. Lee Young-ae enters the room and sits patiently as her mother stirs the concoction, giving advice here and there as to its quality. Judging the formula appropriate for application, Lee Young-ae’s mother instructs her to “prepare a towel” and she exits the frame. Lying on her bed now, Lee Young-ae has the pale green, chunky goop applied to her face in careful spoonfuls. The narrator remarks “actually, YA is a beauty by birth. But her mother still helps to keep her face beautiful.” (MBC)

Here again the emphasis is on natural beauty: Lee Young-ae is a “beauty by birth.” But more significantly, it is her mother who helps Lee Young-ae care for her beautiful skin, and does so not by making her up, but through the home creation of a natural beauty formula made of edible substances. In the book *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*, authors Linda Brown and Kay Mussell introduce the theoretical applications of food in relation to group identity. They contend that: “foodways bind individuals together, distinguish in-group from out-

group...” and “...celebrate cultural cohesion” (5). Understanding folk uses and discourses about food in Korea is thus a vital ingredient in reading the significance of group identity and notions of natural beauty from Lee Young-ae’s facial.

Foodways scholar Robert W. Pemberton views certain Korean dietary habits as an expression of national cohesiveness. In his article, “Wild-gathered Food as Countercurrents to Dietary Globalisation in South Korea,” he describes a popular slogan among Koreans that “food from Korean soil is best for Korean bodies” (79). He condenses this idea down into its popular culture slogan “*shint’o puri*,” and claims that this “ideology is expressed in numerous television shows, and in newspaper and magazine articles” (80). The reasoning behind this movement has largely to do with the special interests of Korean agriculture firms, but the popular effect has been to inculcate people with the idea that foreign foods are impure and even dangerously brimming with pesticides (80).

While we cannot tell whether the food products Lee Young-ae’s mother applies to her face are domestically produced, it is safe to say they are at least perceived that way. Unless a viewer was to read entirely against the grain, these edible signifiers would be well buried within the broader constellation of meanings surrounding Lee Young-ae. In this way, all the rituals and practices associated with Lee Young-ae would be viewed within the state celebrity frame. Since the state celebrity is intrinsically linked with the project of national advancement, any potentially aberrant behavior apropos these aims would necessarily be more difficult to spot. Therefore, the application of Korean produced food products to Lee Young-ae’s face constitutes a blending of natural and national discourses. Food has been essentialized and imbued with magical properties. There is something special about “Korean soil,” as much as there is about “Korean bodies.” Both seem to carry ethereal qualities of “home” that transcend time and space. In the

case of Lee Young-ae and the MBC documentary, her facial represents the expression of ethno-nationalist ideology.

### **Conclusion**

Lee Young-ae is a state celebrity born from the synergistic energy produced by discourses of national and natural beauty. Through her close association with the Korean Wave, Lee Young-ae becomes not only a national icon, but an extension of the state itself through a strategy of national branding. In fact, their projects are only realized through each other. In this way the ideological aims of the Korean government are met as they interpellate domestic citizens as national subjects.

This process obfuscates how Lee Young-ae's status as a natural beauty serves to legitimate the hegemonic interests of the state as sole arbiter of national heritage. Lee Young-ae's body works to justify the notion that identity originates from some miraculous place within, which is, not coincidentally, a place that is necessarily closed to observation or critique. The government of South Korea thus envelops a broad citizenry under a single umbrella and curtails the potential of alternate modes of identification to seriously challenge state dominance.



## CHAPTER II

### INDIGENIZED ORIENTALISM: HINES WARD AS STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE GLOBAL / LOCAL

*When my mom walked out in Korea, people would call her names, spit on her... I mean that's how bad, you know, in Korea it is. My mom always described it—they treat people like dogs over there.*

- Hines Ward

Globalization scholars such as Arjun Appadurai have been busy in recent years postulating a new kind of global space, one characterized by compression of time and space and conceptualized complexly in terms of “disjunctures and difference.” In this chapter, I examine some of these disjunctures, or fissures within the ostensibly smooth flow of global cultural traffic. I contend that while the idea of global disjunctures promises agency to those countries on the periphery in the broadest sense (destabilization of Western “core” powers), close scrutiny reveals that these fissures may in some cases serve only as a foundation within which local power structures project their own hegemonic initiatives. With this in mind, I will examine discourses surrounding American football player Hines Ward’s 2006 trip to South Korea. In the United States, ideas of the Orient, evinced through the Ward story, are mobilized through popular discourse to sustain *ad infinitum* the intrinsic superiority of the West. In South Korea, these discourses are co-opted and re-worked by the state via master-planned public spectacle, supported by the news media. Western-centric Orientalist logic is subverted under the auspices of a Korean ethno-nationalist project that claims a transcendent, all-encompassing Korean identity granted by birth and legitimated through association with the state government. In this way, the state rides roughshod over alternate conceptions of the Korean imagined community, and reserves for itself the role of principal arbiter of Korean identity.

## I: Orienting Hines Ward

The story of Hines Ward begins in 1976, in Seoul, South Korea. This was the year that Hines Ward Sr., a black American serviceman stationed there as part of a buttressing force against the DPRK<sup>14</sup>, married and fathered a child with a Korean woman named Kim Young-hee. They moved to Atlanta, Georgia shortly thereafter, citing the desire to remove their child from an atmosphere of intolerance in South Korea where “Korean blood” is often seen as *the* cogent demonstration of Korean identity, and where children of mixed ancestry are subject to systematic prejudice and discrimination (G. Shin). Shortly after moving to America, the young Ward’s parents divorced, leaving Hines Jr. to live with his mother most of his life (“Hines Ward Biography”). Hines Ward Jr. (henceforth simply Hines Ward) grew up to become a self-professed “Korean African American” wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers (S. Lee 20).

In 2006 the Steelers won the Super Bowl, and Hines Ward was voted Most Valuable Player for that game owing to his multiple receptions and forty-three yard touchdown catch during the final quarter. For some time before this, Ward and his mother had been planning on returning to Korea so he could “see what her culture was all about” (S. Lee 21). However, the attention garnered through his MVP title caused him to become a sensation in the South Korean press, and the trip came to take on humanitarian overtones. Ward resolved to use his celebrity to advance the cause of mixed race children in that country, where they have often been treated as social outcasts (S. Lee).

I use Edward Said’s work on Orientalism to examine the discourses surrounding Ward’s much-lauded trip to South Korea in April of 2006. While Said’s work deals primarily with the Middle East, I find that his discussion works well to illustrate the issues of power surrounding

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<sup>14</sup> DPRK represents the full name of North Korea, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Hines Ward's story as well. Korea is also "Othered" through the Western imagination, and posited as fundamentally backwards. I apply Said's lens to a textual analysis of an ESPN feature on Hines Ward on the show *Sports Center*, which serves to delineate American-produced Orientalist discourses. Analysis of newspaper articles from America, and English-language newspapers from South Korea, works to refocus attention on how the South Korean polity, in concert with an obliging news media, is able to "re-orient" Hines Ward as an essentially *local* hero despite a remarkably long-lasting and vast gulf of social, cultural, and geographic separation from his "homeland" in most substantive ways.

This reorientation of Ward raises two points Said makes that are essential for further discussion. First, "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature... the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (Said 4-5). The purpose of chapter II will be, in part, to examine some of this "thought, imagery and vocabulary" from popular discourse in American media stemming from the recent past. I argue that the specter of the Orient operates within larger frameworks of power as an uncivilized, backward, barbaric, and feminized counter-point to America's ostensible high degree of sophistication, masculinity, and advancement.

The second point Said makes ostensibly reinforces the first, but suggests more flexibility in understanding Orientalism as a dynamic, multi-layered process operating within a global context. He asserts:

to believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, "Orientalized"—and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (Said 5).

Said is right to focus on relationships of power and dominance, but he seems to underestimate the ability of local power-centers in East Asia to produce their own kinds of domination. There

is a “complex hegemony” at work indeed, but it is not one characterized solely by the solipsistic relationship between the Occident and Orient. In fact, the Orient can work American Orientalism to its own advantage, effectively hi-jacking the narrative thrust of American media discourse, and re-deploying it in the name of ethno-nationalism, as is the case with Hines Ward and his 2006 visit to South Korea.

## **II: He’s Different: Content Analysis of ESPN’s *Sports Center***

I examined a segment of ESPN’s *Sports Center* program that was posted on youtube.com. The video, “Hines Ward Hapa Hero,” is a little over eight minutes long, and was most likely first aired during the spring of 2006,<sup>15</sup> when Ward’s trip to South Korea was still garnering significant attention among the media (lowkeycinema). The video is framed by the description of Ward’s trip to Korea as an emotional journey for the athlete as he reconciles a dual identity while advocating for biracial children. As an example of American discourses that construct an Orient in order to constitute the West, this video is rich in signification.

The video starts with an unidentified African-American man standing on an elaborate studio stage. The floor is spotless and slick with multi-colored lights and shadows playing upon its surface, connoting an elaborate (and expensive) lighting set-up. A large column to the right rises from a clear base, lit from the inside with white light and bordered with shafts of red neon, ensconcing an animated *Sports Center* logo. In the background we can see walls of semi-translucent blue reaching around the perimeter, stylized with horizontal stripes suggesting circuitry or perhaps some computer components. Slightly behind and to the left of the announcer are two raised screens. On the left screen there is a picture of Hines Ward playing football with

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<sup>15</sup> The video was posted to Youtube in August of 2006.

the title “The Journey Home” displayed above. On the right, there is a picture of Ward that will be shown later in the broadcast, where he is standing next to his mother in Seoul wearing what appears to be a traditional Korean men’s jacket.

The announcer starts with the words “he’s different,” and quickly looks offstage left. A football is tossed from off-camera, which he skillfully catches before turning back to the camera. While describing how Ward is “different,” he mentions that he isn’t like other “pretty boy wideouts” who “spat the cleats”<sup>16</sup> and whose “uniform looks like it’s custom tailored all cool” (lowkeycinema). During this proclamation, the announcer performs the “pretty boy” by ducking down slightly, bobbing his head, and pretending to flatten his clothing to his body with his hands. He then stands upright, casually passes the ball hand to hand and tells us gruffly that, if we think Hines Ward is like this, “you got the wrong dude.”

This introduction serves primarily to authenticate the announcer’s ability to speak as a masculinized, and, in the logic of Orientalist discourse, a commensurately Westernized figure of authority. First, he’s masculinized through his ability to handily catch the football that is tossed quickly from offstage. Next, his knowledge of football, or his subcultural capital, displays his essential manliness through his discussion and performance of “pretty boy wide outs.” The “pretty boy” wide out, or wide receiver, is often maligned in the sports community for his on and off-field antics, petty personal grievances, and flashy, overly performative and often superfluous game play. Unlike the linebacker, for instance, who is directly involved in every play and takes personal responsibility (and commensurate physical punishment) for the success of said play, the wide receiver primarily “throw[s] weak blocks or run[s] ‘decoy routes’ straight up the field.” In fact, Michael Irvin, who played wide receiver himself on the Dallas Cowboys for over a decade, described wide outs first and foremost as “egotistical” and “pretty boys” (Curtis).

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<sup>16</sup> “Spats” are a fashionable shoe accessory for professional football players.

The announcer's intent is therefore to distance himself and Hines Ward from self-obsessed and "pretty" football playing men. At only 200 pounds, Ward is about fifty pounds lighter than the average football player, and is thus considered small by NFL standards (Park & Gregory). The announcer compensates for this fact, boasting that Hines Ward is a "straight up offensive tackle trapped in the body of a 200 lb. man. He loves to block." The viewer is led to conclude that, although his body is small, Hines Ward is overtly physical and strong. Since "the representation of the feminine/feminized Orient is frequent in different types of Orientalist discourse," I suggest that the masculinization of both the announcer and Ward himself works to distance the MVP from the potential feminine taint of the Oriental Other, and reclaim his body as essentially tough, manly, and thus, quintessentially American (Civantos 77).

Concomitantly, the announcer is de-feminized through the foregrounding of his skin color, which is staged through bodily display and speech to portray an essential "blackness" (Alexander). This blackness is, not coincidentally, highly masculinized, and performed as extremely self-assured and aggressive, suggesting what bell hooks describes as "brute phallocentrism" (hooks 102). This essentialized blackness comes through in his matter-of-fact, gruff, and slightly confrontational monologue. The words "straight up" in "straight up offensive tackle" are given extra force, demonstrating something unquestionable, asserting a position of authority and power which is racialized in this case through a naturalistic utilization of slang in an otherwise business-like and professional context.

With the masculinity of the announcer and Ward himself established, the host transitions into the feature segment by problematically comparing the stereotypes of football playing positions to racial prejudice. After affirming that Ward is not a pretty boy, despite public perception of wide outs as such, the announcer intones that: "as Ward found out, you cannot

change stereotypes until you face them,” now referring to the racial stereotypes that Ward had to face as a Korean child growing up in America, and the difficulties his mother faced bearing a mixed-race son in South Korea. Finally, the viewer is informed that Ward, fueled by his contempt of racial prejudice, has “journey[ed] to initiate changes in a society half a world away,” referring to his 2006 visit to South Korea after winning the Superbowl MVP.

The wording of this last line is significant. First, “journey” suggests travel into and through the unknown. It connotes images of explorers discovering new and exotic lands, and it also suggests an inner struggle that is to a large degree unknowable. That the words “vacation” or “trip” were not used, despite greater accuracy, is significant because these words do not carry the same Orientalist flavor as “journey.” The decision to label South Korea “a society” also carries a strongly Orientalist connotation by uprooting the political entity of the Republic of South Korea and hiding it under the cloak of anonymity, overdetermining its mysteriousness. South Korea is also exoticized by denying the audience specific geographical reference points in favor of the colloquial aphorism “half a world away,” which evokes a vague and unreachable land. This works to Other South Korea at the same time it posits the West, exemplified in the masculinized male sports celebrity, as an instigator of change, instantly positioning the West in a one-up position. It is taken for granted that the “changes” Ward will initiate are changes that will help South Korea to rise out of its backwards primordiality to join the relatively enlightened West.

This discursive construct is highly problematic for two major reasons, both of which serve a hegemonic agenda. First, by Othering South Korea as an unknowable and mysterious land, viewers are not encouraged to explore the specific ways that race has intersected with American cultural imperialism and military power in that region in specific historical and

contemporary contexts. Second, by utilizing the black announcer to narrate this tale of Western achievement over Orientalist backwardness, we are directed to ignore the way racism continues to play out in American society. The black commentator therefore also serves the purpose of announcing proudly by example that African Americans have arrived in America and now enjoy equal status to that of their white contemporaries. This tokenism claims that Blacks in America are, without restriction, able to hold social positions of power and authority while presumably also wielding economic power through ostensibly substantial incomes<sup>17</sup>.

The Othering of Korea in this *Sports Center* program is further reinforced through sound, images, and narration. Viewers are first introduced to Korea in this broadcast through a decontextualized performance of national identity. We are shown lines of stern-faced, spear-wielding Korean men dressed in the traditional garb of the early Chosun dynasty<sup>18</sup> and marching in synchrony with the slow, steady, and deeply resonant beating of a drum. These men are reenacting a royal court procession just inside the gates at *Gyeongbokgung* Palace. This procession of costumed officials and soldiers is organized solely for the benefit of curious tourists, and is re-enacted several times every day *Gyeongbokgung* is open. But the performative nature of this display and the way it operates within the Korean context as decontextualized and essentially meaningless tourist fare, is left unexplored. The viewers are simply offered this display without context and are left to draw their own conclusions.

