

Hateful and Heartwarming Bonds: The Senses as Strategy in the South Korean Family

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates women's strategizing around the senses in South Korea, tracing the ways that women move between sensory experience as an ideal and as an object to put into motion. I argue that the language of the sensory is invoked to stand up to state or societal pressures regarding family-making, child-rearing, and maternal subjectivity. The senses, affect, and emotions are employed to carve out space for individual and family well-being within neoliberal logics of productivity, but these new areas of sensory possibility are too often colonized by the same neoliberal logics. Utilizing multi-sited ethnography, media analysis, and an interdisciplinary feminist perspective, I followed the language of sensory development and sensory experience in practice through participant-observation at community spaces, and through ethnographic interviews. The main issues of this dissertation include: first, the ways that the extended family in South Korea is structured through visual culture and watching/being seen, resulting in ambivalence, particularly in the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Second, how touch and other senses are conceived of as avenues for emotional and psychological fortification for young children, and how this cultivation of sensory education is

extended not just to the mother-child bond, but also to national healing. Third, how sensory fields of sound (in the form of “K-pop” music) and taste (as part of global Korean cuisine) have become spaces of opportunity but also anxiety for teenagers, youth, and their parents. Finally, how “odor” operates metaphorically in constructing the South Korean nation and regions in general, and regionalism and “regional sentiment” in the Chōlla (southwest) in particular, with implications for restricted access to resources on the one hand but greater yōyu (space, leisure) for cultivating the senses on the other. While recognizing that the senses are easily appropriated by the state to promote efficient care of the self according to neoliberal logics, this dissertation investigates small spaces in which the various senses might open up possibilities for more egalitarian, communitarian living in contemporary South Korea.

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## INTRODUCTION

South Korea of the 2010s is experiencing a revolution of the senses, or more specifically, a revolution in cultivating the senses within family and community spaces, as a way of countering the sensory overload of contemporary urban South Korean life. Eyes are drawn to flashing advertisements on screens in all directions; bodies are pressed together in subway cars and on buses; blaring pop music from cell phone stores competes with jackhammers at construction sites for new apartment complexes; food gets spicier and spicier<sup>1</sup>; and smells still waft from impromptu garbage heaps on street corners, though they are much less common than just five years ago. Seoul, South Korea’s massive capital, is a city in between—parts of it, like the new Seoul Station, look futuristic, while in other parts South Korea’s dark twentieth century history lurks. Aesthetically this is difficult to describe, and an outsider coming to the country for the first time today, in 2015, may well not notice what lingers in the shadows. So much of what I know about South Korea is based around my own senses, however sensitive or faulty, cultivated (or numbed?) over ten years between 2005 and 2015. One summer the smell of garbage on the streets of Seoul was overwhelming, whereas the next I didn’t notice it—was it hotter the first summer than the second, I wondered? One summer I found my teeth chattering the second I stepped into an over-airconditioned café, whereas the next everyone seemed to be saving energy with more moderate temperatures. I went back to a restaurant in 2011 that I remembered enjoying in 2007, only to find the food intolerably salty and sweet. I was shocked when a bus

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<sup>1</sup> My interviewees commented frequently that the younger generation eats food that is too spicy, all spice and no flavor. They pointed to a new *insūt’ant’ū* (“instant”) food, *jjolmyōn*, a noodle with a particularly spicy red sauce, as well as fad foods like *pultak* (“fire chicken”), as evidence of this trend. While Korean food has long been spicier than the cuisine of neighboring countries, it was not the main point of pride until recently.

stop where I had waited at with a pushing and shoving crowd in 2005 became a bus stop with a neat line of people fiddling with their cell phones while waiting in 2008.

