

Discourses of Korean Culture amid the Expansion of Consumer Society and the Global Order

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(In lieu of an abstract) A cognitive framework regarding Koreans and Korean culture constitutes the foundation of “Korean culture theory.” When investigating how this framework was formed – or is being formed – a series of circumstantial changes from the late 1980s to 1990 requires scrutiny. Above all, this means examining the repositioning of identities and traditions of Korean culture, the new meanings they are acquiring amid global changes such as the expanding world order and formation of the global village, and the movement of culture beyond the confines of national and regional borders.

1. Introduction

A cognitive framework regarding Koreans and Korean culture constitutes the foundation of “Korean culture theory.” When investigating how this framework was formed – or is being formed – a series of circumstantial changes from the late 1980s to 1990 requires scrutiny. Above all, this means examining the repositioning of identities and traditions of Korean culture, the new meanings they are acquiring amid global changes such as the expanding world order and formation of the global village, and the movement of culture beyond the confines of national and regional borders.

The most salient aspect of the cognitive framework in this period was a

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fundamental change to the concept and position of culture itself. The traditional notion of culture as shared life and ideas was being replaced with the idea of culture as a commodity or object of consumption. This change was accompanied by accelerating and increasingly pronounced culture production processes such as the “creation of culture” and the “invention of tradition.” This phase, moreover, was characterized by the role, now more important than ever, of popular media and other cultural industries in shaping the new cultural discourse and constantly creating culture in the form of new products.

As a result, Korean culture, tradition, and national identity were buffeted by the forces of capital as it transcended state and national borders and moved the world toward a single global order, and by the strong currents of international politics. On one hand, they began functioning as the last bastion of Korean identity. On the other, they emerged in film and print media as commercial products, riper and more competitive than ever for development. As a result, no single cultural perspective or cognitive system now enjoyed supremacy or gained the same degree of social consent as in the past. In this study, I examine the formation of discourses of national culture and cultural industry, focusing on popular culture, in the context described above. As basic texts for analysis, I take cultural discourses formed in popular print media, television, and other audio-visual content that contributed to heightening popular interest in Korean culture in the early 1990s. Specifically, I aim to analyze discourses of “nation” and “world,” and “tradition” and “modernity” projected and spread through these cultural industries and to address the commodification of national culture and tradition.

2. National Culture in the Era of Cultural War: “The Most National Things Are the Most Global”

The most powerful discourses in Korean society of the 1990s are unquestionably those of internationalization, globalization, and information circulation. Among the lively discussions of how to view the phenomena of internationalization and globalization themselves, the leading discourses focus primarily on the concept of competitiveness. Amid the global spread of free market logic, as symbolized by the Uruguay Round, questions of how to make states, firms, and people more competitive are emerging at

the heart of the globalization debate. This understanding is best symbolized by the phrase “age of unlimited competition.” In other words, we must all unite and strive like never before to become more competitive for the survival of the state, because the world has reached an era of savage, dog-eat-dog competition that transcends state and national boundaries.

In this age of global competition, culture inevitably emerges as an element in the continuous development of the market economy. The transition from production of material goods to that of information-based products and services places culture at the heart of industry, so that failure to recognize the high value-added dimension offered by culture inevitably means falling behind the international competition (Gang 1994). For example, Lee Kunhee, chairman of the Samsung Group, which aspires to be “the world’s number one company,” has said, “the age is approaching when culture-less products will not sell, and culture-less companies can no longer exist. From the point of view of companies, the question of how to acknowledge and embrace this cultural paradigm is set to become an important one” (quoted in Jeong *et al.* 1995). “The Path to Becoming a Cultural Power,” a type of cultural policy proposal written by civil servants at the Ministry of Culture and Sports, proclaims that “A cultural war is coming” (Jeong *et al.* 1995: 11). In other words, culture must be the most important yardstick in measuring the advancement of a state, and invisible culture wars between states and nations, not the armed wars of the past or the trade wars of the present, are forecast.

Put another way, this is an appeal for the commodification of culture. This can take various forms, from “Korean *sikhye*,¹ which has stormed the mighty fortress of world-conquering cola” (Ju 1996) to the special performance by the KBS Symphony Orchestra and Kim Duksoo’s Samul Nori band as part of the United Nations’ fiftieth anniversary celebrations at the UN General Assembly Hall on October 8, 1995, which brought Korean rhythm to the world and drew international astonishment at the nation’s melodies. Views of internationalization as a question of state competitiveness, of culture as a commodity, and of (national) culture as the embodiment of state competitiveness, are easily found not just in the discussions of those running companies or formulating state policy, but among those creating culture themselves. For example, writer Yi Inhwa, who rocketed to the status of spokesman for a new generation with the

¹ (Translator’s note) A Korean traditional sweet beverage made from rice.

publication of two successful novels a few years ago, said in an interview with one quarterly magazine:

I think perhaps Korean culture needs to take a humble stance and compromise to some extent with the trends of the popular cultural industry, just like other areas of society, in order to survive in the international era by developing Korea's own unique cultural identity. ... Being a man is about doing what you don't want to do, even if it means enduring humiliation and disgrace. If you don't know about a "proper life," the truly proper thing to do is stay alive by taking the next best choice: a "good life." That's just what the Uruguay Round demands of us. ... Unless we commodify our unique logic and culture, we cannot survive in the indiscriminate competition of the age of total internationalization. (*Sangsang*, spring 1994, quoted in Yun 1994)

It must be noted here that in 1990s Korean society, characterized by popular consumption and the global order, the concept and position of culture themselves are undergoing fundamental change. The traditional concept of culture as shared life and ideas is being eclipsed by one of culture as a commodity or object of consumption. Within the discourse that holds that products made by Korean firms will be internationally competitive if they contain the sentiment and values of the nation, and amid statements that we have reached an age where national culture itself is being – or must be – commodified, culture has been given a completely different position and values that differ from those it carried in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the alternative, resistant national sentiments of the people's cultural movement. In post-industrial society, culture is a "resource" that must be cultivated to add the highest possible value to commodities. Achieving global universality for our traditional or national culture is presented as the resistant logic that we must pursue hardest in the age of unlimited competition.

