

Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance, edited by Laurel Kendall. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. 272 pp., US\$ 46.00, ISBN: 978-0-8248-3393-0 (hardcover)

It has been five years since *Consuming Korean Tradition* was published and received high praises from numerous scholars of Korean studies outside and inside South Korea. The highest praise went to the editor of the book and the writer of the introduction, Laurel Kendall. Truly, Kendall did a remarkable job in weaving not only various seemingly distanced disciplinary focuses on consumption of Korean tradition, but also different times of consumption that span from early to late modernity. The collection of papers covering the themes of spectacle, tourism, material objects, and performance is a great example of interdisciplinary research of Korean studies, which underscores detail consideration of history, society, politics, and culture whether it be combing through or unearthing old historical documents or conducting a detailed and/or grounded ethnographic research.

The book is divided into four parts: "Modernity as Spectacle/Spectacular Korea," "Korea as Itinerary," "Korean Things," and "Korea Performed." First two chapters in Part I discuss experiences of spectacle in two different times, one in the colonial period and the other in the contemporary period. In "Dining Out in the Land of Desire: Colonial Seoul and the Korean Culture of Consumption" Cwiertka examines the "culture of consumption of colonial Korea, illuminating the role of the department stores as the key icon of a modern urban space where new practices, attitudes, and dreams were being born" (21). In doing so, Cwiertka reveals multi-layered colonial Seoul in the making not only by Japanese colonialists but also the Korean middle class who desired for the experience of being modern consumers. In Chapter 2 titled "Shrinking Culture: Lotte World and the Logic of Miniaturization," Tangherlini describes the Lotte World complex that claims itself as the world's largest indoor amusement park and shopping mall as a site of fantasy and consumption, a place for the enactment of leisure-time social bonding. In doing so, Tangherlini argues that the South Korean middle class uses Lotte World to enact its social relationships.

Three chapters in "Korea as Itinerary" deal with the tourist gaze in the colonial period (Chapter 3) and tourist activities in the contemporary period (Chapters 3 and 4). In "Travel Guides to the Empire: The Production of Tourist

Images in Colonial Korea,” Pai describes how Japanese interests mimicked the already well-established devices of late nineteenth-century European tourism to market the Korean peninsula as a destination for both Japanese and European travelers. According to Pai, the tourist promotion followed a predictable iconography of exotic women, picturesque ruins and landscapes, and quaint natives. In “Guests of Lineage Houses: Tourist Commoditization of Confucian Cultural Heritage in Korea,” Moon describes an encounter between the heirs of venerable lineages of the former *yangban* nobility and the domestic and overseas Korean visitors who seek connection with Confucian tradition. As a result, tradition becomes tourist performance and the question of authenticity is debated while visitors describe a meaningful connection to Confucian tradition. Oppenheim’s “Crafting the Consumability of Place” examines two seemingly contradictory South Korean travel genres, *dapsa* (field-study travel) and *baenang yeohaeng* (foreign backpack travel). After a close examination, Oppenheim argues these two travel genres share a common transactional frame such that the traveler invests in an experience without undue encumbrance or commitment.

The third part on “Korean Things” deals with two Korean icons, *jangseung* (devil posts) and *gimchi* (kimchi). In “The Changsung Defanged: The Curious Recent History of a Korean Cultural Symbol,” Kendall charts the *jangseung*’s journey from a village guardian and road marker to a museum artifact and consumable souvenir to a saturated symbol of a multiplex Korean experience. In “The Kimchi Wars in Globalizing East Asia,” Han illuminates how *kimchi*, a staple of Korean cuisine, has been an object of multiple and shifting value by focusing on two incidents between South Korea and its neighboring countries Japan and China over the food.

Lastly, in “Korea Performed” two chapters deal with Korean performing arts, namely dance and *gugak* (traditional Korean music). In “Blurring Tradition and Modernity: The Impact of Japanese Colonization and Ch’oe Sung-hui on Dance in South Korea Today,” van Zile examines selected dance characteristics and experiences of Ch’oe Sung-hui, known as the dancing princess of the Peninsula and recognized as a People’s Actor in North Korea, their relationship to the times in which she lived and performed, and their contribution to a kind of dance that serves as a visual symbol of Korea (170). In “Kugak Fusion and the Politics of Korean Musical Consumption,” Howard explores how promoters and performers of a new genre, *gugak* fusion, are attempting to commodify *gugak* for new audiences, to make *gugak* more commercial, and to ensure that

gugak remains a part of local music industry (195). Howard describes while *gugak* fusion appeals to a broader audience by combining elements of the *gugak* tradition and Western instrumentations, it incurs the enmity of *gugak* purists for not being sufficiently Korean.

As Kendall writes *Consuming Korean Tradition* is a great example of “a dialogue between historians of early modern Korea and scholars of contemporary South Korean life” (3). This is why the book is an important starting point and a valuable reference to the students of Korean studies who are interested in the international flows of Korean popular culture commonly called as *hallyu* and in the process of space/place making where meanings of Korean national identity are negotiated, inscribed, and contested. For example, chapters on department store, Lotte World, tourism images, touristification of Confucian tradition, foreign backpack travel, and *gugak* fusion provide various insights to the understanding of what many *hallyu* researchers are calling the Northeast Asian cultural production circuit (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008).

In addition, if this book recasts the analytic frameworks of Daniel Miller on consumption, Baudrillard on simulacra which suggests some contemporary South Korean simulacra are conscious citations of “tradition,” and Appadurai on modernity as encounters with new material environments and new ways of regarding and engaging the world, many chapters directly or indirectly provide concrete examples of how space/place gets embodied, negotiated, inscribed, and contested all of which are the main concerns the anthropologists of space and place who are rethinking and reconceptualizing the understandings of culture in spatialized ways (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003).

Consuming Korean Tradition puts a spotlight on a touchy subject in Korean studies, commodification and consumption of tradition. Kendall asks what we mean by “tradition” in the context of contemporary South Korea, in other words, commodification and consumption of tradition that take place in the global market where many traditional Korean handicrafts are made with cheaper Chinese materials and produced with less expensive Chinese labor (4). This leads to a series of consideration on authenticity and blurring of tradition and modernity.

In addition, the book is also a dialogue between the book’s contributors who are in different disciplines. Several researchers either make references or link to other researches in the volume such as Cwiertka (Chapter 1) who recognizes the department store in the colonial period as an embryo of Lotte World

or suggest relevance to other areas of inquiry present and future such as Pai (Chapter 3) and Moon (Chapter 4) who suggest the expansion of their inquiries onto the Korean wave or *hallyu* and multiculturalism. Apparently, *hallyu* was discussed in the conference that preceded the book but did not get included in the book.

As a result, the book maintains a consistent conversation about “how experiences of new modernity in the colonial period and of traditional Korea/Korean tradition in late modernity have been constructed, experienced, and reinforced through and around the consumption of distinctive goods and services” (3). In the end, the book opens up a new question or challenge about Korean identity. In this sense, the issue of blurring of tradition and modernity points to the issue of blurring of Korean and non-Korean culture and identity which Moon (2006) took on this challenge in the book titled “Uri anui Oegung Munhwa” (Foreign Cultures Within Us).

This book is a required reading for students and scholars of Korean studies whose interests relate to the complexity of the consumption of Korean popular culture and the fluidity and globalization of Korean identity.

Reference

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