The desire to give my senses a new start contributed to my decision to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in a provincial city outside of Seoul, where I would not only have a break from the sensory overload of Seoul, but would get some distance from the sensory impressions of growing numbers of Western anthropologists and other ethnographers, who have mainly studied the greater Seoul metropolitan area. I found myself justifying this decision again and again, as Seoul is unquestionably the metaphorical heart of South Korea. I instead chose to live and work in the North Chōlla provincial capitol of Chōnju, a city of 650,000 some two hours and forty-five minutes’ drive to the southwest from Seoul. I selected Chōnju as a field location from a handful of mid-sized cities that I visited during pilot research in the summer of 2008; the criteria for my choice were that the city have a distinct historical and contemporary identity, as well as a supportive local university department with which to affiliate myself. Chōnju had both: unlike planned cities such as Ch’angwōn or “new cities” built quickly from scratch such as Sejong, Chōnju is an old city with a historic downtown core, and is also expanding at a faster rate than many provincial cities of similar size. Chōnbuk National University (CBNU) has a strong Archeology and Cultural Anthropology department (*kogo munhwa illyuhak*), which not only helped facilitate my connections, but exposed me to Korean academic approaches to the study of Korean regions. Although I was not studying Korean regions and regionalism as my primary research question, I wanted to take into consideration the effects of region and center-periphery dynamics in family life in South Korea.

Going into fieldwork, and based on interview questions tested and fine-tuned during the earlier period of pilot research, my intention was to better understand family dynamics among women from their thirties through fifties, a generation that has experienced drastic changes in family life due to changing norms, mores, and laws. I was interested in the ways that the demands of family life intersected with women’s desires for self-development and with their self-concept. I had been deeply influenced by Nancy Abelmann’s thought-provoking *Melodramas of Mobility* (2003), about the social trajectories of women in the generation above my interviewees, who at the time of Abelmann’s fieldwork were no longer directly involved in child-bearing or child-rearing decisions as their children were young adults.<sup>2</sup> Jesook Song’s *South Korea in the Debt Crisis* (2009) had just been published prior the start of my fieldwork, and in this and other earlier work she largely focused on youth labor; Abelmann’s more recent work has likewise focused on university students and youth in their twenties. While “kinship” had gone out of vogue as anthropology has moved away from its foundational structuralist orientation, I felt that there was still much to be learned about family-making in South Korea, and approached my fieldwork through the lens of “new kinship,” drawing on the work of feminist anthropologists Cho Han Haejoang and Kim Hyönmi, as well as Western feminist

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<sup>2</sup> Abelmann interviewed women in their late fifties through early sixties, who were “mature women with much of their child-rearing behind them, but women who were nonetheless still in the middle of things, with at least some children yet to be educated and married....these women came of age and matured over the period of South Korea’s most dizzyingly rapid post-Korean War social, political, economic, and cultural transformations, from the 1950s to the 1980s....this book aims to consider origins and destinations of lives in the context of mind-boggling transformation” (2003, 3). In contrast, the women I interviewed—like Abelmann, not a large number, but 14 women regularly over time (4 in their 50s, 5 in their 40s, and 5 in their 30s), with 12 women becoming the “core”—were all born after the Korean War, coming of age in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The pace of change may not have been quite as “mind-boggling” in the 1970s through 1990s as for the 1950s through 1970s, but the generation of women I interviewed were born into the social upheaval that marked long decades of democratization attempts, and the often “cruel optimism” (ala Lauren Berlant) of the promise of widespread prosperity for the nation.

scholars, including Marilyn Strathern, Ann Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant and Judith Butler. During earlier stays in South Korea I had been struck by the pervasiveness of South Korean family television dramas and the ways these and related visual images circulated, so I set out to interview women about family change in their own lives as well as media representations of family change and family relationships, drawing inspiration from Mankekar’s (1999) ethnography of Indian television and family.

I did have many illuminating conversations about family television dramas, but I had many fascinating conversations *not* about television dramas as well; thus, television dramas shed light on social issues in many chapters of this dissertation but are not integral to all chapters. As I analyzed fieldnotes and interviews after fieldwork, I instead began to notice that “sensory experience” was the key frame through which the women I interviewed both reflected on family changes in South Korea in their lifetimes, and strategized about family decisions. While no two women talked about “the senses” in exactly the same ways, the senses, sensory experience, and their connection to emotions and the overall affective landscape of South Korean society came up insistently in conversation and interaction in community spaces. Women spoke of the ways that sight structured their experience in the extended family: they both felt watched by mother-in-laws and themselves watched idealized family relationships on screen, as part of family television dramas. Women extended the importance of the sense of sight to understanding their children, stressing the importance of watching in order to know a child’s innate abilities; once identified, the child’s psychological development and capacity for ability should be nurtured through sensory development, particularly the “healing” sense of touch. For teenage children and