As the costumed “soldiers” march around, the narrator intones ominously: “in Korea, children of mixed ethnicity have long been pariahs, shunned by mainstream society”

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<sup>17</sup> The recent election of Barack Obama to the presidency serves as a great example. While his success does reflect significant progress for African-Americans in the United States, the uncritical and bombastic celebration of his victory as quintessentially racial in character feeds into the false and dangerous idea that systemic inequality no longer exists in America.

<sup>18</sup> The Chosun Dynasty lasted from the late fourteenth to the early twentieth century. The costumes used here are probably from around the fifteenth century.



(lowkeycinema). Unless they have experience or some prior knowledge of South Korea, viewers are left to conclude that South Korea's imagined past is the same as its present, and that Korean "mainstream society" is well represented through these anachronistic figures. The beating of the drum serves as shorthand for a mysterious Orient, connoting images of mist-shrouded mountains, strange rituals, and exotic customs. The stepping of the "soldiers" suggests imperialism, strict conformity, and suppression of individual rights through force of arms.

The soldiers and officials march from left to right, then quickly turn, stepping away from the camera. This shot of these dynastic figures walking away smoothly transitions into "everyday" Koreans walking, backs to the camera, in a modern outdoor market. The imagined tyranny of the imperialist system is thus transferred and rearticulated as the tyranny of modern Koreans who have literally "turned their backs" unsympathetically on bi-racial children. The way the scene is cut reinforces the idea that Korea is a mysterious and backwards place existing outside the realm of a civilized West, outside the advances brought on by modern society.

As the scene continues to play out, showing various shots of Koreans walking around an outdoor market area, the narrator informs us that "bi-racial Koreans are usually poorer and less well educated than pureblooded Koreans. The women who bear these children are also subjected to harsh intolerance" (lowkeycinema). This is no doubt intended to arouse sentiments of moral superiority based on an Orientalist construction of backwardness as binary opposite to an enlightened West. It also serves to hide the ways race operates within an unequal power structure in the United States. In this country the percentage of Blacks living in poverty is nearly three times that of whites, and, just as one example, the gap between white and black university graduation rates is large; 32% of whites hold a Bachelor's degree, compared with only 19% of Blacks ("Poverty 2006") (Ludwig).

“Our” sense of moral indignation is further encouraged by commentary from Ward himself, when he bluntly appraises his mother’s attitude toward her native country. He tells us that “when my mom walked out in Korea, people would call her names, spit on her, I mean that’s how bad, you know, in Korea it is. My mom always described it... they treat people like dogs over there” (lowkeycinema). While spitting on people and treating them like dogs is nefarious to be sure, it needs to be understood in socio-historical context.

While prejudice against “mixed race” people is certainly present in Korea today, it should not come to stand in for the characteristic blind ignorance of an entire imagined community, willfully negligent of the common sense dictates of “civilized” society, but should instead be seen as the continuation of long-standing power dynamics. In South Korea, a Confucian tradition emphasizing self-dependence and avoidance of foreign involvement (including sexual relations [Wanniski]) mixes with a nationalist discourse of “uterine nationalism” which makes women’s bodies a site of national self-definition and an important line of defense in the struggle against cultural imperialism (Heng 111). In this way, the female body, when impregnated with the child of a foreigner, becomes implicated in tacitly approving of foreign domination. Her child, which, in a very real way serves as visible evidence of this digression, becomes equally maligned when he or she is born. The entire family is thus stigmatized; their pure Korean blood has been polluted.

Hines Ward’s father was an American serviceman stationed in South Korea during the mid-70’s, a period of tremendous tension between the U.S. forces and the residents and government of South Korea that often came to a head over the issue of interracial sex. The long-standing Korean aversion to racial mixing, rooted in Confucian tradition and solidified by resistance to Japanese Imperialism, was exacerbated in this situation by the presence of large

U.S. camp towns in Korea. These concentrated pockets of American servicemen supported prostitution industries in the surrounding towns and villages. Having sex with military men for money was one of the few ways women in a widely impoverished South Korea could make a living and raise a family (K. Moon).

Despite social taboos, female prostitutes were encouraged by the Korean government to see themselves as cultural ambassadors servicing men who would one day return home to report on what they had seen and experienced while serving overseas (K. Moon). For example, Katherine H.S. Moon interviewed Korean sex workers for her article “Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States.” She quotes one interlocutor as saying that, during an “Etiquette and Good Conduct Lecture,” local officials would say: “all of you, who cater to the U.S. soldiers, are patriots. All of you are nationalists working to increase the foreign exchange earnings of our country” (154). They were educated about sexually transmitted diseases, and encouraged not to favor white soldiers over black, training that often ran contrary to their inclinations. This sort of training was in response to the preferential treatment afforded white soldiers by prostitutes, which was combining with other forms of discrimination to spread antagonism and conflict amongst the soldiers themselves as well as between soldiers and local residents (K. Moon).

After suffering under direct Japanese colonization for thirty-five years from 1910-1945, South Korea found itself serving new masters after World War II. The American Occupation Authority would take a pre-dominant role in South Korean affairs for years to come, despite being officially disbanded in 1948 (Chay). After the Korean War ended in 1953, the United States became an often unwanted but ultimately necessary ally and bulwark against a North Korea under Kim Ill Sung (Oberdorfer). Thus, “South Korea was placed in the role of the protected, with no choice in geo-strategic matters but to accommodate itself to U.S. initiatives”

(K. Moon 155). In the face of such overwhelming power, the Korean government was forced to seek locations from which to resist seemingly overwhelming U.S. dominance. One of these locations was the body of the local prostitute, an exemplar of the client state who “is positioned in the feminine role of resorting to domestic, ‘covert’ and ‘personal’ resources, including its female citizens, as instruments of power in its relationship with the patron state” (K. Moon 156). That the state would have to rely on such marginal tactics to exert a degree of resistance speaks both to the overwhelming strength of the United States in South Korean affairs, and the corresponding sense of helplessness that must have been felt by Korean state administrators.

Racial tensions were therefore clearly exacerbated by the presence of U.S. soldiers as an occupying (and later peace-keeping) force. But racism against Blacks was directly perpetrated by Koreans, which more convincingly shows that Koreans internalized racism against these soldiers based on the attitudes of white soldiers they encountered, since they assert that they had no specific aversion to Blacks prior to the Korean War. Katharine Moon notes that: “in a *Overseas Weekly* article (August 4, 1971), white soldiers interviewed in Korea admitted that ‘Korean locals have been subjected to the attitudes of the white majority for so long that they practice discrimination without even being aware of what they’re doing’” (145). Therefore, if the Koreans are guilty of racism against Blacks, then it is due in large part to America’s invasiveness in that region.

To its credit, the ESPN video does make one feeble attempt to provide some historical context. Halfway through the segment, Janet Mintzer, CEO of Pearl S. Buck International, appears on screen. Though Pearl S. Buck International is not fully described on ESPN, their website claims their mission to be expanding “opportunities for children and promoting an understanding of the values and attributes of other cultures, [and] the injustice of prejudice...

throughout the world” (“About”). However, Janet Mintzer either glosses over, or the ESPN editors skillfully omit, discussion of U.S. involvement in the politicization of racial mixing in Korea. Instead, her scant thirty-two seconds of screen time are devoted to explaining how Korea is “still a very pure-blooded culture which goes way back in their history before the Korean War.”

By using the Korean War as a demarcation point, she seems to be suggesting that this time period, marked by the defeat of Japan and subsequent American takeover of Korean government, should be seen as a turning point towards a greater degree of acceptance towards racial mixing. This statement ignores the fact that American troop presence in South Korea actually exacerbated social tension over miscegenation in at least two ways. First, the physical presence and accompanying demands of soldiers in the many camp towns spawned a boom in prostitution, which gave rise to a new set of discourses, the sole purpose of which was to manage the question of interracial sex. And second, Korean’s prejudiced attitudes towards African Americans were not naturally occurring, but learned from the white soldiers within an extremely racist and still largely, though unofficially, segregated military organization (Buckley). The lack of context in the ESPN video is purposeful. Discussion along these lines would be a virtual admission of U.S. culpability in supporting the racial intolerance of Korean people. This would deflate the “positional superiority” of the West in terms of Orientalism and the Hines Ward narrative, so it must be contained through omission (Said 7).

According to the ESPN video, when Ward was one year old his family moved to the United States, “in large part because his mother wanted to escape the prejudices of Korea” (lowkeycinema). The notion of escape evokes scholar Denys Hay, when he discusses the “idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans...

the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (Hay cited in Said 7). The wise citizen would thus “escape” from a bad country to a good one. It is necessarily a clear-cut matter of better over worse that serves to conceal potentially disruptive counter-discourses. This idea is extremely pervasive in the ESPN story on Hines Ward. Not only are the Korean people depicted as backwards and traditional, mired in a repressive society located out of place and time, but racism in the United States is glossed over and systematically ignored.

Even when Ward specifically mentions issues with racism in the United States, the piece is constructed so as to ride roughshod over these destabilizing ideas. Ward says of his American schooling that:

going to school, black kids teased me because I was Korean. So it was hard to try to fit in with black kids because they always made fun of my Korean side. Well, trying to hang out with the Korean kids, they always teased me because I was black. Trying to hang out with white kids, they teased me because I was black and Korean (lowkeycinema).

This complicates the narrative of racial identity considerably. Ward’s testimony pulls the discourse from the realm of Orientalism “through the use of speaking back and identity re-positioning... within the third space of talk,” as, simply put, Ward is allowed to speak for himself, and has a degree of agency in this respect (Tate 104). However, hegemonic forces always seek to appropriate and re-signify counter-discourses. For example, in “Encoding / Decoding,” Stuart Hall notes how “new, problematic or troubling events, which breach our expectancies... must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to ‘make sense.’” He goes on to note that “the most common way of ‘mapping’ them is to assign the new to some domain or other of the existing... pattern of ‘preferred readings,’” in this case Orientalist discourse (169).

This re-appropriation of problematic counter-narratives into the realm of “preferred readings” is done in two ways through the *Sports Center* video. First, in describing Ward’s stellar performance in Super Bowl XL, the narrator contends that he “struck a blow against those who had mistreated him and his mother” (lowkeycinema). “Those” are suggested to be the Koreans because they are the only group mentioned in the story that mistreated Ward *and* his mother. It is possible that the narrator means all the people who had mistreated either of them, but the rest of the story contradicts this reading. First, the narrative thrust focuses on changing racist attitudes in South Korea. As Ward says: “we can shed a light and help move forward in the future” (lowkeycinema). Second, by the end we are presented with a terse summary of the Koreans’ attempts to alter their backwards ways, as the narrator intones wistfully: “there were even discussions in the South Korean government to pass laws that would make it illegal to discriminate against people of mixed blood relations.” But the tone shifts to one of somber patronization: “but so far, no laws have been passed” (lowkeycinema). The inherent devaluation of the Orient is secured. That no laws have been passed “so far” is not surprising. The time between Ward’s visit and the airing of this broadcast is likely only a few months at most. This last line serves only to secure us in the understanding of the Orient as trapped in a regrettable past.

### **III: American Newspaper Analysis**

It will be helpful to pause here to demonstrate how the notion of the Orient has been inscribed in popular discourse more widely, outside the realm of this televised sports program. Examination will focus on newspaper articles around the time of Hines Ward’s trip to South Korea in April of 2006. I argue that these discourses imagine transnational culture flows, and,

more widely, globalization, by drawing on a Euro-centric, masculinized, and racialized core / periphery power binary informed by classic world systems theory.

According to Immanuel Wallerstein in *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, South Korea is part of the semi-periphery, which are those states “under pressure from core states... their major concern is to keep themselves from slipping into the periphery and to do what they can to advance themselves toward the core” (29). As we can see, this model constructs the core (Europe and America) as possessing agency to effect change, while the periphery is something unfortunate that a nation may “slip into” if it cannot *advance* towards the core ideal. In the articles I examined, this theory is mobilized by depicting America as modern, advanced, active, and masculine. Hines Ward himself comes to stand for an enlightened and socially progressive America as an underdog success story, the physical embodiment of the American Dream.

First, I would like to examine an article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* titled “Imagine That: Hines Ward as Martin Luther King Jr.” This piece states that Ward “is quite possibly *the* cause for social change coming to South Korea’s heretofore closed society. He is a shining example to 35,000 people like him and an entire nation... Forget the Super Bowl MVP, how about the Nobel Peace Prize?” (Finder). In this article, discussion of social *change* is really about social *betterment* through linear progress following a Western model. South Korea’s “closed” society, withdrawn and traditional, can be pulled from the muck of intolerance and modernized by opening up to the West and its ideals, embodied in Mr. Ward. The comparison of Hines Ward to Martin Luther King Jr. is significant because it connotes a chronological lag of forty years in terms of social advancement.

My second example comes from CNN.com, which featured a story called “Mixed Emotions.” Here, the author mentions how “Ward’s triumphant return has caused many to re-



examine prejudices against biracial children” Later, the article quotes Ward when he says: “we can’t change the past but the present day and the future. Maybe if I can provide hope and inspiration to make Korea even better place (*sic*) than what it already is, then I will be more than excited” (Sohn). This quote from Ward directly conjures up an imagined future for South Korea, instigated by Ward himself and existing as a “better place” than it is currently.

Next, I’d like to look at an article from *USA Today*, based on an interview with Ward in Seoul during his visit. This article is less hyperbolic, but the same tropes reappear as in the ESPN and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* pieces. For example, the author claims: “Ward is helping prepare South Korea for its multiracial future” (Wiseman). The emphasis here is again on assistance with an implied linear progression from a backwards past to a modern future. The article also notes that: “Ward and his mother have been welcomed as heroes in South Korea, where kids like him—children of Korean women and American GIs—have been treated as pariahs, shunned, ridiculed and locked out of the best jobs and schools” (Wiseman). This last part evokes the core / periphery model directly by implicating the polity of the nation-state in condoning systemic racism. The contradiction in this last quote is also interesting. South Korea is construed as a society where discrimination is socio-culturally pervasive, yet it is also a place where people who call attention to this fact are “welcomed as heroes.” Examining the manner of this welcome allows us to glimpse possible “solutions” to South Korea’s social backwardness.

For example, the author of this piece, Paul Wiseman, takes pains to describe the hotel Ward stays at in Seoul. He begins the story by quoting Ward as he relates the travails of his childhood growing up with mixed ethnicity. Then Wiseman transitions by providing context of the interview, writing: “Ward, 30, describes his childhood while relaxing in the \$6,300-a-night Royal Suite in Seoul’s Lotte Hotel. His mother, Kim Young-hee, sits proudly beside him on an

overstuffed couch, sunlight streaming through a window that offers a glorious view of the Seoul skyline” (Wiseman). Here, elements associated with modernity such as conspicuous consumption and leisure are conflated with the American Dream. Capitalist progress in South Korea, evinced through the large corporate hotel and commanding view of the Seoul skyline, dovetail with Orientalist narratives to suggest ways the Other can become more like us.



Finally, I would like to move beyond Said’s theory slightly **Fig. 1** Roh receives a football<sup>19</sup> by discussing how these binary narratives of core / periphery intersect with gender binaries. *The Washington Post* article, “Steelers MVP Gives S. Korea a Most Valuable Perspective,” serves well in this regard. Gender binaries stemming from Freud and prevalent in popular culture reserve a valued, active role for men and a devalued, passive role for women (J. Brown). This theory also applies to discourses of global culture flows. In this article, the ability of Hines Ward to *give* Koreans a new perspective suggests that he is in a dominant position in relation to the Koreans, who can only hope to receive. Later in the article Ward also talks about *giving* encouragement. This is something that is also seen in the aforementioned articles and the ESPN video. CNN.com quotes Ward as saying he will “*provide* hope and inspiration” while the ESPN video intones that Ward will “*initiate* change in a society half a world away” (Sohn) (lowkeycinema).