There is nothing surprising about the way director Steven Spielberg, who conquered the world with Hollywood culture, has emerged as a bigger idol and hero than ever in this age of transnational culture wars. In fact, when *Jurassic Park*, the latest version of the "Spielbergian" science fiction movies, was on release around the world and becoming an unprecedented hit, Korean media fell over themselves to report the film's economic impact more than its content or remarkable special effects. The invisible movements of huge sums of money on the hidden side of the film made it less easy to remain intoxicated by the fantasy world produced through contemporary civilization's most cutting-edge technology. A single film

had earned the same dollar figure as exporting some 1.5 million cars would bring: in this sense, Spielberg's case gave a tangible sense that the age of cultural war was upon us. On the other hand, it is also notable that this was the first time the economic effects of his films, which had already been scoring global hits for many years, had received so much attention. Meanwhile, the tone of this brief article from a Korean daily newspaper reporting the recent inauguration of the Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris offers a glimpse of the same notion:

As the 21st century, when *culture will replace nukes as the weapon of war*, approaches, Japan has gone *on the offensive in Europe*. The hurry to open the Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris on September 24 is none other than a statement of intent to use this place as a window for the creation of an *advance base* to export Japanese culture to the whole world. The center, which occupies a prime piece of Parisian land with views of the Eiffel Tower along the banks of the Seine, was built at a total cost of five million francs (about 80 billion won), and has a total floor area of some 10,000m². ... This plan did not take shape overnight. The Japanese government first gained consent to build a Japanese cultural center in 1982, by pulling out all the diplomatic stops when late French president François Mitterrand visited Tokyo. (author's emphasis)²

With its extremely militant language, this article demands that culture be no longer a leisurely pastime or object of education, but a state-of-the-art weapon and advance guard in a global economic war that grows more intense and brutal by the day. In such circumstances, national and traditional culture become more than just heritage from the past, or something to be valued, protected, and passed on. National culture is now something to be actively commodified and developed to maximize its value-added impact. Effectively, it is virgin territory, ready to be settled through the introduction of the so-called "managerial attitude."³

² (Editor's note) Reference is not provided in the original.

³ The recently-founded Korea Association for Cultural Economics can be regarded as an academic move related to the view that a "managerial attitude" must now be applied. The association, established on September 6, 1997, states in its inaugural declaration, "Our main founding aims are to investigate the economic value of culture and arts (the economization of culture), to study the mutual relationship between economic development and culture and the arts, to analyze the financial situation of the culture and arts market and cultural and artistic groups, to understand the socioeconomic characteristics of producers and consumers in the culture and arts sector, and to suggest cultural policy alternatives" (*Gyosu Sinmun*, September 29, 1997).

Interesting here is the paradox shown by rhetoric such as “cultural war” and “century of culture.” The common notion today is that culture has always played second fiddle to politics or economic logic. But when we hear the twenty-first century described as the “century of culture,” it appears set to take center stage in the new millennium and the current emphasis on economic logic looks bound to shift to cultural logic. In the phrase “cultural wars,” however, we glimpse culture as still defined by economic logic. In fact, culture is now defined not by its own value or by the enjoyment it provides, but by its economic function. In this sense, an analysis with greater validity may be that in the discourses of cultural wars, even culture has now been drawn into economic logic, having formerly been excluded.

3. Culture in the Arena of Identity Politics

1) *The Cultural Doctrine of “Sintoburi”*: “*Korean is Good*”

In the foreword to his recent bestseller, folklore scholar Ju Ganghyeon explains why he has written about the things he regards as the “original, folk” phenomena of Korean culture: He wanted to write a Korean cultural doctrine for “a generation born without a *geumjul*”⁴. The influx of Western culture and resulting lifestyle changes have led to a proliferation of Koreans who prefer pizza to rice; in these circumstances, it is very important to have a proper understanding of Korean culture. In Ju’s own words:

For the past century, we’ve allowed ourselves to be blown too far by westerly winds. [The dichotomy of] “civilization and barbarism,” as defined by Western chauvinism, is a terribly wrong bias. ... How can we measure our own culture by someone else’s yardstick? Now is the time to catch the winds of the East – not just any easterly winds, but those that have always blown within our nation – and establish a cultural doctrine of *sintoburi*.⁵ (Ju 1996: 7)

⁴ (Translator’s note) A rope made of twisted straw and hung across the top of doorways or street entrances to ward off evil spirits.

⁵ (Translator’s note) Literally “the body and the earth are not two” (身土不二) i.e. are one and the same.

In fact, when the last few decades of modernization are viewed as an identity crisis, reinterpreting and reassessing unique cultural traditions and appealing for the recovery of Korean culture is not that novel or unfamiliar. The cultural discourses of nationalist and popular cultural movements that developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s (see Song 1998) were a resistance-based process of developing autonomous, native cultural traditions in the face of outside pressure and “westerly winds.” The state, too, inaugurated the Ministry of Culture in 1990 and is implementing a variety of policy projects with the aim of restoring unique Korean culture and recovering cultural homogeneity, to which it had previously failed to attend “because it was busy making ends meet.” For example, projects such as “Finding Our Sound,” “Standardization of Traditional Colors to Find [Our] Unique Color Culture,” and the development and spread of unique styles and festivals related to clothing, food, and shelter authenticated Korea’s newly re-excavated traditional culture with the seal of state authority and standardization.

But just because “turning back to our culture” projects had already existed for a long time does not mean that the patterns of the 1970s and 1980s are being continued, unaltered, in Korean society today. One of the most striking characteristics of projects to re-read traditional and national culture from the late 1980s into the 1990s was the change of the discourse-generating agent and the strengthening of an essentialist cultural doctrine.

In the former case, the current discourse of “turning back to our culture” is no longer driven by specific groups, as in the past, but by cultural industries, led by popular media. This also indicates that the production processes and results of such cultural discourses can effortlessly be commercialized and commodified. This is easily understood with a quick glance at cultural industries since the beginning of the 1990s. *Seopyeonje*, the film that broke Korean box office records and ignited nationwide passion for 1990s-style national culture; and *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* by Yu Hongjun, who took it upon himself to be a roaming guide to the aesthetics of national culture, were leading works and products that fueled the enthusiasm for “turning back to our culture” in the 1990s. In some ways, the sheer quality of both works contributed to gaining the public’s consent and participation in their cultural doctrine, unawares. Countless other attempts were made to reassess national culture through media such as publishing, video, and television. I would argue that these cultural industries led the national culture discourses of the 1990s.