young adults just making their way in the world with parental guidance, sound and taste were identified as seductive arenas of possibility in light of their connection to a booming “K-pop” industry on the one hand, and the globalization of Korean cuisine on the other. Finally, my interviewees talked about “odor” in a metaphorical sense to describe discrimination against the Chōlla region and center-periphery imbalance, as well as the smell of corruption in politics. While sight and odor were discussed as timeless senses structuring family and nation, I was struck by the ways that touch, sound, and taste were connected to new possibilities for individuals and for the nation. These new possibilities were connected in narrative to South Korea’s rapid social changes: a place where “skinship” was frowned upon, pop music entertainers were looked down on, and tastes were limited by limited ingredients has been transformed to a landscape of exploding touches, sounds, and tastes in a few short decades.

As an anthropology graduate student, I had read extensively in my fields of interest—new kinship studies and gender, citizenship studies, Korean Studies, and visual culture and media studies—but had been trained to go “into the field” with my eyes open, not presuming to know what I would find. Dorinne Kondo’s musings on her entrance to “the field,” some thirty years before mine, resonated with me: “Thinking about ‘kinship’ and ‘economics’ in abstract, organizational, structural-functionalist terms, but drawn by the emphasis on cultural meanings in the writings of interpretivists like Clifford Geertz, I began with questions concerning the ways people thought about and enacted the meanings of ‘company’ and ‘family’ in their everyday lives” (1990, 9). Kondo goes on to explain that by the time she finished a year of fieldwork she knew that more important than the categories she had started out with was the idiom of

personhood and personal relationships through which her informants explained their lives. Personal relationships and personhood functioned dramatically differently in Japanese social life than in a Western context. Unlike Kondo, I had no attachment to structural-functionalist categories, though Geertz’s cultural interpretation and “thick description” have had staying power. My broad questions about “kinship” were focused on getting at the locally specific workings of the “new kinship” feminist scholars have proposed: how family relationships play out in the everyday rather than how they are structured in the abstract; how alternatives to the patriarchal family structure are implemented; how friends and other non-kin become family through prioritizing commitments rather than blood ties; how generational trauma impacts families and how it is alleviated. Likewise, my open-ended questions about representations of family in media, particularly television dramas, were meant to open up the way publicly circulating visual media culture might mediate reality. And yet, I am somewhat embarrassed to admit that it took me longer than Kondo to figure out that the “idiom” that was emerging through my interviews and participant-observation experiences was that of sensory experience, an amorphous field of experience that women used to make meaning of their own “self-development” activities, as well as to navigate the often difficult roles of daughter, wife, and mother. While men also might also bring up the importance of the senses in the activities of family making—and in my few interviews with husbands and sons, some did—women faced greater pressures to cultivate the senses of their children, and in turn, cultivate their own senses. Going through fieldnotes and interview transcripts, I was struck by the way the senses were used to navigate decisions involving extended family relations, child-rearing, schooling, and even

residence. In this dissertation I argue that women invoke the senses and emotions rooted in senses as a way of indirectly talking back to societal and state pressures regarding the social reproduction of their families, as well as their own maternal subjectivities. The sense of sight is given primacy, which guides my beginning the dissertation with a consideration of the extended family filtered through visual culture, but other senses of touch, sound, and taste were applied with greater or less frequency depending on the age of children and current stage of parenting. Thus, while each chapter employs one or more television dramas as a centering device, this is not a dissertation *about* television dramas, and is not exclusively about intersections of family and visual culture. Instead, television dramas open up sight as well as other senses to illuminate what is at work in family-making.