These discourses grant all agency to Ward as someone who possesses something and can make things happen. As we discussed earlier, these tropes are also informed by a racialized and phallogocentric narrative that works to hyper-masculinize Ward. The introductory paragraph on Ward from JockBio.com for example, starts with: “back in the leather-helmet days

<sup>19</sup> Photo taken from April 4, 2006 issue of *USA Today*

of pro football, a player had to run, catch, throw and deliver bone-crushing hits. Today, there is just one of these guys left: Hines Ward” (“Hines Ward Biography”). This toughens Ward while serving as a binary category in the wider discursive field to strip Koreans of agency, positing them as passive and feminized recipients suffering from lack. This feminization of the Orient manifests through Korean ignorance of football, something overdetermined in the United States as a masculine activity. The CNN.com article notes that “most South Koreans have never watched American football” (Sohn). Additionally, *The Washington Post* mentions how “Chang Ye Eu, a sinewy 19-year old, doesn’t know the difference between a field goal and a first down” (Cho). An accompanying picture from the *USA Today* of a towering, masculinized Ward handing the relatively diminutive, feminized South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun a football reinforces this point. The photo seems to have been selected to catch the Korean leader at his most bewildered, his expression suggesting he is unsure what to do with the oblong ball of pigskin (fig. 1).

#### **IV: Re-orienting Hines Ward**

Discussion so far has centered on American discourses surrounding Hines Ward’s 2006 trip to Seoul. I have argued that Orientalism informs the dominant framing of his trip, and supports cultural imperialism through a powerful / powerless binary among states of the global core and the periphery. Now I would like to extend and complicate this argument by examining press coverage of Ward’s visit from the *Chosun Ilbo*, an English language edition of a popular South Korean newspaper. In this publication, “the local” as imagined world space is not a helpless victim of a dominating global hegemon, but instead seeks to actively indigenize would-

be master narratives, mobilizing counter-discourses that emphasize regionally-based identity and state hegemony.

The first way that Orientalist narratives are indigenized is through reclamation of Hines Ward as a signifier. This struggle occurs at the level of identity. Instances that can be used to demonstrate how Ward is Korean are seized upon and become the main narrative thrust of the articles. This occurs in three primary ways: first, by emphasizing Ward's desire to better understand and take pride in Korean culture, second by showing Ward as patriotic, coeval with government courting of the MVP, and third, by stressing Ward's fidelity to his Korean mother.

An April 4<sup>th</sup> article in the *Chosun Ilbo* starts like this: "the words 'Anyoung hassayo?'"<sup>20</sup> spoken in slightly accented Korean by Super Bowl hero Hines Ward kicked off a press conference on Tuesday." The article continues by saying that "Ward expressed interest in learning more about the local culture before he returns to the U.S." and mentioning that "the footballer was keen to express his excitement about all things Korean" ("Football Star Talks"). In another article about a return visit to Korea a few weeks after his first, the author notes "Ward told reporters he was happy to be back and had missed Korean food."<sup>21</sup> Later, the author recalls Ward's comments about the Korean soccer team, stating: "Ward said he believed Korea has a fine team and promised to root for it with a passion" ("Hines Ward Returns"). Finally, in a story printed April 12<sup>th</sup> the author simply cited Ward as saying "with a generous smile that he loves everything about Korea" ("Super Bowl Hero").

Beyond an affinity for Korean culture, Ward is reconstituted semiotically under the umbrella of the nation-state. This is done first through public appearances alongside state dignitaries, and second, by highlighting instances where he professes patriotic sentiment. This

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<sup>20</sup> "Hello, how are you?"

<sup>21</sup> Recall the importance of food and ethno-nationalism from Chapter One

should be seen as an attempt on the part of the nation-state to control its shifting ethnoscapas (diasporic Koreans) by (re)imagining them through the ideoscape of national identity. Here, states “seek to capture and monopolize ideas about nationhood” (Appadurai 1990, 303). For example, Ward was made an honorary citizen of Seoul on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006, putting him in the company of notable figures like Pearl S. Buck and Jackie Chan (“Hines Ward Tearfully”). Korea.net, “Korea’s official website,” places the prestige of the state at the forefront of its article on Ward’s honorary citizenship. Its article leads with a sentence praising Ward “for his remarkable sports career that has raised Korea's prestige” (“Ward Receives Seoul”). As stated before, he also met former president Roh Moo-hyun.

These are occasions where the state can step in and assert some agency in the production of a re-localized sports hero, and to some extent control emergent international discourses by staging elaborate and tightly controlled media spectacles around these meetings. But resistance to Orientalist discourses stemming from the West does not mean the local should be valorized. As Arif Dirlik states: “the local... also indicates fragmentation and, given the issues of power involved, political and cultural manipulation as well” (Dirlik 28). The manipulation in this case is the idea that the Korean government is actively working to improve the lives of biracial citizens. What is closer to the truth is that this humanitarianism is for the most part limited to those (like Hines Ward) with a high enough level of international prestige to draw the global eye towards South Korea. A comment made by the mayor of Seoul after presenting Ward with citizenship is telling. He told the star to “visit Seoul again next year after being MVP again” (“Hines Ward Tearfully”). This virtual admission of only the most conditional acceptance of Ward, based on his continued international celebrity, is evocative of Arjun Appadurai when he claims that nation-states work to pacify their domestic populations by “creating various kinds of

international spectacle to domesticate difference; and by seducing small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage” (Appadurai 1990, 304). In short, the project of challenging systemic racism society-wide would mean a long and expensive process of destabilizing the status quo. On the other hand, evoking the promise of liberation via token celebration of a statistical anomaly reinforces the status quo, leaving the state role as primary arbiter of national identity well secured.

Ward seems to go along with this, and is careful not to criticize the government. During his trip he “expressed hope that other mixed-race children will forget neither their dreams for the future nor their pride in their Korean heritage” (“Hines Ward Given”). This suggests that biracial kids should work within the system, stick it out in Korea, and have faith that things will change eventually. This is ironic because if it weren’t for Ward’s family leaving Korea in the mid-70’s, he would, in all likelihood, not be where he is today. Ward’s mother Kim Young-hee spells this out clearly when she asks: “what do you think would have become of us if I had kept living here with Hines? He would probably never have been able to be anything but a beggar” (“Football Star’s Mother”).

Yet despite Kim Young-hee’s verve, she is also appropriated discursively to underscore the essential Koreanness of Hines Ward, despite his nearly life-long residence in America. Almost half of the articles from South Korea dealing with Ward make mention of the fact that his trip was “fulfilling the promise he made to his mother” to visit his homeland (“Hines Ward Given”). Ward is consistently understood through his fidelity to his mother. Another article mentions that Ward “vowed to keep striving to make sure his mother is always proud of him” (“Football Star Talks”). This is significant in the Korean context because, in Confucianism, “defence of the Fatherland is a duty associated with the defence of family or mother” (Ferro

183). That Ward's mother was his sole guardian only serves to consolidate her role as family *and* mother.

Ward's mother, and by extension Ward himself, is also connected to an imagined Korean homeland through the notion of tradition. Speaking to a gaggle of Korean journalists at the airport in Incheon directly after arriving, Ward quipped "me and my mom are going to catch up on some old traditions" ("South Korea Salutes"). It is unclear exactly what Ward meant by this statement, and it is similarly difficult to deduce in what "traditions" Ward's mother, Kim Young-hee, partook since her day-to-day activities were not as explicitly chronicled as that of her son. Ward is seen dressed in a traditional Korean *Hanbok* at one point in his trip, a garment generally only worn during important holidays and deeply reminiscent of the Chosun-era formal wear worn by representatives of the dynastic apparatus ("Kim Ye-jin").

### **Conclusion**

We have seen how discourses of Hines Ward operate on a global stage, and that these discourses are marked by disjuncture and unequal power relationships. American media seek to incorporate emergent discourses of the Orient in a manner that constitutes themselves as modern, benevolent, masculinized, and enlightened, in a position of constant "flexible superiority" (Said 5). Conversely, these discourses contain "them" (Orientals) as backwards, passive, feminized, and helplessly mired in the past. This discursively constructed Orient is not without a voice however, and can dialogue with the West through mediated spectacle. These events occasion the indigenization of Orientalist discourse, re-appropriating signifiers such as Hines Ward and promulgating the re-oriented sign along the breadth of its own media outlets. But this

indigenization, while resistant in the global context, is also problematic because it is a location for the extension of regional hegemonies. In this case Hines Ward becomes the staging area from which the state mobilizes tropes of national identity that encourage racism and discrimination against minorities, practices of which it is the primary author and benefactor.



### CHAPTER III

#### SEODAEMUN PRISON MUSEUM AND THE CO-OPTATION OF CHILDHOOD PLAY AND PRACTICE

*Mythic elements... appearing in representations of 'heritage,' obstruct the free exercise of critical judgment. The 'figures' that are created—typically, but not exclusively, in the national past—are not truly historical entities but the headings or topics upon which histories can be written. They precede historical understandings, both in logic and in time.*

- David Brett

Seodaemun prison, constructed by the Japanese shortly after claiming Korea as a protectorate, was part of the Japanese solution to the problem of Korean nationalism. Japanese imperialists summarily rounded up and imprisoned Korean nationalists who, through speech or deed, betrayed their fidelity to Korean independence. The prison, just twenty minutes from the heart of Seoul, is still operational though the jack-booted footprints of Japanese soldiers have long since washed from Korean soil. Now it is the Korean government itself that uses Seodaemun, not as a prison, but as a museum and living history exhibit. Though bodies are no longer imprisoned behind its walls, the purpose of Seodaemun is essentially the same: it is still a space whose primary function is to (re)produce docile subjects of a national government.

In this chapter, I will examine Seodaemun as a national heritage site of some importance *vis-à-vis* Korean ethnic nationalism. As a physical space, Seodaemun works as a locus of power for broader discursive strategies, essentially containing the chaotic temporal reality of an oppressive history in a spatial frame that can then be controlled and dictated according to the interests of those in power (de Certeau 38). Simply put, Seodaemun works out a problematic past, present, and future in brick and mortar, and engages in a process of “making real” a history that, for the vast majority of Koreans (especially Seodaemun’s target audience), is primarily imagined in the sense that Benedict Anderson describes “imagined” community: a national

community whose sense of itself is highly mediated and actively produced by the state government which seeks to leverage control over a disparate populace.

Seodaemun is therefore another site for the expression and transmission of South Korean ethnic nationalism. In this case, as in my interpretation of the *Dokdo* children's art display in the next chapter, Korean nationalism is forged through abjection of the Japanese, who thus exist as perpetual "Others." Specifically, I examine the Seodaemun Prison History Hall, henceforth the SPHH, which is part of the larger complex of buildings that makes up Seodaemun. This structure is a site of living history, where visitors are led to accept the dominant discourse of Seodaemun. They are encouraged to act as what Scott Magelssen calls "second-person interpreters," bearing witness to the barbarism of the Japanese through immersion, interactive play, and seemingly radical practices like graffiti writing in an authenticated environment. Here, patrons engage in "co-creating the trajectory of the historiographic narrative... using physical manipulatives... and hands-on exercise" (2006, 298). And while tourists here certainly have a degree of agency in how they understand and interpret the messages of Seodaemun, I argue that the SPHH none-the-less attempts to prey upon the special qualities and characteristics of childhood to produce a more convincing and totalizing nationalist ideology.

### **I: Seodaemun and its history**

The Japanese completed construction of Seodaemun prison in 1908, just three short years after winning protectorate status for Korea (G. Shin 27). Seodaemun, as I discuss it here and as it stands today, is not a single prison, but rather a loose cluster of seven prison buildings and various administrative and supplementary facilities, along with an execution room. The SPHH is

but one of these buildings, all of which are ensconced within impressive brick walls dotted with watchtowers and strung end-to-end with barbed wire. The site as a whole is nestled within a larger park, named the Seodaemun Independence Park, which is administered by the government (Life in Korea). Some of the prison buildings have been given special status as “national treasures” and enjoy a commensurate degree of symbolic value, along with material protection against the steady erosion of time (Cultural Heritage Administration).

Seodaemun’s original purpose was to house criminals, but more specifically, political agitators. These latter types of convict, dubbed by Koreans as “righteous armies,” were organized in opposition to Japanese imperial rule. Their transgressions ran the gamut from organizing peaceful demonstrations to executing bombings and making assassination attempts upon Japanese officials (Duus 188, 220). Despite some limited visible successes however, the righteous armies had little impact towards advancing the liberation of ethnic Koreans; and with the exception of the *Samil Undong*<sup>22</sup> demonstrations in 1919, they only tended to exacerbate existing tension, giving the Japanese cause to clamp down with even stricter governance and enforcement (Robinson 35).

That many ethnic Koreans would see their greatest hope of salvation in militancy is no surprise. The Japanese colonial administration was particularly bloody and repressive, its highest goal being no less than “the liquidation of effective oppositional resistance and consolidation of military and political power” (Peattie 25). Land reallocations deprived farmers of subsistence crops, and appeals to the judicio-administrative bureaucracy were in vain, since it had been taken over by Japanese. Korean language and culture was also systematically repressed so that new Japanese identities could be formed. The school system stood at the forefront of this campaign, the new educational directive being to “cultivate such character as

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<sup>22</sup> Translation: “three-one movement.” Mass student-led demonstrations in Seoul on March 1<sup>st</sup>

befitting the imperial subject through moral development and dissemination of the national [Japanese] language” (H. Kim 50). Rule was especially harsh as felt through the long arm of what Louis Althusser dubs the “repressive state apparatus.” Historian Han-kyo Kim notes that “sabre-rattling policemen were the object of fear to adults and children alike—for good reason (45).” Incidents like the *Che-am* massacre,<sup>23</sup> which Japan unsuccessfully tried to cover-up, demonstrated that any form of organized resistance would be swiftly met with overwhelming and bloody police force (Breen 110).

Finally, Korean females were used as *ibongun seongnoye*, or “comfort women” for the Japanese troops. Prostitution had long been institutionalized within the Japanese military structure, ostensibly to bolster troop morale, discourage soldiers from raping civilians (thus inciting local hostilities), and reduce instances of venereal disease among soldiers. That this system might be seen as “preventing rape” is abhorrent. The policy of mobilizing comfort women alongside soldiers *was* rape, on a massive institutionalized scale. The ethnic Koreans used as “prostitutes” for Japanese servicemen were much more like sexual slaves. Sex was carried out in assembly-line fashion; during “rush hour” soldiers who had purchased their ticket literally had to wait in line to take their turn (Hicks 93). Comfort women were chattel, required to mobilize in ramshackle “comfort stations” on the front lines and even be sent as special detachments to accompany supply runs, both of which were highly dangerous (Hicks 74). The largest danger to comfort women however wasn’t from “enemy” bullets and bombs; sexually transmitted disease was by far their greatest peril. Though the women were sometimes granted a hospital visit, or a brief break from their regular duties for health reasons, many were “allowed to die untreated, or abandoned or even killed” (Hicks 95).

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<sup>23</sup> A Japanese police officer was killed in *Che-am* as retribution for beating a villager. The local police called the men of the village together in a church to discuss the incident. Once there, Japanese police nailed shut the doors and set the church on fire, shooting whoever tried to escape. Twenty-three people were killed.

