

【특별강연】

SNU-ASI Conference Remarks

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President Lee, Dr. Kim, conference participants and attendees. It's a great pleasure for me to be here at today's seminar.

As many of you already know, the U.S. Embassy has long been a strong supporter of American Studies in Korea.

In just the last year, we have provided funding for the launch of an American Studies Association of Korea(ASAK) web site.

We have sponsored the travel to Korea of 4 speakers for the ASAK, ELLAK and KPSA annual conferences, in addition to providing funding to support a variety of workshops, seminars and colloquia.

And, of course, our Information Resource Center (IRC) regularly provides research and reference services to American Studies scholars.

With regard to the IRC, I wanted to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the American Studies Lecture Series, which begins at the IRC on April 19, and in particular to two presentations we will sponsor as part of that series. On May 24, we have arranged for Dr. Michael Frisch, President of the American Studies Association of

the United States to make a presentation, and on May 31, Dr. Kim Su Nam, our IRC Director, will make a presentation on "The Virtual USA: American Studies Resources on the Internet." I think both will prove both useful and interesting.

I must say I also found the topic of today's seminar interesting as well. Globalization and popular culture, at least American popular culture, seem mutually reinforcing phenomena. In the decade of the 90s, the 2nd largest U.S. export behind Aerospace was software and by software I don't mean just computer software, I mean music, movies, books, etc.

In preparing for this talk, I was looking through some old files and came across an article from Newsweek dated nearly 10 years ago about the popularity of American popular culture in Europe. The article was entitled "The Empire of the Fun."

The point of the article seemed to be that U.S. popular culture was still a potent force, but its European consumers, jaded by 50 years of exposure, were cooling on the love affair. Newsweek quotes an American living in London as saying, "As recently as 1970, the U.S. was seen as the savior of Western Europe; now it's almost irrelevant." America, according to Newsweek, "once the superpower of truth and justice, the unrivaled champion of wealth and happiness, (was) seen as a sickly relation unable to educate its young or balance its checkbook."

The article also asserted that the dominance of U.S. popular culture

in Europe was a fluke of history a never to be repeated by-product of the postwar emergence of the U.S. as a global power and the revolution in global communications. The U.S. had at the ready both the hardware and the software, with the software being “a way of life capable of lifting imaginations around the world.”

Well, I wondered, where are we today vis a vis American pop culture and globalization? Was there another “fluke” that occurred when the end of the cold war coincided with the revolution in information technology? Or was Newsweek right about the sickly superpower? The former, according to Thomas Friedman in his book, “The Lexus and the Olive Tree.” Friedman says, “If you consider globalization the dominant international system today, and you look at the attributes countries need to thrive in that system, the U.S. has more assets and fewer liabilities than any major country.” So many assets that in parts of the world globalization has come to mean Americanization, and the once lone superpower has, for some, achieved the status of a hyper-power. And, according to German scholar Josef Joffe, it all rests, not on push, but on pull, not on conquest but on acceptance.

This situation inspires a number of questions? What are the sources of America’s “soft power?” What are the attributes of American pop culture that are so attractive? Why is the U.S. seemingly more comfortable riding the tiger of globalization? Is it because Americans are more comfortable with change? Is it because a multicultural America has been transformed into the first universal nation, and thus better equipped to act globally? Is it partly because, for example,

the most common surname at Harvard is Kim? Is it because of the enduring power of the U.S. central myth the American dream? Is it related to the development of a mature democratic system that balances individual freedom with the rule of law?

Or is the U.S. able to dominate the popular culture market simply because Americans are geniuses at marketing junk? Do we purvey a culture of standardization, a culture of the lowest common denominator? How do smaller nations maintain their cultural identity?

Do Americans have a mass approach to culture that insists everyone else must be like us, and for their own good? And will this ultimately create such strong resistance that we become isolated from and resented by the larger world?

And lastly, what does the success of Pokemon, Tele-tubbies and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" say about other countries' ability to compete in a globalized pop culture marketplace?

These are the kinds of questions that I think American Studies scholars are best suited to answer. In a globalized world in which traditional barriers are falling daily, who better to take on some of these issues and help us chart a new path toward understanding than scholars able to cross traditional academic barriers for their answers.

I congratulate Dr. Kim for organizing such a timely conference in which some of these important issues will be explored. Thank you.