Furthermore, the strengthening of essentialist cultural doctrine denotes essentialist perspectives and notions regarding culture, as symbolized by so-called *sintoburi*. As such, within the current national culture discourse, this term refers to national culture with its class-based or resistant characteristics eliminated, alleviated, or displaced. In other words, in people's cultural doctrines of the 1980s, the aesthetics and sensibilities of national and popular culture emphasized their significance as resistance to the outside world and the Korean elites that colluded with it, whereas today's national cultural doctrine finds no problematic distinction between what would be considered "the people" and the "exploitative classes" by the standards of the 1980s. *Sintoburi*, as implied by its literal meaning, conveys that if you were born in this land – indeed, if the blood of the Korean nation runs in your veins, regardless of where you were born – you innately possess the aesthetics and sensibilities of Korean culture. And if this process has not unfolded as it should, *sintoburi* demands that you at least do your duty by buying a copy of Ju Ganghyeon's above-mentioned reader for a generation born without a *geumjul* and learn about your culture.

The recent fashionability and success of "*sintoburi* products" can be understood against this background. The food industry, in particular, is emphasizing in its recent product development and sales strategies that *sintoburi* must be practiced not only in the realm of Korean aesthetics and sensibilities, but as an important point of orientation in practices regarding, as its first character (身; body) suggests, the bodies of Koreans. One area in which this trend is strongest is that of liquor brands. In early 1996, *sintoburi*-based naming became a major trend in the liquor market, as brands like "Kimsatgat" and "Chamnamu-tong Malgeun Soju"⁶ proved popular. By the end of the year, 32 *sintoburi*-esque liquor brand names had been applied for or been granted registration as trademarks. Most of these were rooted in folklore in literary works or borrowed the names of historical figures. Various examples include: "Nongae," "Ah, Goguryeo," "Bongi Kim Seondal," "Cheongsan-ri Byeokgyesu," "Jang Bogo," "Bangnang Siin," "Hangaram," "Kkachigol," "Ganghwa Doryeong," "Im Kkeokjeong," "Hwang Jini," "Ganggang Suwollae," "Seonnyeo-wa Namukkun," "Neul Pureun Sonamu," "Keundaekjip," "Gaya Wangju," "Donggubak," "Memilkkot Dongne," "Dure Maeul," and "Tteokkal

⁶ (Translator's note) Kim Satgat was a wandering poet in the Joseon period; *chamnamu-tong malgeun soju* means "clear *soju* [from] an oak barrel").

Namu.”⁷ Within the industry, such *sintoburi*-esque names are thought to be very helpful in promoting sales.

The ice-cream industry, too, is no exception. In 1997, the winds of *sintoburi* swept away the vanilla, coffee, melon, and other dominant flavors of the previous few years and ushered in a flurry of new products based on *sintoburi*-esque fruit and vegetable matter. This began with fierce competition between the “Gara Mandeun Bae Ba” (Haitai), the “Uri Bae-ro Mandeun Keun Bae Ba” (Binggrae), and the “Sing-sing Bae Ba” (Lotte)⁸ – by early June, the Gara Mandeun Bae Ba had proved popular enough to clock up sales of at least 1.3 billion won. Other competing ice-cream products include the “Taengkeu Boi” with pear and apple, the “Yuja-C” with citron, the “Harubang” with tangerine juice, the “Chamkkae Kkwabaegi” with sesame, the “Abaka Bar” with a mixture of carrot and apple, the “Nae Mom Sarang Danggeun Ba” with 20 percent carrot juice, and other products with ingredients such as tomato and *daechu* (jujube). One daily newspaper claims that products containing such *sintoburi*-esque natural ingredients are predicted to remain popular for the time being.

In the meantime, news reports claimed that sales of Korean-grown wheat had jumped to 12.2 billion won in 1996, while the nine o'clock television news reported that the traditional beverage, *sikhye*, was elbowing aside cola and lemonade to become the best-selling drink – a phenomenon rarely seen anywhere in the world. Effectively, *sikhye* has emerged as a *sintoburi*-cultural counter-symbol to Coca-Cola, a mega-symbol of foreignness and Western civilization. It has been followed by other traditional beverages such as *sujeonggwa*,⁹ pear drinks, *daechu* drinks, *omija* (a sour, red berry), *dunggeulle* (Solomon's seal) and so on, all claiming to be guardians of the Korean body. Of course, even a quick glance around is enough to confirm that this phenomenon is not confined to the beverage and ice-cream industries. The rise of rural food and folk cuisine as the latest targets of gourmets and as health foods is also a 1990s phenomenon, while the interior decorating of high-rise apartments, built using state-of-the-art architectural technology in traditional Korean-style, is another area that has seen manifestations of *sintoburi* cultural doctrine.

⁷ All named after elements of folk tales, historical figures, folk dances, trees popular in folklore, or oriental medicinal herbs.

⁸ All names referring to the Korean pear (*bae*).

⁹ (Translator's note) A Korean drink made with dried persimmon and cinnamon.

Essentialist Korean cultural discourse as represented by *sintoburi* can clearly be read as a response and defiant reaction to the cultural homogenization carried on in powerful waves of globalization and cultural imperialism. One comment in an advertisement for *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips*, volume 3, run in a daily newspaper says of the author, Professor Yu Hongjun:

Effortlessly and single-handedly, he has pulled off something that several hundred historians would be hard-pushed to achieve together. In a single stroke, his book has restored the soul of national pride, which had been disappearing as the spiritual landscape of our society tilted fully towards the West. He has healed cultural heritage, which lay bruised and hidden in the shadows, proposing an identity for Korean culture that will allow it to stand proudly in world history. This is a victory for genuine nationalism.¹⁰

Indeed, the criticism that the last few decades were a time of “going all-out in pursuit of Western material civilization,” steeped in “narrow-minded thinking that held anything Korean to be non-international or non-global” (Choe 1996) may in fact ring true. Perhaps what is now needed, then, is a stance of “moving beyond chasing others and cultivating a century of our own autonomous culture” (Choe 1996) and of confidence and pride in our national culture – an attitude that allows us to call out “Korean is Good!” In this way, national culture doctrines of the 1990s are an appeal to restore Korean yardsticks, Korean aesthetics, and Korean roots and re-establish the national identity that has until now been lost or in crisis.