I mention this last aspect of Japanese rule in detail because it is significant in light of my present study. Not only is there a strong sense of “woman as nation” operating in South Korea,<sup>24</sup> but Seodaemun itself redeploys the spectre of the comfort woman, not only in defense of national solidarity, but in support of present day patriarchy as well, which I will show later. Moreover, the issue of financial compensation and redress for living comfort women lies at the nexus of myriad issues of importance for Koreans today, the issue often getting top billing in the country’s more popular newspapers such as the *Chosun Ilbo* (Chosun Ilbo). As such, the comfort woman, as a sign, becomes a space within which to work out anxiety, and anger, over national de-masculinization, powerlessness, and victimhood (K. Kim).

Given the characteristic brutality of Japanese rule, Koreans charged with treason against their new colonial masters and held against their will in Seodaemun were certainly treated to consistent bouts of torture, degradation, and wanton murder. The Seodaemun Prison History Hall makes this quite clear, and it would be a mistake to dismiss the real legacy of suffering that Japanese colonization has engendered. I am not disputing the fact that Koreans have suffered under Japanese rule. I am, however, convinced that dominant narratives of Korean identity are unnecessarily wedded to essentialist ideas of heritage that pit them forever against a Japanese enemy. This sort of nationalism glosses over both the oppression visited upon Koreans by their own government, and the attempts Japan has made to address historical injustices through compensation and apology.

For example, it is interesting to note that neither Seodaemun, nor the SPHH, makes any explicit reference to the years between 1945, when the Japanese turned South Korea over to the Americans, and 1987, when Seodaemun was converted into a tourist attraction and living history site outside Seoul. Historian Adam Bohnet remembers from his days at Kangwon National

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter One

University (in Northeast South Korea) fellow graduate students telling him that Seodaemun “continued to be used following liberation,” though such references are stripped from the site itself. With authoritarian regimes in power well into the early 80’s, the prison continued to service the whims of tyrants; only this time they waved Korean flags. The reign of Park Chun-hee from 1961 to 1979 was especially authoritarian, with countless journalists and left-leaning activists of all sorts imprisoned or simply gone missing during this time<sup>25</sup> (Oberdorfer 42).

Additionally, the Japanese government has made several attempts to atone for its treatment of South Korea, something that is not reflected in the material available at Seodaemun. In 1993, for example, Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, speaking of Japan’s various cruelties to Korea, stated that “I hereby express genuine contrition and offer my deepest apologies for my country, the aggressor’s, acts” (Lind 20). In 1995 the Japanese government was instrumental in setting up the “Asian Women’s Fund,” which gave financial assistance to the comfort women of World War II (Hogg). In 1998 Japan issued a written apology, which South Korea accepted, alongside a pledge on both sides to “move forward” (Lind 20). Finally, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro visited Seodaemun itself in 2001, laying a wreath and saying of the exhibits: “when I looked at things put on display [in the museum] I strongly felt...regret for the pains Korean people suffered during Japanese colonial rule. As a politician and a man, I believe we must not forget the pain of [Korean] people” (Lind 20-21).

Given that the Korean state has both directly avoided addressing over half of Seodaemun’s history (forty-two years under Korean control) and avoided softening the militant tone of the SPHH, even in light of direct apologies from the Japanese government, I argue that the site is much more than a living history exhibit *per se*. Much of its actual history has been

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<sup>25</sup> Brought into power through a military coup in 1961, Park ruled with an iron hand until 1979, when he was assassinated over dinner by the director of the Korean CIA.

erased, and that which is there is virulently anti-Japanese, to the point of ignoring present history, and making one feel as if Korea were still under the thumb of Japanese imperial rule. I am therefore led to restate my thesis: Seodaemun exists as a site for the hegemonic (re)production of national subjects, who are thus encouraged to invest in the national government's status as gatekeepers, and primary beneficiaries, of a diffuse and intensely felt ethnic solidarity which in this case is constituted in binary opposition to an Othered Japanese aggressor.

## **II: Locating Seodaemun**

As I noted in the Introduction to this thesis, I lived and worked in South Korea for thirteen months between 2005 and 2006. But it should be clear that I was, and am, by no means an insider. I therefore treat the coming subject matter delicately in that I am cognizant of the ease with which I would be able to make sweeping claims and hasty generalizations. There is little personal risk involved should I choose to make bombastic claims about Korean ethnic nationalism. Unlike my contemporaries living in Korea, I am unlikely to suffer a foul reputation or receive disciplinary action from my employers should I express deviant (anti-nationalist) viewpoints.<sup>26</sup> Also, since it has been over two full years since my stay in Korea, I am aware of the extent to which memory is less a matter of raw data retrieval than an ongoing and active process of working upon canvas that was already worked upon, interpretation upon interpretation like endlessly stacked turtles, one upon the other's back (Geertz). Arjun Appadurai boldly claims "the last turtle is always a matter of methodological convenience or stamina," with which I agree entirely (Appadurai 2005, 11). Therefore, what follows will be an attempt to mitigate the

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<sup>26</sup> The website Education International recently posted a story about seven teachers in Korea who were fired for challenging the national system of standardized tests, giving students a choice whether or not to take them. Such instances are not uncommon; teachers are often punished for lack of patriotism when they suggest, for instance, that the South may have instigated the Korean War, or worse, espouse an ill-defined "pro-communist" agenda.

lure of convenience and the impracticality of stamina as best I am able. What I hope emerges from this effort is not an authoritative “how it is,” but a suggestive string of evidence which culminates in an overall picture, open to challenges, variant interpretations, and reworkings.

Towards the end of my stay in South Korea, my family came to visit. For my mother and father, this was their first time traveling outside North America. My brother and sister-in-law had done some traveling in Europe, but nowhere farther East. I set my family up in a motel<sup>27</sup> that was owned by the father of my Korean friend “Terry.” Their motel was in the heart of Gurishi (my hometown), nestled between various mixed office complexes and a sprawling outdoor-market.

Though I had been promised ten days vacation time by my *Hagwan* director (verbally and contractually), when my family came to visit, I was told brusquely that taking time off of work was “not possible.” This was the first of many misunderstandings on my part. My blind American faith in the inalterability of contracts was one of many unfortunate conceits I carried into South Korea. Nevertheless, I *was* able to spend time with my family in the evenings and on the weekends, and I must say that I played a pretty good host.

On Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2006, I traveled to Seodaemun prison with my parents, brother, and sister-in-law. My sister-in-law’s father had served in the U.S. army during the Korean War, and had suggested to his daughter that she see this prison, having taken a trip back himself after it was reopened in 1987. I met my family early in the morning at their motel. We took a bus to the subway station, then a subway to nearby Dongnimmun. From the subway station it was a short trip by foot to the gates of Seodaemun.

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<sup>27</sup> Compared with hotels, motels were generally referred to as “love motels.” Their implicit function is to serve as discrete rendezvous points for husbands and their mistresses. The rooms were very nice, though the sex toy vending machine on my parents’ floor belied the rooms’ primary purpose.



### III: Studying Seodaemun

The following section reflects a long morning and early afternoon spent touring Seodaemun with my family. We did not have a guide, but were directed by the general flow of human traffic, and numerous signs that were printed in Korean and English. I have talked with my family on numerous occasions about their memories of Seodaemun since returning, and have also tried to collect as much information as possible about the site via printed material and Internet sources.

I argue in this section that Seodaemun is the physical nexus of the Korean state's attempt to co-opt possible meanings of the nation under a single umbrella. These ethno-nationalist discourses inextricably bind an essentialized notion of heritage, blood, and birth, to the state government itself, which posits itself as supreme arbiter of the Korean imagined community. In the case of Seodaemun, as in the following chapter on *Dokdo*, this formulation is especially dangerous since it conditions Korean identity as binary opposite of the Japanese, who are villainized and Othered, maintained in perpetual stasis as a dark specter threatening to consume the Korean peninsula. Moreover, the extent to which children are used in both cases to both embody and legitimate these ends is equally worrisome.

My conclusions about the purpose of Seodaemun come from textual analysis and participant observation. Theoretically, my arguments revolve around two essential ideas. First, that Seodaemun attempts to close itself to contrary readings by foregrounding itself as an *authentic* historical site. This has much to do with the physical location and structure of Seodaemun, as well as the messages one encounters within its walls. Second, Seodaemun works to legitimate and promulgate its agenda through the co-optation of childhood play and practice.

By encouraging morbid play through interactive features, Seodaemun attempts to make second-person interpreters out of child subjects, immersing them in a hegemonic web of living history discourse. Finally, the practice of childhood graffiti writing is mobilized in an effort to legitimate more vehemently anti-Japanese sentiments, and merge the historicity of the site with the presumed reality of present everyday life.

#### **IV: Location in Space, Physicality**

In Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he argues that the city itself can be read as discourse. From the Modern period we have great projects, monolithic sectors of city space designed to treat humanity as a vast experiment, the end game of which was no less than the betterment of the human race. Post-modern spaces, he argues, characterize a lack of master-narratives and subsequently foreground the role of individuals as free agents. Multi-use spaces and aesthetically challenging architecture were designed not to fulfill existing needs, but to adapt to needs as they arose, from the *uses* people put these spaces to in their day to day lives (de Certeau).

I argue here that the geography of Seodaemun, within the discourse of the city, foregrounds its role as an authentic space, one that offers a pure and unvarnished vantage of historical fact. That is, the physical travel from Seoul to the relatively less inhabited Dongnimmun further embeds the visitor in a discourse of historical authenticity (*Life in Korea*). Through close reading of the way trajectories and the gaze (as postulated by de Certeau) are directed by the curators of Seodaemun, I contend that the physicality and layout of Seodaemun also reinforce the authenticity of the site. Thus, one's journey through Seodaemun is carefully

managed to support dominant narratives of the site, and close off alternate readings that may reveal one's journey as constructed.

My first argument, that the location of Seodaemun outside of the city is itself a strategy, rests on the assumption that a similar educational exhibit would be logistically more advantageous in Seoul itself. I make this claim for two reasons. First, there would be heightened proximity to potential visitors, thereby enhancing both the educational "value" (more visitors equals more educational content transmitted) and the financial viability of this sort of living history exhibit. Second, the expensive upkeep and renovation needed to maintain Seodaemun as it exists would be avoided, thus freeing those financial resources for other state projects or promotion of the new, more centrally located Seodaemun exhibit.

It may go without saying, but keeping Seodaemun at its original location foregrounds it as an "authentic" site. I therefore see its location, especially in light of the pragmatic advantages of relocation outlined above, as serving an ideological function in this regard. The truth of Seodaemun's message is made all the more convincing due to the visitor's physical journey "back in time," their emigration from the city proper, with all its connotations of modern convenience. Seodaemun, as a physical site whose semiotic value is entwined with that very physicality, emphasizes the pilgrimage (and attendant feelings of dislocation) as an important part of how visitors make sense of their experience there.

That Seodaemun is an educational site aimed especially at children makes this argument all the more compelling. Childhood is characterized by a distinct lack of mobility; children's ability to roam about their environment demarcated by clear divisions of where they can and cannot travel (Gilliam 40). For many children then, especially those from lower income families, a school trip to Seodaemun represents a drastic departure from their typical haunts and

habitations. What would to an adult seem like any other half hour drive out of the city may feel like a trip to another world for a child.

Here, the bus or subway acts as something of a magical conduit uprooting children from rational time/space and inserting him or her in a state of liminality which serves to make arrival all the more miraculous, as Anne Allison notes in her discussion of long commutes in Japan (71). This is not to say that the child is beamed in Star Trek fashion to a distant planet. I merely suggest that the trip itself has a certain inscrutable mystique about it, especially to a child. It should therefore be granted special consideration, especially in terms of the extent to which the travel itself serves to mythologize, in the Barthesian sense, the destination as a place out of a child's normal consideration of space and time.

I want to turn attention now to the layout and materiality of Seodaemun. Much like other tourist sites of historic value, like the Brandywine River Museum visited by John Dorst in *The Written Suburb*, Seodaemun's success in transmitting the desired ideological effect lies in carefully incorporating modern elements in a way that also emphasizes its age and authenticity, especially in key areas of the site. Despite the fact that the buildings have been renovated, improved upon, and saddled with modern accoutrements like phone lines, indoor plumbing, and countless other innovations over its more than one-hundred year history, it is still foregrounded as a place where the past lives are frozen in time, ready to come alive at the behest of curious patrons.

Certain areas of Seodaemun, though they exist within the compound and ostensibly carry no less historic value, are clearly modernized, and all traces of their original use have been expunged. The greeting area of the SPHH for example is carpeted, with smooth white walls, modern lighting, various sophisticated and interactive displays, and signage posted at regular

intervals in English and Korean, as you would see in an airport. The ticket booths are also a modern addition, and they stand awkwardly inside the gate, little plastic huts with Plexiglas windows keeping a silent vigil in all weather.

On the surface, it may seem that these modern additions threaten to disrupt the aura of authenticity surrounding Seodaemun. These locations announce their difference in three primary ways. First, they are visually different, made of clearly modern material and designed with a utilitarian sensibility. Second, they appear towards the beginning of one's visit to the site, and are located near the front, emphasizing their role as touristic departure points. Finally, and most importantly, each is marked as a concession to the demands of educational usability and management. Large and clear signs instruct patrons where to go, what to see, and how they should feel while touring Seodaemun.

But these spaces, clearly demarcated from the "reality" of harsh prison life, actually guide one's attention to the authenticity of the rest of the site. They are the necessary "tourist" portions of the prison, a reminder that other carefully arranged spaces are completely authentic. The better lit and more comfortable the greeting area of the SPHH, the more intensely one will note the dark, dank, crumbling, and uncomfortable basement where prisoners were tortured. The effectiveness of the exhibit thus lies in the rapid plunge from modern safety to pre-modern barbarism, blank sterility to blood and guts reality. In this way the visitor is encouraged to gloss over the more banal realities of history (bureaucracy, administration) that existed on the first floor, and commune with others downstairs for the real show.

The gaze is also managed through the layout of Seodaemun, or the trajectory one takes on a typical tour through the site. The effect here is quite powerful, as one is thrust into the role of prisoner from start to finish, incarceration to death. When you enter Seodaemun you must first

pass through the high and wide prison gates, which have been well preserved and loom ominously. You are then directed into the greeting area of the SPHH, where you learn about the righteous armies and how they were unjustly imprisoned. On some days they have cardboard cutouts of these heroic nationals standing up with holes cut out in their faces. You are encouraged to have your picture taken with your head sticking through, smiling sweetly for the camera as you tote your rifle in defiance of tyranny (Lawson 2007).

You are then led through the prisoner area, passing row after row of dimly lit cells, your footsteps sounding hollow on the concrete as you proceed through this cavernous area. Next, you can see various guard facilities, and a few administrative buildings which are closed to the public. The most spectacular part of the journey comes next, when you wind back through the SPHH basement, and can witness acts of terrible violence firsthand. Finally, the tour winds down before a glum looking little square building where you learn that prisoners were hanged. Just outside this building is a dark tunnel burrowing under the wall. Though it is gated shut, a sign informs you that this tunnel is where the bodies of dead Koreans were carted from the prison.

As we've seen, the visitor's journey closely mirrors that of an actual prisoner. First, you arrive at the prison through the front gate. Next, you are informed of why you were incarcerated, and given the proper background to fix yourself solidly as a righteous freedom fighter, detained by a malicious government for expressing love of your motherland. Next, you are led through the cell area, getting a taste of what it would be like to live in a small room, dealing with guard surveillance. Then you are brought downstairs for torture and rape, empathetically suffering as the prisoners did through deep immersion in a series of interactive, animate exhibits. And

finally, your stay at Seodaemun is completed with a hanging; the last exhibit of note the receding tunnel of blackness into which your last mortal remains will travel.