#### SOUTH KOREA AND THE SENSES

My sons were so sad when North Korea lost their match in the 2010) World Cup that they couldn't eat. They actually cried when they learned that the South Korean players eat chocolate and bananas before matches, and the North Korean players only have *myōngt'ae* (a dried fish). It used to be common in South Korea, but now it's so plain and common and untasty that people feed it to their dogs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My interviewee, Minju, was one of three women I interviewed most frequently over the course of my fieldwork. (I interviewed the “café women” twenty-six times in total, and these were typically sprawling three-hour conversations; I also just hung out with them, tutored their children, and went on errands with them. I interviewed Minju alone six times). I use pseudonyms and nicknames for all research participants mentioned in this dissertation. At first I planned to follow the convention of Korean-language ethnographies, as well as Laurel Kendall (1996) and So-Jin Park (2006), calling the women “so-and-so’s mother,” in recognition of their maternal subjectivity. But as I listened during fieldwork I found that women in their thirties and forties tended to call each other “so-and-so’s mother” in some cases, and simply by name (or name + *ōnni*, “elder sister”) in other cases. I brought up the question of what they would like to be called toward the end of fieldwork, and all agreed that they would like to be referred to by (pseudo)name, in acknowledgement of the work (paid or not) that they are doing outside of mothering.

A friend of mine sends their little kids to five or six *hagwŏn*. My kids’ father doesn’t want to send ours. Instead, he wants to move to the countryside, Jiri Mountain by Namwŏn. If we go to the countryside the kids cooperate together and don’t compete, and the teacher can watch over. . . . My husband has dreamed about going to the countryside since we were dating, and jokes once or twice a week—but he’s not joking—about moving to the foothills of Jiri Mountain. He wants to spend more time with the kids. Now he leaves around 7 a.m. and comes back around 7:30 p.m., and has just a little time to read to the kids. So we’re doing okay economically, but he wants time to sit inside when it rains and have *makkŏlli* together.<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation examines strategizing around the senses in South Korea, tracing the ways that women moved between sensory experience as an ideal and as an object to put into motion. In the two quotes above, we can see the dominant sense of taste structuring the two narratives: the tasty chocolate or bananas versus unappetizing dried fish; the pungent jug of *makkŏlli*. The senses of touch and texture are hiding there as well, with the chocolate and banana smooth and therefore sustaining, and the dried *myŏngt’ae* fish tough and difficult to swallow. Likewise, for Soyoung it is not solely about the taste of *makkŏlli*, but also the implied coziness of sitting inside a warm house and drinking *makkŏlli* while the rain comes down outside. The sense of sight is overlaid onto both these narrative excerpts as well: the listener can see, in their mind’s eye, the boys crying as they watch the North Korean soccer players in the televised soccer match. We imagine a cozy house in the lush green foothills of Jiri Mountain, a jug of *makkŏlli* and perhaps a *p’ajŏn* (green onion pancake) to go with it sitting on a low table. Finally, we might hear the rain outside the country house where *makkŏlli* is being enjoyed, and the incredulous tone of voice of the soccer match announcer describing the unexpected diets of the North Korean players, so traditionally Korean as to be foreign. These sensory dreams are powerful, but of

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<sup>4</sup> I interviewed Soyoung seventeen times in total, over the longest period of time (two years). We were sometimes joined by her twin sister, Hayoung.

course not always realized: to my knowledge, Soyoung has not moved to the countryside with her husband and two little girls, and her husband is still working long hours; Minju’s sons’ crying over North Korean players has not brought North and South Korea any closer. Yet the senses are potential fuel for change among the women I spoke with, always there to be harnessed if the will is strong enough or the conditions become ripe.