But even Ju Ganghyeon, author of *The Enigma of Korean Culture*, himself gives the following example. When he asked the students in his class to raise their hands if they had been born in a hospital rather than at home, all of them put their hands up (Ju 1996: 47). What is the meaning of the author’s intention to provide a “cultural umbilical cord” to a generation born not knowing where its umbilical cord is? Clearly, to a generation born without an umbilical cord, the culture and traditions of the nation are far from being something naturally acquired in a mysterious process of *sintoburi*. On the contrary, it’s highly probable that the content and significance of national culture will become just another object of study and consumption, to be learned, mastered, and acquired through a how-to-book along the lines of a *Guide to Computing*. In a situation where

¹⁰ (Editor’s note) Reference is not provided in the original.

a recent survey of elementary school student tastes found their favorite food to be hamburgers and, surprisingly, their most-hated food kimchi (Choe 1996), such signs are clearly appearing.

Thus, statements of “*sintoburi* cultural doctrines” based on essentialism may carry a reactionary significance that impedes reflection upon an actual situation where economics and politics transcend national borders. In circumstances where, as American literary and cultural theorist Masao Miyoshi points out, the boundaries between existing states and nations are rapidly collapsing, such essentialist cultural doctrines can sound like empty slogans. To quote Miyoshi on current circumstances, for example:

In this MNC/TNC operation, at any rate, manufactured products are advertised and distributed globally, being identified only with the brand names, not the countries of origin. In fact, the country of origin is itself becoming more and more meaningless. The “Buy American” drive is increasingly a hollow battle plan: the Honda Accord is manufactured in Ohio from 75 percent U.S.-made parts, while the Dodge Stealth is made in Japan by Mitsubishi. (1993: 740-741)

In Korea, too, at least 90 percent of edible bracken sold in the country comes from China, while food on ritual tables includes Chinese bracken and other greens and Chinese fish. An article in the economics section of the *JoongAng Ilbo* daily newspaper on February 6, 1997, claims that preparing a ritual table entirely with Chinese products costs less than half as much as filling it with Korean equivalents. In other words, we are now in a situation where *sintoburi* is not just a question of philosophy, conviction or aesthetics, but one of cost and economics. In a reality like this, it will become harder and harder for unique national culture or history to maintain a stance of resistance. The commercialization of the so-called native or folk-related, and the museum preservation of and touristic engagement with traditional culture are now not just easy to find in Korean society, but regarded as among the most competitive growth industries.

All this means that, within the cultural doctrine of *sintoburi*, the gulf between the intentions of those generating the discourse and the practices of consumers may grow wider than ever before. The case of Gangjin-gun County, which appears in volume 1 of Yu Hongjun’s *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips*, is a clear example of estrangement between the production and practice of discourse. Unknown to most people until only a few years ago,

Gangjin became a famous tourist spot overnight thanks to Yu's book. Even the road sign on the way into the county has changed from "Welcome to Gangjin-gun" to "Welcome to Gangjin-gun, the Number One Field Trip Spot in the South," rendered in flamboyant script. This small county, previously visited by 30,000 people a year, is now a famous spot visited by more than 500,000 on field trips in summer alone. To the people of Gangjin-gun, Yu acquired special significance because he had "brought them lives of pride, rather than living anonymously in a backwater visited by no one." In 1996, on September 17 – Gangjin-gun People's Day – the county decided to thank Yu by presenting him with a certificate of honorary citizenship, the highest possible expression of gratitude. One year later, on October 25, 1997 – the first ever Jeollanam-do People's Day – the province presented Yu with a certificate of honorary citizenship, as an expression of thanks for creating a friendly image for Jeollanam-do in the eyes of other Koreans.

Gangjin is now the number one field trip spot in southern Korea, effectively a museum of "southern culture," or even a symbol of it. On the cultural map of Korea, Gangjin is no longer a place to find the aesthetics of "an ordinary stone and a blade of grass." Each stone and blade of grass you find there must now be experienced with the a priori descriptor "Gangjin"; they are Gangjin stones and Gangjin grass. Yu's sensibilities, interpretative methods, and even aesthetics become standardized in the routes of all those on field trips and tourists clutching copies of *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips*. At one temple, for example, the gravel path leading to the entrance, rather than the temple buildings themselves, takes center stage; at another, a small hermitage hidden in a forest behind or a collapsing stone lantern are standardized as the foci of appreciation, rather than the main Buddha hall. The author may have to find another, anonymous place if he is after the aesthetics of an ordinary stone or an ordinary blade of grass, while the problem of how to achieve a balance between his basic aesthetic, which holds that "All artifacts can only shine when they are in their original place," and this treatment of cultural heritage as property belonging to museums and tourism, now appears more intractable than ever.

Cheongsan-do Island in Jeollanam-do, where much of *Seopyeonje*, including the famous (!) long take, was filmed, has also seen a big increase in visitors from the mainland since the film's release. The hit Korean film brought new fame to the location, an island in Dadohaehaesang National Park, which has received 70,000 visitors so far in 1996 and is expecting

100,000 in 1997. A tourist pamphlet from the *JoongAng Ilbo* that offers a travel map of southern Korea matching Cheongsan-do and other key locations with the *Seopyeonje* scenes shot there gives its readers the following order:

The most important thing to do before you go to Cheongsan-do is watch *Seopyeonje* again on video. At the end of the film, Yubong, who blinded his daughter for the sake of singing; blind Songhwa; and Dongho, who abandoned his family, overcome their sorrow as they sing the song *Simcheongga*. Once they have met and worked through their bitterness, they part again without a word, people who met through music and embraced each other through their hearts. That's how you need to travel in Cheongsan-do, at the southern tip of Korea. (*JoongAng Ilbo* June 6, 1997)

Like Gangjin, Cheongsan-do has emerged as a key signifier, embodying “southern culture” and “the sorrow of the nation” through *Seopyeonje* (*Sopyonje*), and we are told to appreciate it as such.

2) *Finding the Roots of the Nation: “In Search of Original National Culture”*

On the other hand, recent publishing trends offer a good indication of the flow of Korean cultural doctrine in the 1990s, as well as being key agents driving this flow. One aspect I would like to note in relation to the discussion in this paper is the movement that can be called “finding the identity of nation(al culture).”

One of the *JoongAng Ilbo*'s special-edition articles to mark the new year in early 1997 reports the results of a survey of publishers' plans. The questionnaire reveals that the most salient new year plans of the heads of some 30 leading Korean book publishers are “learning from the past for the future” and “looking for Korean things.” Above all, a strong “craze for classics” is forecast from the start of the year and several publishers are drawing up plans for complete translations or re-discoveries of classical texts. A particularly sudden rise in interest in East Asian classics, from countries such as Korea and China, is apparent. For example, Sol Book is planning to release a series in Korean of the classics *Selected Works of Jeong Yagyong*, *The Jehol Diary*, *Encyclopedic Discourse of Yi Ik*, *Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea*, *Complete Works of Kim Jeonghui*, and the *Translated Classic Series*, while Dongmunseon is planning the ultimate series of Chinese classics, complete with exhaustive footnotes and commentaries.