### **V: The SPHH: Co-optation of Children's Play and Practice**

It is important to establish that children are the primary intended inheritors of the educational value that Seodaemun purports to distribute. As I mentioned above, Seodaemun is a registered national treasure, managed by the Cultural Heritage Administration. Part of their charter states: “the value of our cultural heritage must be taught and widely propagated through education in home, at school and in society” (Cultural Heritage Administration). Youth are allowed into Seodaemun for only 1,000 won, or about a single U.S. dollar. Children are charged 500 won, or about 50 cents. The low cost of these admissions again underscores the populist educational aim of Seodaemun. Anecdotal evidence also affirms my argument, in that children have been seen, by myself and others, being brought to the site *en masse* as part of official school outings (Muninn). A pilgrimage of this sort would be ideologically in keeping with the Korean educational system's emphasis on historical narratives of ethnic-nationalism grounded in antipathy for the Japanese oppressor.<sup>28</sup>

As I argue in the next chapter, the educational system in Korea is defined by its rigid adherence to the dogmatic proscriptions of the state government. Parents, students, and educators are all coerced to participate in a system that inculcates children under the state-sponsored national imaginary; education is second to citizen formation. By dictating field trips to Seodaemun, the state educational project uses the docility of children's bodies to its benefit,

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Four

the limited spectrum of children’s spatial familiarity only serving to further mystify the whole process and, arguably, leave the child more prone to ideological suggestion.

Additionally, an article in the *Korean Times* tells about a Korean non-profit program entitled “Motherland Excursion for Korean-American Youth.” The purpose of this program is to teach Korean-American youngsters living in America about Korean history by flying them over for a short, guided visit. The article quotes one student as saying that “this trip has opened my eyes to the history that lies behind my roots and what my identity is.” One site that is included on this ten-day trip is Seodaemun prison (Kang).

The SPHH consists of two floors. While the visitor’s area on the main floor could arguably have been designed for adult patrons, the basement is decidedly children-centric. On the main floor is a relatively mundane collection of placards and dioramic displays giving one a general background in the struggle of Korean nationalists during occupation. There are long and wordy descriptions of patriotism, injustice and bravery, with more than a few life stories, all of which emphasize unjust confinement and human tragedy. Large black and white photos of Righteous Army militants line the walls. One picture features a headshot of a dead Korean man lying on his back, face skyward, a massive gash inches deep running from his cheek to the back of his head.



**Figure 1** Uncomfortably small cell

Descending into the basement however, you are greeted by a dank musky odor. Lights are dimmed, and as you step down a faint sound comes to your ears. At first it seems like the baying of animals in some field far away. Then it sounds more like animals being led to slaughter, crying out in fright and horror. Suddenly, laughter



cuts like a knife through the din of terrible moans, and you realize these are human voices! You proceed, despite yourself, and the sounds become louder. It is clear now that people are crying out in pain, begging to be relieved of the most terrible suffering.



**Figure 2** Torture of a woman

Another set of voices can be heard cracking through the noise like an electric shock, cackling and screaming short directives. Speakers are set along the walls at intervals; there is no escaping this audio bombardment. The sounds of suffering come from various

rooms along the corridors, which visitors cannot enter. The rooms each have one wall replaced with Plexiglas so the visitor can look inside (fig. 1). Animatronic mannequins inhabit these rooms, which we quickly learn are cells preserved from the time of occupation.

In one room, a Korean woman sits at a table opposite a Japanese officer. Her hands are laid flat on the table and the officer is jamming something into her fingertips. With each thrust she screams in agony, and when the object is removed she wails and moans (fig. 2). In the same room a woman is chained to

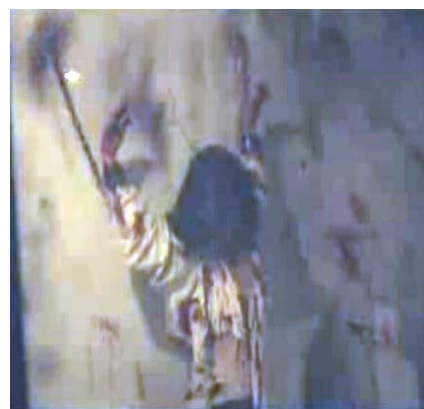


**Figure 3** Held at gunpoint

the wall, her white shirt is ripped to a bare minimum of coverage, exposing a taut stomach and gently sloping cleavage. Blood is splattered all over her shirt and the wall behind her; a Japanese guard stands nearby, leering. In the corner yet another woman kneels between two other guards. One holds her chin, forcing her head to tilt upward. In a connecting room a Korean man is held at gunpoint, prevented from taking action (fig. 3). There is a door leading to

the room where the women are being tortured, and the guard holding the gun gazes into the darkness of the adjacent room, as if wishing he too be could involved in the rape and torture.

This room is notable because it raises the phantom of comfort women. As I mentioned earlier, the comfort woman is a highly charged figure still today, and her inclusion here, if only through the loose association of unwanted sexual advance, is characteristically bold. The helpless Korean man in the other room is a powerful symbol of castration and powerlessness. It is instructive as well to note the sexualization of the victim chained to the wall. She is construed as being partly responsible for her own treatment, as her highly sexualized body seems to have been “asking for it.” The male gaze is in fact invited to identify with the Japanese officer in this case, whose lustful eyes roll over the open, passive body of the victim, whose own eyes lie meekly on the floor, half-hidden behind waves of silky hair (fig. 4). This indicates a framing of the comfort woman that works to “re-deploy patriarchal norms of female sexuality” in the present day, a decidedly masculinist feature of Korean ethnic-nationalism (Yang).



**Figure 4** Sexualized bondage/torture

Another room offers visitors the opportunity to sit before a Japanese jury. A panel of three officials sits before you, the judge directly in front and in the middle. You mount a small square stool. A noose hangs directly overhead. The jury reads a verdict and the judge makes a vitriolic closing statement, his voice sharp, mechanical and inhuman, piercing the thin air. Suddenly, the stool drops from beneath you! You jump in fright as your friends laugh; you have just been put to death.

In the far corner of the basement level is an even more dungeon-like area that is especially dark. The walls are made of moldy weathered brick and the ground is moist. Against the wall are a series of what look like small coffins. They are about four-feet high and a foot and a half deep. Visitors learn through placards that these are torture devices. Prisoners were stuffed inside and meant to stay there for days upon end. There is not enough room to sit, stand, or kneel. The body is forced into an impossibly uncomfortable position. Patrons learn that after leaving the box prisoners could not stand for days, often suffering permanent injuries from their captivity. The most compelling aspect of these little coffins is that children are most often (due to their small size) encouraged to climb inside and feel what it would have been like for the victims of this horrific device. A child clamors excitedly inside, and his friends or parents shut the door on him or her, veiling the child in a nigh-absolute dark, mitigated only by the small spaces in the iron grated window towards the top.

The SPHH clearly relies heavily on immersion to make history “come alive” for visitors, especially children, who are drawn in as second-person interpreters. The entirety of Seodaemun is not strictly for the benefit of children, but again, a strong argument can be made that they are the primary intended beneficiaries of these messages, and that they are most likely to be affected by what they see. The aim of these exhibits is to draw the child into a historical narrative so deeply that the difference between fantasy and reality is blurred. If, for one moment at least, the child can somehow divine the pain and suffering of his or her ancestors, the SPHH has served its function. The dropping stool is perhaps the best example of this, coming spatially / sequentially after the scenes of torture, when the child is already in a bewildered state of morbid fascination and/or fear. Then, utilizing elements of a theme-park ride, the child’s body is literally thrust into

the action as it lurches downward to certain death in synchronous harmony with the evil dictates of the Japanese judge.

These morbid scenes I have just described were designed by the SPHH curators. As immersive as they may be, they are still rather static in that they have a fixed performance or set of operations upon which their display is focused. A tape of wails plays on a continuous loop. A woman is stabbed in the fingertips again and again. The longer one watches, the more the performative nature of the display becomes apparent. A boy clamors into a coffin and is trapped, or he is sentenced to death only to be replaced by another child equally eager to experience this grisly simulacra. Interactivity is moderate, but the novelty and “fun” is probably minimal, especially when compared with other Korean kids’ popular amusements like video games. Moreover, children do not have free reign to truly immerse themselves in the sort of self-constructing narratives that would suggest more organic, bottom-up experiences. The visit is first and foremost an educational venture with lessons to be learned and teachers to obey, wrapped snugly in a wider curriculum that contextualizes the experience, but also diminishes its spontaneity. The ideological narratives therein are truly top-down, and may be regarded as such by the keen child.

It is clear, therefore, that the historical narrative of Seodaemun is not airtight. Children undoubtedly have some agency, and even the best exhibit may still reveal itself as manufactured. I propose then, that while these exhibits do rely on our tendency to “privilege performative acts of knowledge production,” they are still negotiated, and there are a “multiplicity of ways that a participant can access, produce, affirm or reject meanings...” (Magelssen n.p., 29). However, another feature of the SPHH manages to patch this potential discursive fissure by co-opting children’s graffiti, essentially incorporating and resignifying it as yet another exhibit.

All along the basement, from better-lit areas to the darkest corner, one can see graffiti splashed across the walls. Some of it is etched into the paint with keys, some of it drawn boldly in magic marker. It is not uncommon for graffiti to appear wherever youths gather and surveillance is ostensibly at a minimum, but there are two unique qualities to the graffiti in the basement of the SPHH that demand consideration here.

First, the graffiti, in both English and Korean, is vehemently anti-Japanese. Phrases like “fuck you Japan” and “Japan fuck” litter the walls. Sometimes the word Japan appears alongside an interesting Korean emoticon, which takes traditional *Hangul*<sup>29</sup> and turns it into a raised middle finger. The walls in some places are literally covered top to bottom in this kind of material, enough so to suggest that the exhibit itself has provoked young people to these unsanctioned acts of expression.

I am all the more convinced that the Seodaemun curators welcome these additions after thinking about the sheer quantity of graffiti on the walls. Literally hundreds of individual works ran corner to corner, some of them brazenly out in open spaces. It would be a simple matter to cover these hateful outcries with a coat of paint, or erase the marker with some dissolving fluid, but this has not been done. Indeed, the number of works on the wall suggests to me that the graffiti has gone untouched for a considerable length of time by the managers of the SPHH.

This could be a logistical matter, signifying nothing more than that the organization is simply unwilling to throw resources into what is arguably a losing battle against pint-sized semiotic guerillas. I find this explanation lacking for a number of reasons. First, the financial costs in deterring these acts would be minimal, a few fake cameras and a sign warning against graffiti would suffice. Equally cost-effective would be a new coat of paint every year or so, which would surely be a reasonable expense given what must be a very costly operation and

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<sup>29</sup> Korean

hefty management budget. Also, the fact that the slogans are so hateful, and so obviously targeted at the Japanese, makes covering them up a good idea if for no other reason than to avoid alienating potential Japanese tourists.

I argue that this graffiti is endorsed by the SPHH because it serves as a logical extension of the discourse of “living history” which Seodaemun represents. The message these walls convey is that young people are taking the historical lessons of Seodaemun to heart; they are outraged at the misdeeds committed upon their ancestors and wish to lash out at those responsible. Like the young Dokdo artists I discuss in the next chapter, these graffiti writers espouse a hateful intolerance of Japan that is rendered all the more potent by the educational context of their visit. In the educational context especially, each extant work of anti-Japanese graffiti encourages more, like a public blackboard upon which an authority figure has ostensibly encouraged one to write. In essence, the graffiti becomes the most convincing aspect of the SPHH because it appears “authentic” in that it is not a deliberately managed and static display. The seemingly organic sentiment of the graffiti writers thereby justifies the malicious Othering of Japan, which is legitimized via its public visibility.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to remind ourselves in conclusion that the responsibility for this kind of heritage discourse does not come from the people themselves, but the state government, which has overwhelming power to craft and perpetuate notions of Korean identity. As I demonstrate in this thesis, management of popular discourse comes in a variety of forms, from the products of the culture industries to the indigenization of foreign sports heroes and the use of children’s art to

mobilize nationalist sentiment. Here, the government has embarked on an effort to create “living history” for the youth of its nation, taking advantage of the special status of childhood to further propagate anti-Japanese sentiment, and, by extension, to consolidate their own power over the possible meanings of Korean identity itself.

## CHAPTER IV

### LONELY ISLAND: DOKDO AS ETHNO-NATIONALIST PROJECT

*...in landlessness resides the highest truth*

- Herman Melville

Korean identity is formed in large part through a long history of victimization. As a peninsular country located among large powers in East Asia, the Korean people have suffered countless invasions by regional forces seeking profit, expansion, or simply a convenient path into rival territories (Rhie). Of Korea's antagonizers, the Japanese figure prominently as the most reviled, due in no small part to thirty-five years of brutal colonial rule from 1910 to 1945. But discourses of the Japanese as enemy, as sinister Other, are both "real" and "imagined."

They are real in the sense that there exists an actual history of domination and oppression—felt in the bodies of Koreans and transmitted as folk knowledge through the generations—that informs present-day anti-Japanese sentiment. But they are also imagined through the machinations by which the state government of South Korea mobilizes popular memory. This activation of memory functions as a "heritage discourse" that articulates a desire to heal the wounded nation after periods of social trauma, absorbing heterogeneous subjects into the body of the state, which promises unity and order (Abrams 25).

In this chapter, I examine South Korean heritage discourse as it occurs within a children's art exhibit. These works of art, thematically organized around a territorial dispute with Japan concerning the Dokdo islands, were put on public display in a Seoul subway station. My close scrutiny of this exhibit reveals how Dokdo is cast as a powerful symbol of national identity and cohesion. James Abrams quotes anthropologist Richard Handler, who considers locations like the Dokdo islands "discursive or physical sites within which the struggle for cultural self-



definition takes place” (Abrams 25). In the case of Dokdo, though the islands hold little real value, they operate as symbols of the Korean nation, and, when threatened, Japanese aggression. Further, as Abrams notes, sites like these also articulate that “‘we’ have *a past* that is ‘ours’ and that makes ‘us’ different” (Abrams 25). As I will argue in the case of the children’s art exhibit in Seoul, this imagined difference is extremely troublesome because it is constituted through the production of an aggressive and monstrosly reviled Japanese Other that would take Dokdo as its own. Anti-Japanese sentiment is kept alive since they represent a threat that is always on the brink of spilling over, threatening perpetual invasion and disruption of national coherence.

The islands of Dokdo (named Takeshima in Japan) thus act as an ongoing site of contestation where ethno-nationalist energies are mobilized to “reclaim” that which is Korean, that which is posited as under threat by a Japanese enemy. By ethno-nationalist I mean narratives of the “independent nation... distinguished from others by its essential culture, tradition, and history” that also intertwine with imagined ethnic homogeneity (S. Moon 33). In the case of the Dokdo children’s art exhibit these energies are mobilized by cloaking state power in the authenticity of childhood artistic expression, using the children as a vanguard of invisible proxies through which to advance a state agenda. The narratives evinced through the children’s depictions of the Dokdo issue posit a Korea under siege by an abject Japan; Dokdo must therefore be defended with force by fantastical extensions of state power. These stories of attack and defense resonate in a broader discursive field where the state claims heroes from the dynastic past who have valiantly defended Korea from a covetous Japan.