Through the stories of the women I interviewed, my observations and experiences as a participant in community sites, and my and others’ readings of media and other public discourse in South Korea, the overarching work of this dissertation is to link affect and the senses in the context of the family in South Korea. After structural-functionalist beginnings and the Culture and Personality School of the early twentieth-century, anthropology yielded to the interpretive turn of the 1970s and 1980s (Geertz), and then reflexive turn of the 1980s and 1990s (James Clifford, George Marcus, Ruth Behar, among others), before entering an “affective turn” in recent years. This affective turn is not limited to anthropology, and in fact was taken up earlier in literary and cultural studies (by Lauren Berlant, Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed). Several anthropologists who are considered anthropologists of affect today did earlier work on embodiment and the senses, clear precursors to the treatment of affect in anthropological research (Joseph Alter, Thomas Csordas, Catherine Lutz). In a review essay in *Cultural Anthropology* “affect” is described as “felt bodily intensity that is...different than emotion and

language.”<sup>5</sup> Teresa Kuan recalls Massumi’s definition of affect as “the body’s power to affect and its capacity to be affected,” writing:

A body is best defined by its capacity to be affected—by its responsiveness to, say, the sensation of touch and movement, converted, by way of an accumulation of experience, into a muscular memory, which is then externalized into a habit, or a skill. What Massumi does not mention between these pages is how the capacity to be affected might be mobilized into a power to affect in a given historical context. (Kuan 2015, 191)

Kuan writes of *qinggan jiaoyu* (sensory education 情感教育) as a response to sweeping implementation of *suzhi jiaoyu* (quality education 素质) in China, describing affect in this context as a kind of circulating vitality. She describes a teacher she encountered during her own fieldwork as seeing her mission as “ ‘molding character’ by way of stimulating the seven sensory channels,” which Kuan calls “affect theory applied” (2015, 197). This resonates with my discussions of touch and healing through the senses (in chapter 2). Cultivation of particular senses were seen as being more or less useful, not to mention possible, at different stages of childhood and youth.

I understand the relationship between affect and the senses thusly: affect is a publicly circulating vitality, either positive or negative, and the senses are what allow an affective field or landscape to form. Bodies affect and are affected by all five senses, but Paul Stoller, writing at a nascent moment of an anthropology of the senses in the late 1980s, encourages anthropologists who aim to write “tasteful ethnography” to be more attentive to taste, touch, and smell, instead of

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<sup>5</sup> McGrail, Davie-Kessler, and Guffin (2013). [http://www.culanth.org/curated\\_collections/16-affect-embodiment-and-sense-perception](http://www.culanth.org/curated_collections/16-affect-embodiment-and-sense-perception)

“the rarefied Hegelian senses of sight and sound” (1989, 29). Stoller continues “. . . seemingly insignificant incidents as being served bad sauce become as important as sitting with a nameless informant and recording genealogies—data—that eventually become components in a system of kinship.” And yet sight and vision, as well as sound and hearing, have been sublimated to smell, taste and touch in affect studies, as the feminist goals of much of affect studies have countered the “rarefied Hegelian senses of sight and sound” that Stoller and others identified. This dissertation considers all five senses while acknowledging that the entry to all five senses was sight, as the project began as a “visual anthropology” project and discussions of sound or taste are combined with analysis of television dramas about music or food. While agreeing with Saraswati that “affect functions as an apparatus of power that does the work of naturalizing various social hierarchies including race, gender, and skin color hierarchies, in a transnational context” (2013, 4), I also contend that affective fields, and the senses and emotions that enable them, are unstable and in flux. The unstable nature of affect and “emotion as an ideological practice” (Lutz 1988, 4) allows for manipulations of social hierarchies and talking back to power. In its attention to an affective landscape in South Korea in a particular place (Chŏnju) and a particular time (the 2010s), this dissertation grapples with many of the “ten components of corporeality” that Csordas identifies: “bodily form, sensory experience, movement or motility, orientation, capacity, gender, metabolism/physiology, copresence, temporality, and affect” (1993). The women I spent my days with in Chŏnju talked about their and their children’s bodies, sensory development, routes and blockages for success and vitality, social and personal tendencies and potential, gender inequality, food and health, and mothering. Sensory experience

and awareness permeated all of these discussions, and presented possibilities for broader affective social shifts. In Ahmed’s words, “Love becomes an intimacy with what the other likes and is given on the condition that such likes do not take us outside a shared horizon. The family provides a shared horizon in which objects circulate, accumulating positive affective value” (2010, 38). As long as sensory cravings for touch, sounds, and tastes do not threaten the family’s shared horizon—and sometimes they do—they may strengthen family intimacy while undermining neoliberal state priorities.