Nanam is preparing a series of translated East Asian classics such as *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, while several other publishers revealed similar plans. Assessing this passion for East Asian classics, the same newspaper writes:

We interpret this as introspection in the face of the scientific rationalism and material capitalism of the West. The intention is to reassess, from the beginning, the Western worldview, which has reached its limits, from the philosophical perspective of East Asia, with its ancient traditions. In particular, this is a fundamental reflection on our behavior since the 1960s, when we have been charging ahead for the sake of growth and development and never looking back.^{11,12}

As if to support this interpretation, the craze for classics is accompanied by a flourishing project to find “things Korean.” Sakyejul’s “Korean Culture Series” is a prime example, to be released in early April as four volumes including *Korean Culture and Koreans* and *The Confucian Culture of the Joseon Period*. The series is described as a comprehensive examination of Korean culture through interdisciplinary research by young scholars. Design House is planning a series that aims to shine light on Korean identity from a new perspective, with 100 volumes to be published over the next five years, an attempt at a Korean-style Gallimard series. Hangilsa’s “Korean History in Stories,” a similar project, is due to be published in the second half of the year, in 24 volumes covering Korean history from ancient times onwards.

Of course, this is not a new movement that began in 1997. On the contrary, it can be read as a continuation this year of key trends in the publishing industry over the last two or three years. In 1996, too, for example, the most important trend in humanities and social sciences publishing, including general educational books, was “the search for Korean things.” The most prominent genre within this trend was educational (Korean) history books, a boom which began with works on Joseon history. The first and second halves of 1996 saw Joseon history works such as *Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty in One Volume* and *How Did People Live in Joseon?* emerge as bestsellers, while the latter part of the

¹¹ On the other hand, some critics of the trend for translating classic texts interpret it as a complacent way of avoiding copyright laws.

¹² (Editor’s note) Reference is not provided in the original.

year saw a flood of books focusing on the Goryeo period.¹³ *Royal Annals of the Goryeo Dynasty in One Volume*, *Goryeo Dynasty History in Stories*, *Newspapers from History 2*, and *How Did People Live in Goryeo?* all focused on the Goryeo period and were all published in the second half of 1996.¹⁴

By 1997, the subject of such history books showed what might be called a natural extension back to the Goguryeo period (after Joseon and Goryeo). Examples of books published this year include: *Chronicles of Goguryeo*, *The 700-year History of the Goguryeo Dynasty*, *To Goguryeo*, *A Walk through the Historic Sites of Goguryeo*, *An Imperial History of Goguryeo*, and *Desert Star: General Gao Xianzhi*. Interesting here is the fact that all of these educational history books about Goguryeo focus on the unyielding spirit and drive of Goguryeo and its people. *Chronicles of Goguryeo*, which is primarily a dynastic history stretching from the reign of King Dongmyeong to that of King Bojang, describes Goguryeo as a great power, battling for supremacy with states on the Chinese mainland. According to this book, Goguryeo first encountered territorial friction with Baekje and Silla around the fifth century A.D., four hundred years after its founding; the claim here is that looking at Goguryeo only in terms of the Three Kingdoms' relationship is a narrow view of history that confines it to the Korean Peninsula. In the same way, *The 700-year History of the Goguryeo Dynasty* uses examples from the past to show the spirit of the Goguryeo people as they engaged in active diplomacy with neighboring states in order to defend their territory, though this book does not give prominence to any new historical perspective or narrative. The novel *To Goguryeo* tells a story of emigrants from Goguryeo establishing an independent state in the heart of Tang China. As such, it makes a novel of the life story of General Li Zhengji, who is said to have staged a coup d'état at the age of 26, occupied and ruled the Henan region, and resisted Tang. The author claims that airbrushing Yi, who monopolized trade with Silla, Balhae, and Japan, out of history is due to a short sighted view of the past. *Desert Star: General*

¹³ Among these, *Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty in One Volume* remained the number one bestseller in the humanities and sciences category into early 1997. As of mid-1997, 600,000 copies have reportedly been sold.

¹⁴ It can be said that Goryeo had received relatively little interest until this point. It now appears to be drawing new interest due to the recent history book publishing boom. In fact, the Goryeo revival project began with art, when Ho-am Art Museum held an exhibition of Goryeo national treasures in summer 1995. The exhibition attracted 180,000 visitors and generated new interest in Goryeo among Koreans.

Gao Xianzhi, written for grade five and six elementary school students, is a fairy tale that shows the author, a novelist, following the traces of the eponymous general, a historical figure originally from Goguryeo who became a Tang commander and achieved brilliant deeds such as the Saracenic expedition. As he follows Gao's footsteps along the Silk Road, the novelist learns about bold courage. One daily newspaper wrote of "a time of spirit and courage, when the plains of Manchuria were ruled from the backs of galloping horses. Goguryeo may be a source of huge historical comfort for those wanting to overcome their territorial complex about [living in] a small country" (*JoongAng Ilbo* August 1, 1997).

The publishing industry's quest to "find Korean things" is not confined to history. In fact, the boom was first generated in 1993, with the publication of the first volume of Yu Hongjun's *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips*. This book, volumes 1 and 2 of which had clocked up recorded sales of at least two million copies as of the end of 1996, was the main culprit in triggering the explosion of interest in "Korean things," regardless of its actual merits as a book. This work has brought about a boom in exploring cultural heritage through a combination of reading and travel. Where the term meaning "field trip" (*dapsa*) previously called to mind academic excursions, the success of *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* has brought a sharp rise in interest in the heritage left by Korea's ancestors, so that field trips to cultural historic sites have become popular as a type of themed travel. Field trip clubs have formed, while advertisements for field trips sometimes catch the eye in newspapers. Individual field trippers clutching copies of *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* underarm have become a common sight, too. In these circumstances, several books related to Korean cultural heritage and related field trips have been published, and are proving enduringly popular. Just a few of the cultural heritage field trip books published in the last two or three years include: volumes 2 and 3 of *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips*, *HiTEL Stories of Historical Sites*, *A Picture Diary Drawn on the Road*, *A Guide to Field Trips*, *In Search of Cultural Heritage*, *Culture Trails in the Mountains and the Fields*, *A Historical Site Pilgrimage of Historical Figures*, and *A Living Museum of Territory*. All of these emphasize experiencing cultural heritage, rather than merely appreciating it. Other key recent works reassessing the value of Korean cultural heritage, though not written for use in field trips, include *Leaning against an Entatic Pillar at Muryangsujeon Hall* (Choe Sunu) and *Learning*