## **I: Keeping Company with Lonely Islands**

The Dokdo islands are comprised of two rocky outcroppings, lying approximately equidistant between Japan and Korea. They are claimed as the legitimate territory of both countries (Dadamedia). Together, the islands contain about twenty-five acres of surface area, mostly comprised of jagged, barren rock. On the eastern islet some wild grass grows, and there is a flat area where the Korean government erected a lighthouse in 1954. Roughly translated, Dokdo means “lonely island,” owing to its relatively isolated location several dozen miles from any significant center of habitation in Korea (B. Lee 5). In Japan the islands are called “Takeshima,” or “Bamboo Island.” They were so-named in 1905 after Japan incorporated the islets into Shimane Prefecture along with a general annexation of Korea, mistaking them for the populated and bamboo laden Korean island of Ullungdo fifty miles to the northwest (B. Lee 8).

Historically, the islands have been of value in two areas. First, they have had use in terms of fishery and harvest of aquatic material. The porous, sea splattered rock faces of both islands have been home to sea lions and abalone, and the deep seawater in the surrounding area is full of marine life and seaweed. The islands also provide temporary respite for weary seamen. Second, the islands have more recently had value in a strategic sense to the governments of both countries. Japan was perhaps first to recognize this value during the Russo-Japanese war where their Navy played a predominant role in securing Japanese victory. Korea too, especially post-World War II, has seen the centrally located islands as an important constituent of state defense (B. Lee). The waters around the island may also harbor natural gas and mineral reserves, something that could potentially be of economic value to either national economy (“Rocky Relations”).

The dispute of ownership between Japan and Korea over these craggy outcroppings of land goes back several hundred years. According to Korean school curricula, in 1696 Korean

dynastic official Ahn Yong-Bok was sent by a special state council to lay official claim to the islands with the *Shogunate* of Japan (Seichū). The story goes that he had traveled to Dokdo under the auspices of the Korean dynastic apparatus, to whom the islands were seen as unquestionably Korean, only to discover a wealth of Japanese fishing boats dotting the surrounding waters. After making landfall Ahn was outraged. He stood before the Japanese fishermen and shouted a warning: “how dare you Japanese come to our land and commit such acts of invasion?” The next day he found them still occupying the island so, with his entourage, he destroyed their cooking pots and sent them scrambling back to Japan.

This hostile confrontation is said to have led to his meeting with the *Shogunate* and eventual talks between the two governments. Here, Japan is said to have formally conceded that the islands do indeed belong to Korea. This claim seems to be backed by the Japanese government’s prohibition of deep-sea fishing by their citizens in the adjoining waters for over a hundred years hence (B. Lee). However, like all information concerning the politically contentious islands of Dokdo, it is difficult to separate historical reality from convenient fiction.

For the purposes of this chapter, I am not concerned with the territorial status of Dokdo in the realm of international law. Marilyn Ivy, in her book *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, suggests that the “reality” of historical events is less important than how they function within historical memory and nostalgia. Ivy calls these kinds of events “phantasmic,” or “epistemological object[s] whose presence or absence cannot be definitively located” (22). For Ivy, these occurrences “never simply exist as such” but instead each will “produce its effects only after the fact, in a repetition that becomes its own spectral origin” (22). Therefore I am only interested in the adventures of Ahn Yong-bok insofar as they are seized upon by the Korean

government as a mythic discourse meant to resonate ideologically in the minds of Korean citizens in the present day.

Currently, and despite competing claims of sovereignty by both countries, Koreans inhabit the islands. According to the editors of *A Fresh Look at the Dokdo Issue*, there are thirty-seven police officers living there along with three lighthouse keepers and a single fisherman and his wife. At first glance, this seems to foreground the role Dokdo plays in a national defense or security capacity owing to the sheer number of police officers as opposed to other residents. The fisherman and his wife are perhaps more significant, however. Images of familial solidarity based on connection to the earth (the ocean in this case) and self-reliance are often conflated with discourses of the nation. Here, cyclical harvest connotes a timelessness fused with blood, family, and nation, intrinsically connected through the highly politicized islands, dovetailing with the polity of South Korea. That *tourists* may also visit the islands via ferry service (Dadamedia) suggests the destination is also meant to be consumed by a public hungry to “make concrete the possibilities and images” of this ethno-nationalist construct (Ramusack 80).

The interplay between official function and tourist destination brings the work of Benedict Anderson to mind. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson discusses both “official” and “popular” nationalisms, as well as describing the relationship between the two. Put simply, official nationalism is the state’s direct attempt to claim a diverse citizenry as subjects, historically done through appeals to the state’s once powerful dynastic or imperialistic structures. As Anderson aptly puts it, official nationalism is another way “for stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire” (86). Conversely, popular nationalism is just that, a sense of national identification that springs more organically from grassroots movements. Anderson however problematizes the “popular” of popular nationalism by suggesting that these

seemingly spontaneous displays are, in reality, carefully crafted and predictable responses to certain government initiatives, often involving perceived assaults on language, land, or a traditionally conceived family unit. This seems to be the case with Dokdo in its touristic dimension. Were it not for government sanctification of Dokdo via heritage discourse, it would be unlikely that Dokdo would merit a tourist trade at all. In short, popular nationalism is encouraged by getting people to make the status of Dokdo a personal matter, removing the islands from the cold context of empire (legal jurisdiction) and relocating them in terms of leisure, the family, and most important, home.

## **II: Establishing State Responsibility**

Between June 7<sup>th</sup> and July 6<sup>th</sup> of 2005, the Gylhyeon subway station on the Incheon line in Seoul hosted a collection of around one thousand children's drawings from Gyeyang Middle School organized thematically around the Dokdo dispute. These artistic renderings were characterized by violent anti-Japanese sentiment and remained on display until their inclusion in a blog (garnering significant critical attention with over 900,000 views) necessitated their premature removal (AoG.2y.net). In this section I will explore how these children's drawings can be seen as an attempt by the government to co-opt the perceived authenticity of childhood expression, thus masking the state's role in advancing a vitriolic anti-Japanese foreign policy agenda.

To establish the Korean government's culpability for their role in this public art display, it is necessary first to connect them more directly to the educational system. In the following section, I demonstrate this connection in two ways. First, I will note how the Korean education

system is characterized by tightly centralized state control. Commensurate with this first point, historical narratives in Korean textbooks tend to construct nationalist heroes from the past who are marked by their staunch defiance of Japanese aggression. Second, I will show how the display's ideological function suggests coequality with the political climate and objectives of the time concerning the Dokdo issue.

The Ministry of Education oversees the public school curriculum in Korea, and rigorously oversees every facet of children's educational development from elementary school onward (Ryu). The Ministry of Education "develops and implements national educational projects, approves and publishes textbooks, and supervises the provincial or municipal board of education for educational policy planning and implementation" (Ryu 94). Moreover, Kim Young-hwa of the Korean Educational Development Institute notes that "the Korean education system has been organized and operated with rigid restrictions and uniform control" where "teachers play the role of mere messengers under orders and directives." The social function of the educational system, Kim contends, is one based on the premise that "the individual interests of parents, students and educators should be subordinated to broader public policy objectives," in this case the mobilization of public sentiment around the Dokdo issue (Y. Kim 60).

This is doubly troublesome when we consider the ways educators are embedded in, and granted authority by, the family structure of Koreans through a "coalition between parent and teacher" who "share the same goals and assumptions" about education (Sorensen 27). Parents give tremendous authority to teachers, who are expected to "mold the character of their students." Moreover, in the eyes of parents the "teacher's word is law" and "rather than foster discussion, parents, teachers, and students all assume that the teacher's proper role is to impart truth" (Sorensen 27). In the context of a highly bureaucratized and authoritative educational

system, teachers, with the unconditional support of parents, are forced to toe the line and not challenge the mandated curriculum. That is, educators are stripped of agency and work primarily to propagate official policy, which is equated with “truth.”

Beyond this high degree of governmental control, the politicization of Dokdo is also already institutionalized in the Korean school curricula through utilization of mythically (re)imagined national heroes that operate within the present day socio-political discursive field in ways that support current policy objectives. For example, history textbooks (approved by the Ministry of Education Review) recount the tale of Ahn Yong-Bok mentioned earlier in this paper (Dadamedia). The story of his encounter with Japanese fishermen, originally recorded in the *Chosun Wangjo Sillok* or Annals of the Yi Dynasty, posits Ahn as a national hero in light of the current struggle over Dokdo. This anachronistic reclamation of a dynastic historical figure points to what Arjun Appadurai calls the “battle of the imagination” between the state and the nation whereby the state tries to “monopolize the moral resources of community” (the nation) by “flatly claiming coequality” between the two (Appadurai 1990, 304).

I use the term “nation” here as Appadurai does, to describe “groups with ideas about nationhood” that may challenge or subvert nationalist hegemony (Appadurai 1990, 303). For a great deal of its modern history, South Korea was ruled by authoritarian regimes that relied heavily on repressive force to incorporate the nation, constituted here by large and undifferentiated masses of oppressed subjects, or “*minjung*,” into the national imaginary (Armstrong 2). In an era of relative freedom however, this framework is less valid. Today the nation is conceived of more complexly as “a constellation of forces” such as voluntary associations and other “diverse forms of socialization” operating in “a revitalized public sphere” (Armstrong 2-3). The nation must therefore construct ideas of Koreanness that will hold sway

with an increasingly fragmented and active citizenry. Through the constitution of Ahn Yong-Bok as a heroic figure, mobilized in context with the Dokdo issue, the state extends its influence to a mythologized past. As Claude Lévi-Strauss explains in his “The Structural Study of Myth,” “what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (Strauss 430). Ahn Young-Bok, though a real historical figure, is detached from historical context because he continues to be operated on as a different kind of “living” figure, one that is made to wholeheartedly endorse a state government that he would undoubtedly find incomprehensible, or, at the very least, unpalatable.

Thus, the power/knowledge of the state is best described as heritage discourse to recover “memories and traditions presumed emblematic of a groups’ desired continuity” (Abrams 25). In this instance, the sleight of hand that makes Ahn Yong-Bok a hero of the Republic of Korea also embodies one function of myth in a Barthesian sense, which he describes as “the privation of history.” Here,

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from (Barthes 101).

In this way, pre-colonial dynastic Korea is claimed for the modern nation-state, and in so doing, all prior and existing social tensions (between the ruling class and the ruled, for example) are smoothed over, creating the illusion of nation / state coequality and peaceful cohesion among all interpellated Koreans.

It is clear from the above discussion that the Korean educational system, organized in a classroom setting through the teacher, marches in lock step with broader government policy objectives. In government-approved Korean textbooks, historical figures are plucked from the past to serve the imperatives of the present, a process that works to conceal the calculating nature



of heritage discourse. In the case of Gyeyang, it is unclear whether the school is privately owned, or administered more directly by the government. However, as Althusser notes of ideologies: “it is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are ‘public’ or ‘private.’ What matters is how they function” (Althusser 80).

### **III: Japan and Korea, Best Fiends Forever**

In order to demonstrate how the school drawings serve an ideological function for the state, it is important to place them within the socio-political climate of 2005. 2005 was the ironically self-professed “Korea-Japan Friendship Year,” but was characterized by particularly intense posturing and hard-line maneuvers by politicians from both Korea and Japan (Card). This political inflexibility revolved in large part around the Dokdo question. Early in the year Japanese Ambassador Toshiyuki Takano was quoted as saying “The Takeshima Islands are historically and lawfully Japanese territory,” which provoked a flurry of protest outside the gates of the Japanese Embassy (Card). In two extreme cases, a mother and her son cut fingers off their hands in protest, intending to send them to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. Later, a man waving a protest flag immolated himself in front of the Japanese embassy (Card).

2005, the year of the art exhibit, can thus be seen as a time when “anti-Japanese sentiment and Dokdo fever” spread across the country (Card). This was true among members of the general populace and also within the ranks of the government. Diplomatic “shoving matches” ensued at the highest levels, and finger pointing and name-calling were standard procedure. In response to the Japanese Shimane Prefecture drafting a “Takeshima Day” bill, Korean president Roh Tae-woo “wrote in a letter to the public that Japanese foreign policy has

reached an intolerable point” (Card). This led to Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara’s comment that Roh’s remarks were “a third-rate political technique.” Seoul mayor Lee Myung-bak was quick to retort “if our politics are third rate, then Ishihara’s must be fourth and fifth rate” (Card).

Thus, while the drawings are in some respects shocking in their graphic depiction of violence, in the context of 2005 their cartoonish display of hate seems, regretfully, appropriate. Tension over the Dokdo issue led to real violence in the streets and semantic violence expressed through angry intergovernmental missives. The sheer intensity of ill will between the neighboring countries at the time, informed by politicization at a grassroots level (street protest), makes it reasonable to assume the government would at least tacitly have approved of the display to appease their loudest constituencies. Moreover, the tone of the drawings was not out-of-step with what was ostensibly a wider government strategy of escalation politics. Finally, while it is clear that significant anti-Japanese affect came from the bottom up, it is also clear that the government played a role in stoking the flames of anger through heritage discourse, publicized statements, and incorporation of the Dokdo dispute in school curricula.

It is my contention that the politicization of Dokdo (by certain elements within the government) was done primarily to consolidate power among those parties domestically.<sup>30</sup> I argue that this is the case for four major reasons. First, because the Dokdo dispute is so long-standing, dating back hundreds of years. Second, because attention and discussion over Dokdo seem *inversely* related to diplomatic progress (Cheong). Third, because the issue is so intensely partisan, and capable of rousing such deep rooted sentiment, and finally, because the islands are of such relatively small strategic and economic value. These four factors suggest the issue serves primarily as an emotionally and politically charged red herring that pulls attention from issues of

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<sup>30</sup> I am unclear from which parties, groups, or individuals the politicization of Dokdo originates. More research is required in this area.

more immediate consequence like poverty, environmental degradation, health care, and the economy (D. Shin).

I have thus far focused intensively on the role of the state in the propagation of heritage discourse to construct historical continuity. This idea of continuity is based largely on a mythologized past constructed through ethno-nationalist manipulation of popular memory. The agenda served is hegemonic, that is, it “stems from the ability of those in power to make their own interests appear to be synonymous with the interests of society at large” (Lipsitz 67). The objective is to preserve state power and the status quo by interpellating diverse, potentially radical *national* subjects as relatively docile, contented *state* subjects. This is done by co-opting deeply felt anti-Japanese sentiment rooted in specific and real historical oppressions and patterns of victimization.

#### **IV: Historical Memory, Heroes, and Identity Oppression**

This section will examine the intersections of historical memory and ethno-nationalist discourse. I focus here on two periods of historic Japanese expansion with an emphasis on how modern Koreans understand themselves and the Japanese. The first period has been called “Japan’s Korean War” of 1592-1598, which I will discuss as it relates to the construction of a national hero. It was during this time that Korean Commander Yi Sun-sin would rise to the challenges of war, secure a crushing victory for his countrymen, and later die heroically to be re-born under state curricula as a figure of mythic import in the Korean imagination. The second period, decidedly more significant for the purposes of this chapter, entails the period of Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to the end of World War II in 1945. During this time

“Koreanness,” seen as carrying an inherent revolutionary potential, came under direct assault from all sides as the Japanese sought to contain new imperial subjects. I will deal with each one of these periods in turn, demonstrating how these historical events, and their modern expression through state-constituted heritage discourse, come to bear on contemporary animosity towards the Japanese Other.