#### THE ETHICS OF ENGLISH AND MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

The title of the dissertation, *Hateful and Heartwarming Bonds: The Senses as Strategy in the South Korean Family*, references affective labor and obligation within the family. “Hateful bonds, heartwarming bonds” is a translation of the Korean expression *miun chǒng koun chǒng*, with *chǒng* operating as a difficult-to-translate word referring to Korean cultural psychology, a kind of Korean equivalent, though not in meaning, of the Japanese expression *amae*.<sup>6</sup> *Chǒng* has been translated as “attachment,” and is often paired with the word *han* (resentment) to describe the Korean national psyche.<sup>7</sup> *Chǒng* might also be translated simply as “affect,” in its dynamic

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<sup>6</sup> See Takeo Doi, *The anatomy of dependence*. Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International, 1973.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the discussion of *han* in works dealing with the *minjung* movement (Armstrong 2002, Shin and Chang 2011, Namhee Lee 2007, Sohl Lee 2012), C. Fred Alford has examined the *han/chǒng* binary in a psychocultural context, and Roy Richard Grinker examines the binary in the context of North/South division, national trauma, and geopolitics. Both *chǒng* and *han* have two variants: *wǒnhan* is “revenge or justice-transformation oriented,” and *chǒnghān* “describes sorrow, distress, and unresolved sentiment, and is self-compliance oriented. . . . a *han* of passive acceptance and resignation” (Kim-Yoon and Williams 2015, 41). The two varieties of *chǒng*, as mentioned above, are *miun chǒng* (hateful) and *koun chǒng* (beautiful/heartwarming). Since *chǒng*, unlike *han*, directly refers to relationships, it can be further subdivided into *mojǒng* (motherly *chǒng*) or

connectivity; *miun chǒng* (hateful bonds/attachments) is the predicament of having become enmeshed in someone’s life but hating them, and so having a perverse attachment, whereas *koun chǒng* (which I have translated as “heartwarming,” but is more conventionally translated as “beautiful” attachment) resonates more with the Euro-American term “bond,” as a purely positive connection. This phrase came up often in interviews, and described the affective labor and obligation owed to parents-in-law, but also husbands and even children. The senses were used strategically to mitigate the tyrannical variant of *chǒng*, both within and outside the family. Adding complexity to the concept of *chǒng* is the fact that one can feel *miun chǒng* or *koun chǒng* to the same person at different times, or even simultaneously, illustrating Peletz’s (2001) notion of ambivalence as a key concept in the “structures of feeling” of family life. My analysis of interviews and fieldnotes illustrate the senses being discussed as at times describing familial affect, as mediating familial affect at other times, and at still other times as standing up to familial affect or nation-state affects.

My work with women’s narratives throughout this dissertation draws on a long-standing focus on life history and interviews in ethnography. Ethical unease over women from academia interviewing other women has been approached by interdisciplinary discussions of interview methods, as well as the mechanism of consent forms under the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After the first meeting, my interview questions were open-ended and while I began each individual or group interview with a follow-up from the last interview or a general statement about a social or family issue I was particularly interested in (perhaps drawn from a headline that

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*bujǒng* (fatherly *chǒng*), *chǒng* between siblings, *chǒng* between husbands and wives, *ujǒng* (*chǒng* between friends), and *aejǒng* (*chǒng* between lovers). I will discuss *chǒng* and *han* more in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