*about Korean Cultural Heritage through Pictures.*¹⁵

In fact, most bestsellers in the humanities in 1996 and 1997 were educational history books or books about Korean cultural heritage. To express it in the words of one daily newspaper, the bestsellers and steady sellers of the 1970s were *Human Market* and *Hometown of the Stars*, in the 1980s they were *Idols and Reason* and *The People and Intellectuals*. Wouldn't these books' equivalents in the 1990s be *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* and *Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty in One Volume*? Indeed, a list of the month's bestsellers published by Seoul's Kyobo Book Centre published at the end of October 1996 shows six educational Korean history and cultural heritage-related titles in the top 10 bestselling humanities category: *How Did People Live in Joseon?* (1), *Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty in One Volume* (2), *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* (5), *The Enigma of Korean Culture* (8), *Korean History in Stories* (9) and *Excavation Stories* (10).¹⁶ This phenomenon continued in 1997, with analysis of statistics from the same bookstore on bestsellers in the first half of 1997 revealing an overwhelming interest in "finding Korean things." *Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty in One Volume* remained in first place in the humanities category after its success of 1996, and was joined by eight other titles: *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips Vol 1* (5), *Newspapers from History* (6), *Korean History in Stories* (7), *Yeah, the Royal Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (9), *Royal Annals of the Goryeo Dynasty in One Volume* (11), *How Did People Live in Joseon?* (12), *The Enigma of Korean Culture* (13), and *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (20). This can be read as a sign of the broad interest among readers in Korean culture and history; the publishing industry has rapidly grasped and reacted to this interest, thereby encouraging it.

Of course, this does not apply only to the publishing industry. Television and other popular media are equally busy with "finding Korean things" and "finding historical truth"; this suggests that searching for the true or original form of Korean history is not solely an academic interest or monopoly. For example, KBS-1TV's *Sunday Special – Seven Secrets of the Tomb of King Muryeong* (December 16, 1995) and its sequel, *Sunday Special*

¹⁵ This interest in Korean cultural heritage received policy help and an official seal of approval from the government with the designation of 1997 as a "year of cultural heritage."

¹⁶ Two of the other books in the top 10, *The Story of the Romans* (3) and *Fingerprints of the Gods* (6) were about the history and culture of other countries.

– *Forgotten Land: Secrets of the 22 Districts of Baekje* (September 15, 1996), were acknowledged as rare masterpieces among attempts by popular media to find original forms in ancient history and were even re-broadcast. *Secrets of the 22 Districts of Baekje* asserted that Baekje engaged in active maritime activity with Japan, China, and South-east Asia, based on its 22 districts, known as *damno*. Programs exploring the “original forms” of Seokguram Grotto and Hwangnyongsa Temple, broadcast in 1997, also met positive media and popular receptions for “going beyond the simple praise for formal beauty we have seen until now, and investigating the Korean Buddhist philosophy and traditions that lie in its background” (*JoongAng Ilbo*) in terms of their use of the latest computer graphics technology and their approach. Like the publishing industry, most of these programs also aimed to “find historical truth”; in other words, to reveal historical truth lost or isolated from official versions of history until then, to cast new light on the roots of national culture and the excellence of Korean cultural heritage, or to unearth evidence of the great spirit and noble aspirations of Korean ancestors. For example, while history books had previously taught Koreans that only the small Korean Peninsula, hanging on a corner of the continent, was the home base of their nation, they now encountered new ancient historical horizons in which their country dominated an area stretching north beyond Manchuria and south to the seas of South-east Asia. This, along with the cultural heritage produced by a noble artistic spirit, was more than enough to fill them with national pride.

How should we understand this striking movement to “find Korean things,” led by the publishing industry and television? At this point, we may refer to the case of our neighbor, Japan. The emergence and success of the genre known as *Nihonjinron* (“theory of the Japanese”) or *Nihon bunkaron* (“Japanese culture theory”) bears many similarities to the Korean history book boom in the publishing industry and the “search for national roots” currently underway in Korean society, while the boom in cultural heritage and related field trips shows many parallels with Japan’s boom in “searching for tradition.”

Anthropologist Harumi Befu claims that the emphasis on Japanese cultural uniqueness that is created and consumed through writing in the *Nihon bunkaron* genre must fundamentally be examined within the context of Japan’s internationalization (1987). In other words, Befu’s understanding is that Japan experienced a national and cultural identity crisis in the processes of modernization and internationalization and came to assert

cultural uniqueness and a distinction between Japanese and other cultures to resolve the problem. The recent obsession in Korean society with “finding Korean things,” too, bears the pronounced appearance of a reaction to losses that have occurred in the process of modernization. It can be understood as “re-politicization of national culture” (Kim 1993: 94) that has appeared in the context of the currently accelerating process of globalization. In other words, a paradox occurs whereby the more boundaries collapse and the significance of international borders weakens, the more the imagined communities of the nation and the state may gain significance as arenas in which new identities are defined and compete (Gupta 1992).

The “tradition-finding boom” in Japan that triggered a series of national obsessions in the 1970s and 1980s such as domestic tourism and the *furusato* (home place), can also be understood in this context (Gwon 1996). In the case of Japan, too, cultural industries including popular media, tourism, and transportation were understood to be the main agents leading and commercializing the tradition-finding boom. But the widespread and enthusiastic reception that nostalgia for lost tradition, generated and stoked by cultural industries, received from consumers came against a background of huge epochal change in Japanese society. In the same way, the emergence of “national films” and “national must-read books” like *Seopyeonje* and *My Cultural Heritage Field Trips* was made possible not only by their quality as works, but by the circumstances of their time: loss of “roots” and identity crises experienced in the process of rapid modernization. However, demands for such identity searches only begin once loss has occurred. No matter how much the value of tradition and the soundness and excellence of national culture are emphasized, this does not signify a return to tradition; it is highly likely that this interest will be no more than a non-reflective, temporary phenomenon. This is because the movement to “find Korean things” itself is merely a product of its specific times. Indeed, Marilyn Ivy’s (1988) analysis of Japanese society clearly shows that the sense of loss, nostalgia, search for the self, and appeals for a return to cultural roots that govern the above-mentioned tradition-finding boom evaporate in the process of post-modernization, so that obsession with and consumption of “Japanese” things are transformed into a style or fashion that can be chosen from among countless other “exotic things.” In fact, such post-modern signs are already appearing in Korea. For example, Jo Hyejeong gives the following description of the rupture in Korean

society regarding the “search for Korean things” in her discussion of *Seopyeonje*:

As Yi Yeongmi points out, some people in their teens and 20s are charmed by *pansori*¹⁷ and buy records of it after watching *Seopyeonje*, just as others came to like Mozart after watching *Amadeus* or opera after *Le maitre de musique*. To them, Korean tradition is another artistic product for selection; they do not rate it any higher for being Korean. Frankly, feudalist, modern and post-modern generations now co-exist in Korean society, so that understandings of “Korean things” and “national things” take very different forms, too. (Jo 1994: 268)

3) *Other Cultures as Mirrors for Viewing Ourselves: Self-Searching Korean Cultural Doctrines or Korean Culture in the World*

Meanwhile, the recent popular interest in culture is not limited to “Korean things.” On the contrary, it can be said that interest in other cultures is stronger than ever. Here, however, interest in other cultures and worlds goes beyond mere exploration of and curiosity about difference. It is a mirror that constantly reflects “us” and serves as a mechanism for such reflection. In this respect, interest in other cultures conflicts with the search for Korean things mentioned above. In many cases, however, they signify two sides of the same coin. When did interest in other cultures, except among academics and certain individuals with a penchant for the exotic, expand? In terms of recent contemporary history, it clearly would not have been in the 1960s or 1970s, when the logic of growth was dominant. And it is even less likely to have been from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, when resistance-based national culture doctrine was strong. On the contrary, it can be understood as a very recent contemporary phenomenon that occurred at the same time as movements such as essentialism and finding the roots of national culture.

The craze for exploring other cultures that has recently emerged in the form of television documentaries and newspaper or magazine articles has thoroughly undermined the claims of anthropologists who have so far regarded the study of other cultures as an important indicator of academic identity. Let us start by looking only at television programs that regularly introduce other cultures. Prime examples include *The World Now*, broadcast

17 (Translator’s note) A traditional genre of sung storytelling.

almost daily after the so-called prime-time nine o'clock news to add news from places around the world; *Documentary Theater*, which introduces in comparatively thorough detail the traditions and customs of tribal societies living in "remote" places (this program is extremely "anthropological" in that it tries to understand exotic customs and practices that could be seen as fundamentally bizarre, in the context of their own cultures); *Global Exploration Challenge Team*, focusing on celebrities experiencing remote places; and *Sunday Special*, which is not limited to other cultures but does introduce them on a regular basis. For a long time, these and other television programs along with print media articles have made rare and exotic culture from across the world into knowledge that can be acquired on a daily basis from the dinner table, rather than the exclusive preserve of academic specialists. Daily newspapers and magazines are bursting with information about other cultures in places such as Tibet, Turkey, remote China, Africa, South America, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

What, then, are the other cultures broadcast through these programs, and how are they represented? Interesting here is that an overwhelming proportion of programs focusing on other cultures are about "remote places." This strikes a peculiar contrast with the other cultures Koreans generally heard about and saw in the past, and particularly during the age of growth: those of Europe and the United States. Does the fact that TV cameras exploring other cultures today generally focus on tribal peoples in remote areas and "undefiled primitiveness" not reflect nostalgia for a past lost in the process of modernization? There are clear signs that it does. Scenes of a Hamar tribal coming of age ceremony in a remote part of Africa "where primitiveness lives and breathes" (*Documentary Theater – A Coming of Age Ceremony in Hamar, the Blessed Land*) or a Zhuang wedding in China where a pig is slaughtered and the village holds a big party (*Documentary Theater – Singing Ethnic Group: The Zhuang People of China*) are the antithesis of contemporaneity. Comments such as "This is how Korea once was in the past," in reference to communal Zhuang marriage customs, or "Their unique world, in which everything in life is shared, is a paradise that people today have never experienced," when describing the Punan of Borneo, are infused with strong nostalgia for a lost past.

A *JoongAng Ilbo* article titled "The busy road to India, spiritual home of modern people tired of material culture" (December 21, 1996), too, reports the remarkably sharp recent increase in Koreans traveling to India, interpreting the phenomenon as being due to second thoughts about

material civilization. Travel to India has indeed increased notably, to the extent that specialist India travel agencies have appeared.¹⁸ The *JoongAng Ilbo* offers the following analysis, borrowing the terms of a philosopher who once studied in India: “India is a repository of the spiritual history of humankind. Those who have seen the limits of material civilization or whose material desires have been satisfied go to India in search of a spiritual world. Following Europeans in the 1960s and Japanese in the 1980s, Koreans in the 1990s are heading off in search of spiritual worlds lost amid material civilization.” The six-part series *The Great Nile Journey*, produced over a year as one of ten major programs to mark the sixth anniversary of broadcaster SBS and broadcast in November 1996, also carried a strong tone of introspective *fin de siècle* reflection, particularly in the form of regret and skepticism about the side-effects of twentieth century technological and material civilization, repeatedly drawing contrasts between the “primitive” and the “civilized.”

From this perspective, if the obsession with history books can be seen as a temporal expansion of modern nostalgia, exploration of other cultures can be seen as a spatial expansion of the same phenomenon. At the same time, however, both of these movements are ultimately driven by the same principle motor, modern nostalgia. In the end, then, these temporal and spatial axes appear to convert to a single axis of time. In other words, other cultures, particularly others’ spaces in the form of the remote areas that are currently the object of so much interest in Korean popular media, function as extant symbols of the Korean past. If the Western other culture disseminated in the age of growth pointed our imaginations toward the future, the other cultures of remote areas currently being “discovered” and experienced in popular media function as a mirror, reflecting a “past” for us to think about.

Meanwhile, our perspectives in search of tribal peoples in remote areas and undefiled primitiveness reflect not only modern nostalgia but now a confidence (or possibly arrogance) and sense of security that stems from our own achievement of modernization. The other cultures in remote areas are a past that we have both lost and overcome. Remote and primitive

¹⁸ In the case of specialist India travel agency Hyecho Travel Adventures, for example, only 100 Koreans traveled to the subcontinent in the entire year of 1991, when the company’s first tour product was released. In 1996, by comparison, the number of travelers to India in December alone was 1,000, with 3,000 expected the following month.

tribes are objects upon which we can project our own imitations of Western imperialism. In other words, the current craze in our society for exploring other cultures has two meanings in relation to Korean cultural doctrine. It is both a device for reflecting upon Korean culture and an imperialist mechanism of imagination for Korean culture as the latter spreads throughout the world.