“Japan’s Korean War” from 1592-1598 is typically not considered a “war” proper by history texts, though historian Stephen Turnbull coined and uses this moniker in his book *Samurai Invasion*. Rather, historians often refer to this period simply as “The Japanese Invasions of Korea” of 1592 and 1598, which respectively served to sandwich four truce years between 1593 and 1597 (8). Turnbull argues that this characterization needs to change given that “Japan both occupied and terrorised parts of Korea while sporadic fighting continued” during this time of ostensible peace (8). Additionally, while the aim of the Japanese was not to subjugate Korea, but simply to use it as a platform to advance into the Chinese mainland, “almost all the fighting was done in Korea” none-the-less, and the Korean people bore the brunt of this “long and bloody conflict” (8).

Like Ahn Yong-bok, who so defiantly proclaimed Dokdo a possession of Korea, the historical figure of Yi Sun-sin also emerges from this period and is similarly mobilized through heritage discourse as a staunch defender of Korean values in the face of an aggressive Japanese Other. Yi Sun-sin was the Left Naval Commander of Chōlla (situated on the southeastern-most section of the peninsula) when the Japanese first advanced upon Korean shores en-route to China. It was Yi Sun-sin who rallied initial resistance, and he also famously utilized “Turtle Ships” (spike roofed, heavily fortified ramming boats with cannon) to rout the more powerful Japanese Navy in several decisive battles early in the war. These battles, fought among the

labyrinthine islets dotting Korea's southern shore, would serve as "the most severe defeat to be suffered by a Japanese force in the entire Korean campaign" and would come to secure Japanese defeat in the larger war (Turnbull 104).

I consider Yi Sun-sin a figure of tremendous importance when examining the formation of modern Korean identity. Ironically, his position within the Korean military apparatus of the 16<sup>th</sup> century places him as a person of modest standing at the time, both in rank and in scope of power. For example, his authority was somewhat limited, having "only extended as far as the provincial border" (Turnbull 83). However, his impact on the outcome of "Japan's Korean War" cannot be underestimated, and he can be seen in this light as an underdog protector of the Korean homeland in a more straightforward way.

The story of Yi Sun-sin, his life, and his crushing victory over a more powerful Japanese force is well known to Korean students reading state-approved textbooks. As an EFL (English as Foreign Language) teacher in a well-attended private school in Seoul, I can attest to Yi's inclusion in history texts, and the students' familiarity with this figure. I personally saw Admiral Yi's shining visage beam from the inside of history books of varying grade levels. Over the course of my thirteen months in Seoul, I also had the opportunity to ask students (mostly of middle-school age or slightly younger) directly about this Naval Commander countless times. Students would quite happily, if a bit frustrated at my ignorance, tell me of Yi Sun-sin's victory over the Japanese, often sketching neat little Turtle Ships on scratch paper to accompany their narratives.

Yi Sun-sin is also reified as a national-figurehead by the government for broader public consumption. A life-sized mannequin of Yi sits in the Korean folk village near Suwŏn (Turnbull). Also, a massive (about the size of a city bus) and menacingly postured statue of Yi

perches on a towering stone monolith overlooking a busy traffic circle in downtown Seoul. Néstor Canclini, in “Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers,” writes that: “monuments are almost always works with which political power consecrates the founding persons and events of the state” (428). Both the mannequin and the statue are maintained by the state. In fact, the Yi statue is posed near the Korean “Blue House,” which serves as both the presidential residence and the central government’s administrative nerve center. While not literally a “founding person” of the state, reclamation of Yi Sun-sin as a historical figure makes him analogous to the state none-the-less. These examples serve to demonstrate again how the state seeks to capitalize on the moral resources of the nation by extending its myth narrative back into the recesses of history.

We can clearly see how Yi Sun-sin serves state interest in a similar way as Ahn Yong-bok. Both figures are discursively foregrounded as staunch defenders of Korean intactness in outright defiance of Japanese aggression. Both figures are also heroic in that they emerged victorious in their respective struggles with the Japanese, Ahn over the encroaching fishermen, and Yi over the entirety of the Japanese navy and, in consequence, the entire military structure. Both figures are mobilized to uphold an ethno-nationalist hegemonic structure informed by notions of a pugnacious Japanese Other. While Ahn’s narrative thread pierces straight through the heart of the Dokdo issue, narratives of Yi are broader reaching, and serve mostly to envelop and contain attendant emergent discourses within the sweeping cradle of signification that is militarism, male heroicism, and defense of the motherland.

The second historical period I would like to examine is the time of Japanese colonization, lasting from 1910-1945. It should be noted that the history of invasive, direct Japanese involvement in Korea actually began in 1876 with the signing of the Kanhwa treaty. This treaty

“opened Korean ports to foreign commerce,” and introduced Korea to the Japanese economic system where “new ideas and institutions of enterprise and association, and a modern capitalist interstate system of polity and commerce” quickly become entwined with antecedent Korean forms (McNamara 2). The Japanese government already “had a stake” in Korea well before it was annexed on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1910, a year existing for many Koreans “at the core of national self-definition” (Dudden 3).

I have chosen to limit my discussion to the years of direct colonial rule because it was during this time that the citizens of Korea became bound directly under Japanese governance. The Japanese government and colonial institutions worked to craft imperial citizens out of the Koreans through a variety of mechanisms, four of which I will discuss here. The first deals with the reeducation of Koreans through the Japanese-directed school system. The second involves racial discrimination, and the third, the police force. Finally, the Japanese sought to justify their rule (and simultaneously de-legitimize Korean nationalism) in the eyes of the international community by shifting their internal legal discourse to a Western model.

In 1911, the year after annexation, the Japanese government codified the Chōsen Educational Ordinance into law. Eugene C. Kim, in “Education in Korea Under the Japanese Colonial Rule,” notes that Article One of the ordinance states: “the essential principle of education in Chōsen shall be the making of loyal and good subjects by giving instruction on the basis of the Imperial Rescript concerning Education” (138). The contentious issue here is of course the “making of loyal and good subjects,” which entailed a process of “de-Koreanization” as a necessitating factor (138). This de-Koreanization entailed as twin organizing facets loyalty and subservience. All classes except Korean language (taken as electives) were taught in Japanese. In addition, Japanese history was taught in place of Korean history, and the “Japanese

national anthem was introduced to cultivate a Japanese national spirit.” If these measures weren’t enough, the predominantly Japanese teachers themselves impressed upon the students the notion of Japan’s overwhelming might by teaching with swords clamped to their sides (138).

Racial discrimination against Koreans by the Japanese was widespread during the years of colonization. Han-kyo Kim writes in his article, “The Japanese Colonial Administration in Korea: an Overview,” that discrimination was bad enough to warrant a Japanese journalist to note (in a censored book published in Seoul) in 1927 that: “we (the Japanese) have to repent and sincerely apologize to the newly acquired twenty million brethren (the Koreans)” (45). Koreans were severely underrepresented within the colonial government, and, when present, were paid substantially less for the same work; for example, as late as 1943 only “12 percent of the total number of high officials in the Government-General” were Koreans (45). Also, Korean employees of the same rank as their Japanese counter-parts could expect to earn forty percent less pay (H. Kim).

Lastly, as if reeducation and racial discrimination were not enough, imperial citizens were formed through the operation of a police state, which can be seen as something of a last line of defense. The Japanese police organization was massive and functioned smoothly, stomping dissent. Kim notes how its primary function was internal security, which consisted largely of discovery and punishment of Korean nationalists and anti-Japanese *agent provocateurs*. The Japanese were “extremely suspicious of the Koreans and... impose[d] strict surveillance on all potential, as well as active, anti-Japanese groups and individuals” (45).

Beyond these measures which sought to transform Korean identity along multiple fronts while promoting identification with the ruling empire, Japan also sought to legitimize its rule through the manipulation of international legal discourse. In his book, *Japan’s Colonization of*



*Korea: Discourse and Power*, Alexis Dudden argues that “Japan’s legal theorists, politicians, and translators defined the country’s Korean policy as legitimate under international law” through “fluent use of this discourse” (2). In this way, Japan sought to couch its claims to Korea in a language that would “make new international sense, at a time when *not* making sense in this manner rendered a nation ripe for colonization” (1). Japan thus sought to contain inherently radical Koreanness in concrete ways domestically, but also through careful manipulation of legal discourse on an international stage.

These aforementioned attempts to transform and contain Korean identity, coupled with the brutalities attendant to colonial exploitation and the systematic sexual debasement of Korean “comfort women” during the Second World War, have served as a reservoir of ill feeling among members of the Korean nation. Some authors have described this resentment, attendant with a palpable sense of loss and victimization, as “*haan*” (Min 7). Scholar Eungjun Min describes *haan* as the accumulated “pains, wounds, and scars” that “when... manifested... can be directed, either constructively or destructively, to others or to oneself” (Min 8). This suffering, which Min calls “dynamic energy,” is harnessed by the Korean government, using heritage discourse to mobilize popular political support around specific issues, in this case the Dokdo island dispute (Tanaka).

## **V: The Pure, Unsophisticated Expression of Children**

So far I have explored a bit of Dokdo’s history and contextualized the narratives of Dokdo within the socio-political climate of 2005 and historical memory more generally, dealing with two periods of Japanese imperialism in Korea. I have also established the government’s

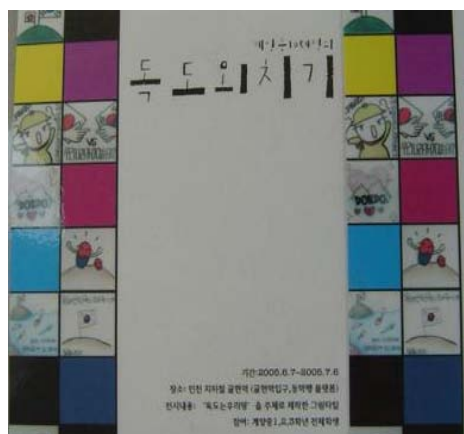
culpability in the children's art exhibit. This section concerns itself with describing in some detail the artwork itself. The organizing theme of these drawings is the contested island of Dokdo, which serves in the wider social field as a location of instability and uncertainty that threatens to pierce the wounded underbelly of Korean identity. It must therefore be claimed and held onto in order to preserve a sense of group cohesion. I understand these drawings as just such an attempt at reclamation, operating within an ethno-nationalist discourse of identity whose definitional power comes through an "us vs. them" mentality of binary opposition. As original pieces of children's art, these works serve to ideologically mask and conceal the mechanisms of power that elicited their creation by signifying something pure and unblemished, stemming from the minds of children and thus reflecting a pre-existent reality uninfluenced by personal and enculturated biases.

Understandings of children's art by art educators has traditionally been quite romantic. The 1934 book by R.R. Tomlinson, *Picture Making by Children*, makes this clear by stating: "in the whole realm of art there is nothing more refreshing than the pure unsophisticated expression of children" (9). There are four words here that conceal a wealth of assumptions in terms of how we interpret children's art: "refreshing," "pure," "unsophisticated," and "expression." The words "refreshing" and "unsophisticated" serve to reinforce the idea of purity by setting up an implicit contrast to something burdened or sullied, which is the world of adults. Tomlinson invites us to "leave the rush and turmoil of the work-a-day world; to take refreshment in the contemplation of the visions and creations of children" (9). The visions of children, posited as "pure" and unsophisticated, are thus injected with authenticity. They are somehow more accurate representations of the world because their works are not clouded by the concerns of adults, the demands of the "work-a-day" world. As forms of "expression" they are seen unproblematically;

the children's works are "not reflections of something imposed, but of something experienced" stemming from the "uncontaminated mind of the child" (18).

Art educator Kenneth Jameson notes this as well in his 1968 book *Art and the Young Child*. However, Jameson takes it a step further. Describing Van Gogh's "Cornfield with Cypresses" as a "reflection of intense personal experience," he goes on to argue that "the work of very young children is equally, if not more explicit" and "less complicated and more direct" (56). Donna Kelly, professor of art education, calls this view of children's art as direct expression the "aesthetic window paradigm" (108), through which consumers of children's art are able to voyeuristically gaze into their minds. The child thus is thought to sit ironically in a highchair of ultimate authority, peering out with unadulterated eyes, able to comment directly on the world *as it is* through expressive works that are thought to speak immortal truth.

The "aesthetic window paradigm" discussed by Kelly is used most consistently in conjunction with very young children, whose canvases are most frequently splattered with seemingly nonsensical splotches of bright color and randomly swerving lines. It is thus used in a psychological sense to describe the child's relationship with his or her world. This makes it in



some senses incongruous with the Gyeyang Middle School drawings due to the artists relatively older age and higher technical accomplishments in the realm of visual representation. However, I argue that this paradigm still best describes how adults view and understand the art in the Dokdo exhibit. The Dokdo drawings have not reached a

**Figure 1** Ad for the Dokdo art display<sup>31</sup> level of sophistication commensurate with an association with adulthood to those commuters passing by this exhibit, the markers of childhood that exist in these drawings are plainly evident. Bright colors dominate the individual works, and the ad for the exhibition is designed to incorporate similar intensely colored panels of blue, purple, red, yellow and pink (fig. 1). Figures and actions are simplistic or overly exaggerated and lines are generally uneven, representing young, unsteady hands. Additionally, the iconography of childhood expression abounds in the form of cartoon characters and stick-figures. The promotional poster itself also reinforces the primacy of childhood by utilizing erratic, off-sized *Hangul* (Korean alphabet) for the prominently displayed title of the display, while using neatly typeset *Hangul* for the details and information portion (Gyeyang). Most importantly however, the display is sponsored by and advertised as a special event put on by Gyeyang Middle School, foregrounding the artists as children and thereby encouraging viewers to respond under the aesthetic window paradigm mentioned above.

## **VI: Othering and Abjection: Ethno-Nationalist Hegemony through Children's Art**

In the previous section I proposed that, foregrounded as creations of children, these works exist in a position of discursive authority informed by the aesthetic window paradigm. I would like now to examine the narratives of these works. If the stories they tell exist in a privileged position due to their association with pure expression, what kind of stories are they? What do they have to say about the Japanese, about Dokdo, and about Koreans themselves? First, it would be unwise to attempt to fix all these narratives within a given genre or classificatory system (Harris-Lopez 111). Despite the common theme of "Dokdo," the drawings

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<sup>31</sup> Photo taken by "Gord" at AoG.2y.net.

are divergent enough in source and subject matter—there are enough unknowns—to warrant exclusion of some pieces and focus on others that can be more readily identified and incorporated within certain analytical techniques.

Analysis of children's drawings reveals a dual process of exclusion or Othering, combined with a reclamation of identity rallied under the banner of the nation-state. The Gyeyang art display was prompted by the Korean educational system and informed by a mythologized heritage discourse presented in history textbooks. It was framed around a widely discussed issue of territorial, and hence, by definition, national sovereignty, and presented in a hub of mass public transit, viewed by an unknown and disparate spectrum of Korean citizens. I see this as an attempt on the part of the state to “capitalize on the moral resources” of the nation through the use of children as intermediaries, as an ankle-biting advance-line of authority with which to shield itself (Appadurai 1990, 301).

There are two major tropes in the children's drawings I would like to discuss. The first involves symbolically situating the Japanese within the abject—refuse, filth, and the defiled—which must be radically excluded. The second is more straightforward, and involves portrayal of the Japanese as reviled enemies to be physically destroyed. What is important in each of these is the way narratives are situated under the discursive umbrella of the nation state through the use of icons and symbols. I see all these factors as attempts to maintain a nationalized Korean identity that exists in opposition to a reviled Japanese Other.