week or an impending family holiday), I did not guide interviews in a particular direction. After the first few interviews most of the women made a self-deprecating remark such as, “I don’t know if my idle talk will be useful for your research.” Except for a few interviewees who had an especially self-deprecating self-presentation and were still making these kinds of remarks after we had been meeting for two years, I learned to judge the development of rapport with most women I interviewed by the gradual diminishing of these comments. I had written in my consent forms the line, “You will not gain anything directly from this research, but may find it interesting and personally useful to talk about family issues as part of this research.” However, most of the women seemed not to believe that anything would emerge that would be useful for me or for them, and said that they were more accustomed to research that took the form of direct, to-the-point survey questions. My offer to trade English conversation lessons/time for themselves or their children generated more interest, a topic I address a bit later in the introduction. It is noteworthy that few women were enthusiastic about participating in the research, making vague statements like “Well, I suppose if it’s useful to you,” and expressing more enthusiasm in “exposing their children to a foreigner.” Some women approached all the topics with equal openness when interviewing began, while others were interested *only* in talking about media about family and not their own families, and others interested *only* in talking about their own families and not media. I felt somewhat validated that several of the women said towards the end of my fieldwork that the weekly or biweekly interviews *had* been useful to them in ways they did not expect, not quite in a therapeutic sense, but in simply having a dedicated time and space to talk about family conflicts, concerns, and dreams. Minsook, who I interviewed in a group with

two of her friends most weeks, also said, “I hope you don’t take offense, but it was actually interesting to me to have to explain words and concepts to you, since in some cases it made me question and define concepts for myself.”

I interviewed and “hung out” with women in their thirties through fifties in the provincial city of Chōnju, engaging in conversations about the affect and knowledge involved in building and maintaining a family. While I interviewed many people once or twice who are not included in the pages of this dissertation, in the end a core group of twelve women emerged, with four in their thirties, four in their forties, and four in their fifties. I also conducted participant-observation in three core sites to observe women’s “self-development” practices and more everyday, spontaneous discussions of family practices; a fourth, one-off fieldsite, a preschool parent group, also features in chapter 2. The three core sites were a neighborhood community center (in which I specifically attended a Japanese conversation class, in addition to observing overall comings-and-goings of the center), a neighborhood library film appreciation club, and a department store mother-baby class. For the community center class and film club (2010-2011) as well as the mother-baby class (2011-2012) I was a regular, paying class member. I also held group and individual interviews with some members of the two neighborhood (center and library) classes. As a graduate student I was not able to compensate my interviewees monetarily (and indeed I do not believe that would have been ideal even if I had had the means), so I offered an hour of English conversation tutoring for my interviewees or their children for every hour of interviewing. Although this could get cumbersome and tricky to calculate, most women took me up on this trade to one extent or another: women in their forties or fifties with school-age

children generally had me meet their children for lessons at their homes (or in one interviewee’s case, in the bakery-café where she worked), and women in their thirties with younger children either had me play with their children “in English” or work with they themselves on English required for possible future job interviews or tests. In so doing, I felt that I was not just taking my interviewees’ stories without giving something back to them, but adding the role of “teacher” (as many of the interviewees called me) on top of my role of “student researcher” led to re-negotiations of fieldwork ethics and narrative research.

There is a lot of uncertainty and anxiety packed into selecting a field site(s), selecting research participants, and the ethics of fieldwork. This project is imminently local, even as I make connections with other places experiencing similar changes to family due to transnational processes. And yet, even though this is not a transnational project, it is a multi-sited ethnography, which led to a feeling of slipperiness at times. Even though two of the sites I visited were a short walking distance from one another, they were still distinct places with distinct social worlds. Moreover, while someone working on discourse and practices around a particular kind of surgery, for example, might conduct ethnography at two different hospitals, I was looking at three different sites of identity-production, where women would be thinking through the public space (of the site itself), themselves via their own actions in the space, and the families they would go back to once the class was over. Another difficulty in constructing a coherent narrative was posed by the fact that I recruited some of my core group of interviewees from these community classes, but the majority were introduced to me by Chõnbuk University professors and graduate students, and then “snowballed out” from there. However, many of my interviewees who I met

via introductions also attended language or culture classes at a community center, library, university outreach program, or department store “cultural center,” and many spoke to being heavily invested in Chǒnju’s “culture industry,” as that, rather than industry in a traditional sense, is “what makes Chǒnju Chǒnju-like.” My interviewees tended to operate in the same middle-class circles in Chǒnju (though there is a great range to “middle-class”), and my two interviewees who did not engage in cultural activities (the “gym *ajumma*” and Shin) spent an equivalent amount of time attending church, with the churches also frequently engaging in community building and cultural outreach activities.