The assumption about an imperialist mechanism of imagination is possible because our view of “remote areas” is highly selective and because interest in such remote areas does not signify a return to the past. *Sunday Special – Soul of the Amazon: Yanomami* shows just how selectively the camera lens (i.e. our perspective) is when it comes to other cultures in remote areas. This program describes the lives of the Yanomami as a place where primitive (communal) life has been maintained, showing the lifestyle and economy, house arrangements, family relationships, natural environment, male-female courtship, taking of hallucinogens, and soul searching of the tribe in relative detail. But to the author, who has watched plenty of archival film footage of the Yanomami, albeit taken a long time ago, the most striking part of the program was seeing the tribes people wearing all kinds of underwear, which looked as if it had been imported from contemporary civilization, watching them carrying around vessels that looked like part of an aluminum cooking set brought as a present by the KBS camera crew, and assuming that their lives had already been thoroughly influenced by outside culture to the extent that the pans appeared not entirely unfamiliar objects to them. In this sense, the Yanomami appeared not “primitive” but “modernizing.” In the same way, one daily newspaper reported a rumor that what the production team of the aforementioned *The Great Nile Journey* actually experienced on the ground was not so much “African culture undefiled by civilization” but “a perplexing Africa contaminated by Western civilization and packaged as a tourist destination (*JoongAng Ilbo* November 7, 1996). Ultimately, the selective camera lens that adjusts its frame to conform to “our” imagination of how “they” are, tells as much, if not more, about our view of other cultures as it does about other cultures themselves. Views that attempt to lock “remote” cultures in the “past” are an embodiment of self-searching Korean cultural doctrines, based on Korea’s achievement of modernization that enables Koreans to go off traveling with television cameras and on faith in Korean culture as it expands into the wider world.

4. Conclusion

The key trends of Korean cultural doctrines in the 1990s that we have examined can be summarized as national cultural doctrine defined by economic logic and the re-politicization of national culture, as symbolized by the search for Korean things. It can also be pointed out that the current discourses and opinions surrounding national culture show more pronounced rupture and confusion than ever before. This is based partly on the fact that current cultural discourse is generated not, as in the past, under the leadership or monopoly of a particular group or force, but by popular media and diverse other forces and voices with varied understandings and consciousness. Another cause is the diversity and degree of rupture, greater than ever, of the consumers of cultural discourse generated by these various groups. Frankly speaking, Korean society today is characterized by the coexistence, “separate yet together,” of people ranging from those with direct experience of agricultural society to the so-called cyber generation, with its real-time understanding and embodiment of global cultural trends. Of course, the background to this is the transition in earnest of Korea to a consumer society via the “myth of modernization” of the 1960s and 1970s, and the “myth of revolution” of the 1980s.

A particularly complex question is that of how the reality of accelerating globalization and the rapid dissemination of information can coexist with doctrines of national culture, for example essentialist national culture doctrines represented by *sintoburi*. Kim (1996) observes that “The nationalist passion at a mass rally on a university campus protesting the Uruguay Round and the opening of the [Korean] rice market, when the crowd sings along to guest singer Bae Ilho’s song *Sintoburi*, is merely a brief moment amid dancing to the reggae rhythms of *Pingye* under psychedelic lighting.” In the same way, the forces of global culture diffused by a combination of advanced information technology and cultural industries pose a fundamental threat to the position of national culture, which was centered within national and state boundaries. In these circumstances, it may be inevitable that discourses and practices revolving around national culture are more visibly ruptured and confused than ever.

As pointed out above, the emphasis of national culture can clearly be read as a reaction and resistance to cultural homogenization amid the powerful waves of globalization and cultural imperialism. Traditional

culture must be respected as an important material for building cultural identity amid the flood of mega-information spilling over national borders. Nonetheless, cultural identity cannot be established simply through appeals to exclusive and essentialist national culture. In circumstances like the present, when consumer society and the world order are expanding so rapidly, obsessions with essentialist national culture may actually impede reflection upon reality.

For example, rupture with regard to national cultural consciousness emerges as a specific problem when policy is formulated based on the preservation and development of national culture. The government is in the process of designating 1997 as “Cultural Heritage Year,” reflecting recent interest in national culture, and a year-long nationwide project to “know, find and cultivate cultural heritage.” Buoyed by this atmosphere, many movements to “restore” traditional culture or discussions of cultural heritage conservation are taking place. In the meantime, local authorities around the country are busy holding various cultural events and creating policies to increase enjoyment of culture.

The problem here is that it is not so easy to agree upon what to define as national culture and what to conserve as cultural heritage. The architect Seung H-Sang, for example, has warned of the danger of ahistoricity posed by many buildings restored in the name of Korean tradition. He comments on the recent restoration of Gyeonghuigung and Gyeongbokgung palaces and on plans to restore *hanok* villages and Baekje and Silla villages, as follows:

The problem lies in the serious loss of history caused by such restoration, and the misreporting of it. The people of Athens don't leave the Parthenon in its ruined state through lack of money, and it's not as if the people of Rome don't have the resources or technology to restore the Colosseum. ... In other words, those ruins and traces of decline are themselves an important part of history, and freely imagining and researching how they originally looked is a very important cultural activity. Restoring a building without being clear about the period to which it's being restored, or relocating a building that cannot exist away from its original place effectively means killing and taxidermizing it. That's not restoration but destruction – nothing but chauvinism. (*JoongAng Ilbo* September 29, 1997)

How, then, can we prevent cultural heritage conservation from lapsing into taxidermizing, and reassessment of tradition from flowing into exclusive nationalism. Fundamentally, I believe we must start with an

honest view of history and a clear vision for the future. When we do so, not only “successful” culture but “failed” history will take their proper places in our precious tradition, and not only “great tradition” centered on the ruling classes but a variety of cultural traditions will be recognized (Jo Hyejeong, *JoongAng Ilbo* March 30, 1997). Meanwhile, wider awareness will be needed that unique national culture is not fixed or immutable but can be newly defined in accordance with current situations and continuously reassessed as living cultural tradition. In the arena of specific cultural policy, we need to let local citizens participate actively in policy formulation and conservation projects so that they develop a common interest in cultural awareness.

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