I use Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject to describe how these child artists portray the Japanese in an attempt to reclaim and solidify their own identity as Koreans. In *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva describes the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). This is an especially useful

concept when we consider the relative homogeneity of the Korean people throughout history (Hulbert 373) and the role of the Japanese as occupying foreign power between 1910 and the end of the Second World War, and periodically before this time, most significantly during “Japan’s Korean War” of 1592-98. This recent colonial history, especially the traumatic disruption of a relatively stable Korean socio-cultural landscape by imperial mandate and force of arms, caused deep psychic trauma that continues to play itself out in the culture of South Korea today (Gateward).

Kristeva argues that since the abject disturbs order, it needs to exist as a “jettisoned object” which must be “radically excluded” so that identity can exist as a solidified “I,” or in this case, as a cohesive “we.” She specifically mentions corpses and waste as examples of the abject, stating: “as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live... These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty...” (Kristeva 2-3). This process of excluding the abject to reclaim a sense of cohesion is evident in many of the children’s pictures.

The children’s art heavily features the expulsion of the abject onto readily identifiable symbols of Japan. By associating the Japanese with the abject, two primary statements are being made. First, that Japan should be radically excluded (kicked out of Dokdo) *like* other abject substances such as urine, boogers, and feces. Second, by continually smothering, covering, or otherwise filling the empty signifier of Japan with the goopy stuff of abjection, the art seems to say that Japan, and (most troublingly) by extension the Japanese people, *are* the abject themselves which must be expunged from the land of Dokdo (figs 2-6).

The Japanese, when visually represented, are often portrayed as monkeys or dogs (figs. 7-9). This further ensconces them within the notion of the abject because they are “filthy animals,”

but it serves more generally to strip the Japanese of subjectivity. They are transformed into the primordial, savage, objectified beasts of an uncivilized order. This may be done by the children for comic purposes, but it is still troublesome because it allows violence to be inflicted on these creatures in a fantasy space where there is an absence of easily identifiable consequences.

If the Japanese were portrayed as human beings, we might be tempted to consider them such, which would open the door to myriad troubling questions. How can the nation exist alongside, and indeed under the control of, such a hated enemy and still maintain a sense of pride, unity, and coherence? How can Koreanness be reclaimed after years of marginalization and outright subjugation; indeed, what *is* Koreanness in light of such pervasive cultural imperialism? Clearly these are not easy questions to answer. I simply suggest that the state tends to direct these historically rooted questions (frustrations) in a particular direction in order to preserve the status quo, to maintain its legitimacy as *the* source of Korean identity. By Othering the Japanese and dehumanizing them, the door is shut on potentially destabilizing questions of identity, and all energy is instead directed against a readily identifiable enemy and towards a feeling of communion rallied in opposition against an outside threat.

The extreme violence depicted in these drawings is also shocking, and suggests the depth of unresolved bitterness toward Japan (fig. 10-11). I would like to start with the idea that children's art, especially by young males, is often actively violent and should not suggest a direct correlate to actual violence in the material world. What is important here is not so much the implied threat of real violence in the streets (hate crimes), but the way the children legitimize systemic violence through the body of the nation-state. Here, the "solution" to the Dokdo question is a totalizing one, and is executed under the tutelage of the state. This is done in two ways. First, through anthropomorphizing the landmass of Korea itself, the political map being

an essential ingredient in how states incorporate imaginary communities.<sup>32</sup> Benedict Anderson argues that two-dimensional maps give one a sense of power that *is*, the power to both create the map and lay dominion over that which it signifies. But more importantly, Anderson suggests the map can also suppose power which *is yet to be*; quoting Thongchai, Anderson writes that “map[s] anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa... [they] had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth’s surface” (173-174). Second, a solution to the Dokdo question is presented by foregrounding the Korean flag. Both of these representations serve to show how the question of Dokdo is not only best left to the government, but it is also up to them to settle the matter once and for all and on a massive scale, which is suggested by attacks on the Japanese landmass (figs. 12-15). When ethno-nationalist sentiment is thus organized, the proposed solution is no longer a matter for citizens, teachers, diplomats, heads of state, NGO’s, activists, or cultural ambassadors. Reclamation of Dokdo and expulsion of the abject instead requires the massive and overwhelming mobilization of force predicated *ex post facto* upon popular support and executed by the nation-state.

### **Conclusion**

I argued here that the state government of South Korea used the Gyeyang children’s art display to mobilize anti-Japanese sentiment. This should be seen as part of a wider utilization of heritage discourse, which the state promulgates in order to absorb the heterogeneous members of the nation under a single flag, thereby constituting a cohesive Korean identity. While it is not denied that Koreans have good cause to harbor bitter resentment against their neighbors, I assert

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<sup>32</sup> Maps in South Korea overwhelmingly shade both Koreas the same color, with only a thin line indicating the DMZ stretching across the peninsula.



that the Korean government is at least partially culpable for continued animosity because of the extent to which they fan the flames of antagonism and keep historical injustices alive in popular memory.

Constituting Korean nationalism in such a way is a dangerous proposition. Not only does it encourage explosive anger on an individual level, as we saw in relation to Seodaemun prison graffiti writers, but it also grants authority to the state as the best institution with which to work out the same bitterly tangled feelings which it itself continues to foster. Moreover, the children's drawings suggest that the best response to Japanese aggression is the most violent and totalizing one, nothing less than the complete destruction of Japan. While war is unlikely to break out between these nations anytime soon, the depth of the outrage such destructive wishes belie suggests that old wounds are not being properly tended. In this atmosphere it is only a matter of time before they start bleeding once again.

Photo Index<sup>33</sup>



Figure 2 Japan as Korea's feces



Figure 3 Dokdo under Japan is poop

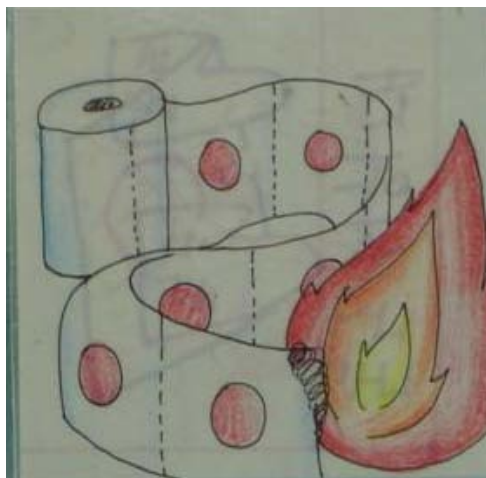


Figure 4 Burning Japanese flag toilet paper



Figure 5 Urinating on Japanese



Coughing up phlegm onto Japanese flag



Figure 7 Korean boxer beating a Japanese monkey

Figure

<sup>33</sup> All photos taken by "Gord" at AoG.2y.net. Accessed July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008.



Figure 8 Korean tiger fights Japanese monkey



Figure 9 Japanese prime minister Koizumi as dog



Figure 10 Korean on Dokdo shooting Japanese



Figure 11 Koreans beat prostrate Japanese



Figure 12 Korea chomping a weeping Japan



Figure 13 Flag and land conquer together

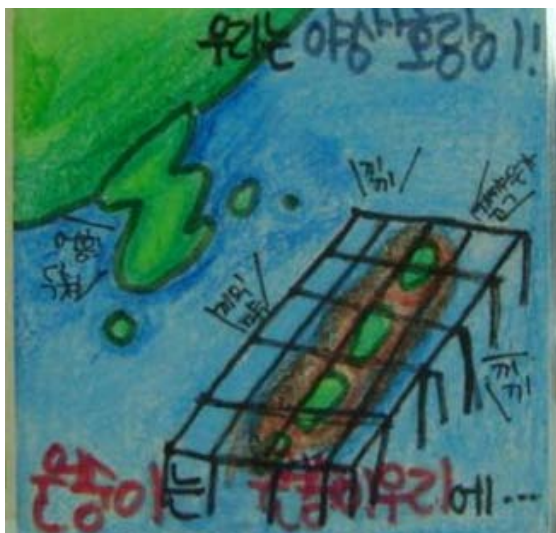


Figure 14 containing the Japanese menace



Figure 15 Utter destruction of Japan

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The prevalence of state centered ethno-nationalism in South Korea is unlikely to diminish in coming years. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that the weakening of the global economy in recent months will actually harden the lines between who constitutes a full-blooded Korean, who is foreign, and how the relationship between the two should be conceived. It is difficult to predict the shape of things to come, but I would like to take this opportunity to make some observations, grounded in the research of the preceding chapters, as to what we might expect the ethno-nationalist landscape to look like in the next several years.

As I have argued, it is essential that Korean ethnic nationalism be grounded within broader socio-economic processes linked to globalization. As I demonstrated in Chapters One and Two, the Korean Wave and the mobilization of state celebrities are a direct response to the pressure of Western media encroachment. Even seemingly insulated cultural displays such as the Dokdo and Seodaemun exhibits are also inherently global phenomena. Both are informed by fears of Japanese imperialist ambition, a fear that is all the more credible given Japan's dominant socio-economic role in Asia.

Looking more specifically at the previous few months, it is clear that the global economic crisis has affected Korea profoundly. In the last quarter of 2008 South Korea suffered from the second largest economic retraction in their history. Not since the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990's has the economy of South Korea been dealt such a blow (Jong-woo). In fact, finance and research firm Goldman Sachs declared that South Korea has officially entered a recession, putting them in good company among traditional powerhouses such as the United States and Germany ("Goldman Sachs").

The economic troubles looming for South Korea are likely to have two consequences relevant to ethnic nationalism. The first is that the strategy of the Korean Wave, that is, that national advancement can be borne on the back of popular cultural export, is one that will be thrown into question. Many financial experts have argued that such a model of export orientation has exacerbated the financial woes of East Asian countries in recent months. Second, and concomitantly, prospects of “thick reconciliation” between South Korea and Japan, based on “pop culture diplomacy,” is similarly jeopardized as a viable strategy. Based on the preceding two conditions I argue that the state’s role in promulgating South Korean ethno-nationalist discourse will only become more entrenched. Turning away from economic policies of cultural export, Korean popular culture will become all the more insular, removing the potential checks and balances necessitated by global (or at least pan-regional) market accessibility.

As the global recession worsens, the Korean project of national advancement will likely turn in on itself as domestic pundits cry betrayal at the hands of international lending agencies such as the IMF. The IMF, responsible for Korea’s massive bailout during the Asian financial crisis, imposed the very macro-level policy upon which the present day Korean economy is based, namely, export growth. The IMF’s insistence on export orientation (a pre-condition of the bailout), came with the promise that massive restructuring towards such an end would be beneficial, making Korea a significant power in East Asia (Klein). Until quite recently, that strategy *has* led to tremendous growth, as the success of the Korean Wave indicates. However, some economists have argued that this over-emphasis on export driven economies in Asia, such as that of South Korea, has directly caused these states to flounder in the wake of the global recession, creating a

backlash against the IMF and, by extension, wealthy Western capitalist nations in the process.

A recent article in *The Economist* describes this side of the story: “the Western consensus in favour of globalisation lured them... [Asian IMF beneficiaries] into opening their economies and pursuing export-led growth to satisfy the bottomless pit of Western consumer demand. They have been betrayed” (“Asia’s Suffering”). It is not difficult to see this feeling of betrayal turning inward, fostering an “us against the world” mentality, and casting South Koreans in the familiar role of victim, lashing out against those who would ostensibly do them harm. An article in the *Chosun Ilbo* titled, “We can no Longer Depend Solely on Exports,” argues “we need to transform our export-dependent economic structure into one that is supported by domestic consumption” (*Chosun Ilbo*). Appearing alongside articles such as “Koreans Working Longest Hours for Less,” and “Depression on the Rise,” (referring to the mental condition) it is not difficult to deduce, at the very least, that the financial crisis is both responsible for suffering and located specifically in an export market orientation. The article “Depression on the Rise,” in fact, mentions that “the increase has been particularly steep since the U.S. financial crisis started encroaching on the country” (*Chosun Ilbo*). The language of encroachment is especially noteworthy, as it suggests a culprit quite directly.

Shifting economic focus from exports means fostering domestic demand, which has its own set of implications. The aforementioned article in *The Economist* states that Japan’s “failure to tackle the root causes of weak domestic demand” has led their economy into deep stagnation (“Asia’s Suffering”). Concomitantly, the author closes by prompting other Asian nations to no longer look at Japan as “the lead goose in a regional



flight formation,” instead suggesting they “break ranks” (“Asia’s Suffering”). If there is merit to this argument, and South Korea does shift resources towards fostering domestic demand, as both foreign and domestic commentators have proposed, what potential implications would this carry *vis-à-vis* ethnic nationalism?

One significant implication is that South Korean celebrities such as Lee Young-ae and, to a lesser extent, the re-appropriated Hines Ward, would suffer diminished regional cache. The culture industries which have poured millions of dollars into making these stars palatable and interesting overseas would no longer see the benefit of such investments. This alone would not be devastating to the Korean economy, but Lee Young-ae and Hines Ward are only the tip of the iceberg. All celebrities whose fame can be attributed, at least in part, to the state project of national advancement via popular culture export (the Korean Wave) would suffer a similar lack of backing. Since all popular culture products are essentially caught in a strategy of global nation branding, without the macro-economic export incentive to innovate and compete globally, popular culture industries would stagnate, becoming complacent.

Moreover, if export is de-prioritized, then it stands to reason that the intended audience for Korean popular culture would shift accordingly. Celebrities would still be “made” by the culture industries, but, lacking any financial incentive to make them palatable for pan-regional audiences, they would be relatively “flat” creations. That is, these new popular culture projects, aimed as they are towards domestic audiences, may be less open to multiple readings, and may in fact be so specific to stimulating Korean consumer demand that they intrinsically exclude the possibility of significant consumption overseas. In the context of the state ethno-nationalist project, which



pervades all South Korean popular culture, the flatness of these new celebrities would further support a monolithic, top-down field of potential national identifications, further limiting the number of potential national imagined communities and effectively strengthening state hegemony.

This is a matter of significance in terms of South Korean ethnic-nationalism because popular culture products, for all their ability to reinforce the supremacy of the state, have, in many ways, suggested the possibility of “thick reconciliation” with traditionally acrimonious neighbors such as Japan. As Chiho Sawada argues, thick reconciliation is intimately linked with what he terms “pop culture diplomacy.” Rather than the “thin” overtures of friendship that are bandied about as political, legal, or economic initiatives, Sawada argues that true (thick) reconciliation between hostile nations must be borne of “mutual understanding and shared values built through people-to-people interactions,” the type of which can be best realized through shared consumption of popular culture products (Sawada 174). As I noted in Chapter One, Lee Young-ae has served as something of an unofficial cultural ambassador to Japan. Additionally, Korean pop star BoA is touted by government officials and fans alike as peacemaker *par excellence*. She was the first Korean to have a number one album in Japan (“BoA has Conquered”). Likewise, sporting competitions such as the World Cup, the Olympics, and the Asian Games have always been places where national athlete-celebrities can mingle with their contemporaries, both in actual space, and in the imagined space of media discourse. If cultural exports drop, the dream of thick reconciliation may be untenable; lingering animosities would bloom in the acrid soil of cultural self-isolation.

As the true implications of the global financial crisis begin to sink in, it will be important to carefully observe the response from South Korea. I have predicted that the state will most likely reduce cultural exports, at the same time looking to Western nations and the IMF specifically as targets of indictment. It is difficult to imagine that this sort of turning inward will be a favorable environment in which to foster alternative notions of Korean identity. So long as the state retains its preeminent role in the construction of national identities, populist change is unlikely to come to the lower half of the peninsula.

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