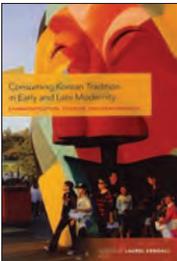


Korea



Laurel Kendall, ed., *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. 272 pages, 17 illus.
Cloth, US\$46.00; ISBN 978-0-8248-3393-0.

HAVING RECENTLY reviewed a conference volume of occasionally tenuous coherence, I will admit that the juxtaposition of early and late modernity in the title of *Consuming Korean Tradition* gave me pause. However, editor Laurel Kendall addresses potential trepidations head-on in a sharp introduction that demonstrates in exemplary fashion how pairing seemingly disparate periods can allow them to shed

light on each other. In this fine anthology, scholars of colonial and contemporary Korea come together to “describe 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). Taking the work of such anthropologists as Daniel Miller and Arjun Appadurai as touchstones, the volume’s authors treat consumption both as an activity that creates social relations and as a site for constructions of modernity and tradition, its “shadow image,” as Kendall terms it. Collectively they sustain a conversation about the intertwining of consumption with markers of identity over the course of the last century in Korea. This framework proves fruitful in the unique context presented by Korea, where a fraught colonial history continues to produce reverberations in the exchange of cultural goods with Japan, and compressed modernization has seen South Korea move from repudiation of the past to self-conscious invocations of local tradition and desires to brand itself globally through national symbols.

As the book’s tripartite subtitle suggests, commodification, tourism, and performance resonate as themes throughout, and the volume is divided into four parts (“Modernity as Spectacle/Spectacular Korea”; “Korea as Itinerary”; “Korean Things”; “Korea Performed”), each of whose chapters engage in more focused internal dialogues in relation to the issues sketched above.

The first section sets examples of spectacular spaces in Korea side by side, one colonial, the other very much contemporary. In “Dining Out in the Land of Desire: Colonial Seoul and the Korean Culture of Consumption,” Katarzyna Cwiertka discusses department stores in 1930s and 1940s Seoul, which, as she convincingly shows, were a key venue for inculcating forms of modernity that came to be understood specifically in terms of consumption. Her portrait, though extremely informative, would benefit from additional evidence about the experiences of the shoppers themselves, for the rapid spread of the discourses of consumption described did not insure that reception was uniform. Consider, for example, the late author Park Wan-suh’s account of her first trip to the Hwashin Department Store restaurant in *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* While the writer’s mother needles her for wallowing in luxury, the author experiences the excursion differently, primarily recalling the length of the line and that people still cut to get in. Cwiertka’s ending remark that in the colonial period department store’s spectacular spaces we are seeing Lotte World in embryonic form, leads nicely to Timothy Tangherlini’s insightful “Shrinking Culture: Lotte World and the Logic of Miniaturization.” Tangherlini, in a simultaneously sympathetic, distanced, and witty reading that nicely echoes his subject matter, argues that visitors to Lotte World eagerly embrace the inauthentic. Indeed, as Tangherlini suggests, within this theme-park-cum-department store, where “normative visions of Korea’s rural past have a hard time competing with fantastic visions of no one’s future and really fast water rides” (59), the traditional fades in importance, becoming simply another consumable, albeit one that perhaps confers a modicum of legitimacy upon the mammoth complex.

“Korea as Itinerary” brings together three case studies that explore the evolving relationship of tourist activities in Korea to tradition and modernity. Hyung Il

Pai's "Travel Guides to the Empire: The Production of Tourist Images in Colonial Korea" considers the devices used to market Korea as a destination to visitors from Japan and Europe, which shared much with contemporary tropes developed in Europe for mainstream tourism. In contrast, Okpyo Moon and Robert Oppenheim each describe alternative modes of travel that grew in popularity in Korea in the latter years of the twentieth century. Moon focuses on the promotion of lineage houses in the Andong region as destinations for urban Koreans to experience the country's aristocratic Confucian heritage, and draws attention to the conflicts created as descendants commoditize family traditions for external consumption, with the attendant concerns about authenticity that this raises. Much as the overall volume brings together two contrasting yet complementary time frames, Oppenheim reads against each other two forms of recent tourism that have achieved popularity in Korea: *tapsa* (field study of indigenous monuments) and *paenang yohaeng* (backpack travel, particularly overseas). His discussion illuminates how each mode of travel, albeit in very different manners, manages to situate itself within a framework of consumerist nationalism.

Particularly strong is the section on "Korean Things" in which Kendall herself and Kyung-Koo Han explore the evolving significance of two "essential" Korean objects as they move from one domain to another. Kendall's chapter on "The *Changsŭng* Defanged: The Curious Recent History of a Korean Cultural Symbol" shows how these demonic totems have been invested with meaning as, quite literally, "signposts" of Korean identity, but in a journey that over the years has made them subject to an uneasy mixture of nationalist veneration and market imperatives, as they appear by turns as village guardians, museum artifacts, kitschy souvenirs, protest icons, and potent artistic resource. Kyung-Koo Han, in a pithy but rich discussion of "The 'Kimchi Wars' in Globalizing East Asia," focuses on two incidents that brought South Korea into conflict with its neighbors over a food that has become central to Korean self-definition: a dispute with Japan over the latter's entry into the international kimchi market, and public disquiet over the safety of imported Chinese kimchi in 2005. Han's analysis offers an outstanding example of "the extremely complex and sometimes arbitrary relationship between national identity and authenticity in cultural tradition" (164).

Debates about tradition versus authenticity are also central to the concluding section, "Korea Performed," which presents two case studies of contestations from the realm of the arts. In "Blurring Tradition and Modernity: The Impact of Japanese Colonization and Ch'oe Sŭng-Hŭi on Dance in South Korea Today," Judy van Zile discusses the polarizing figure of Ch'oe who, though a pioneer in dance on the Korean peninsula, was effectively erased from public memory in South Korea for having gone north until her reputation was resuscitated in the 1990s. Many aspects of her life and her motivations for what she did remain open to interpretation, and she continues to embody paradoxes: although much of her dance was criticized in her life for dubious authenticity as Korean performance, she is now regarded as a key source of much typically Korean dance. Finally, Keith Howard, well known in the field for his work on Korean music and its contemporary realizations, here focuses on "Kugak Fusion and the Politics of Korean Musical Consumption." In

this chapter his particular concern is the entirely unsurprising clash between purists and innovators over attempts to market traditional Korean music by introducing modern, often Western elements. As usual, Howard's presentation is detailed, well researched, and clear.

In sum, *Consuming Korean Tradition* is an engaging and welcome addition to the growing body of volumes exploring Korean society from diverse perspectives and in a variety of areas. The book will be of special interest to Koreanists, but ethnologists whose research relates to issues surrounding consumption, tradition, and modernity will also find this a useful work to have on their shelves.

Stephen Epstein
Victoria University, New Zealand