When I began fieldwork in March 2010, I was operating under the incorrect assumption that my offer of English in exchange for interviews would enable me to recruit across a wide class spectrum. I figured that middle-class women would be more likely to have me tutor their children as a kind of value-added “cultural experience” for them, as they would already be sending their children to English *hagwǒn* (after-school academies). Moreover, I surmised (quite correctly) that most children of the more upper-middle class women would not only be learning English at one of the many multi-purpose *hagwǒn* across the city, but would be attending dedicated English (literally, “English specialty,” or *yǒngǒ chǒnmun*) *hagwǒn*, staffed by “native speaker teachers” (*wǒnǒmin kangsa*). Therefore, these children would already have exposure to “foreigners,” and I would be a kind of extra supplement in terms of English education. Families on the lower end of middle class did not send their children to *yǒngǒ chǒnmun hagwǒn*, instead sending them to the one-stop *hagwǒn* where they could learn English, math, and Korean

grammar in quick succession, all from Korean teachers.<sup>8</sup> But I learned during the course of fieldwork that plenty of upper-middle class families selectively pulled children out of *hagwŏn*, as was the case for Insook, who realized that high English scores were likely unattainable for her daughter and that she would be better off investing that money elsewhere. There was plenty of questioning around whether *hagwŏn*, even glossy *chŏnmun hagwŏn*, were worth the expense. But as Park So-jin (2006) has pointed out, there has been much anxiety over pulling children out of *hagwŏn* to save money or reduce children’s stress, due to the widespread observation that schools are now just holding-pens for children until afternoon *hagwŏn* time, with children sleeping, goofing off, or doing their *hagwŏn* worksheets in class. However, mistrust over the

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<sup>8</sup> There was a clear hierarchy in English *hagwŏn* that emerged in interviews—not only for students in terms of familial social class, but also in terms of Korean English teachers. One of my interviewees, Soyoung, began working part-time at a *yŏngŏ chŏnmun hagwŏn* toward the end of the fieldwork period, having stayed home with two young children for a few years. (Her previous work before children had been in an administrative role in the national electric company where her husband was employed). This was Soyoung’s first job teaching English, and she was excited by the opportunity, as English had always been a passionate hobby. However, the pay was low. The children who paid the most had the most exposure per week to the native English speaking teacher, and some children’s families paid considerably less per month to have lessons exclusively with her (the Korean teacher with accented English). The reasons these children’s parents gave was not feeling like the exposure to native English was worth it yet, or that their children were afraid of foreigners, etc. Soyoung’s twin sister had worked part-time in a one-stop *hagwŏn*, where she was paid less than Soyoung; in turn, Soyoung was paid less per month than the “native speaker teachers” (who generally had significantly less knowledge than she did of English grammar). Most (though certainly not all) “native English teachers” in Korea in the highly unregulated private *hagwŏn* system are recent college graduates hired on the basis of their “authentic American/British accents,” and increasingly, good looks (as photos are required as part of the application process). Most of these “native speakers” only stay in Korea for a few years, and do not acquire Korean language skills. Soyoung reported enjoying the company of some of these “native speakers,” but described the tensions in a story that sounded all-too-familiar to me: “I like the female teacher, and she is actually trained as a teacher back in her home country. But the cultural differences in the classroom stress her out, and she can’t communicate in Korean, and when I translate for her (with my poor English) that leads to tensions between us somehow, too. She is having more and more conflicts with the director and I worry that she’ll leave soon. The male native speaker teacher is easy-going and the kids like him, but he has no teaching experience (and also no Korean, of course) so he needs so much help in the classroom. I understand their predicament and sympathize...but I don’t get any extra compensation for doing all this mediating, of course.” The going rate for a *hagwŏn* “native speaker teacher” is 2.2 million *wŏn* per month, with higher pay up to 2.4 or 2.5 with more experience in-country (this is just over \$2,000 US dollars to \$2,300 by May 2015 exchange rates). Soyoung reported her own salary as 1.8 million *wŏn* or \$1,600 for work that averaged 30-35 hours a week, and this is without the perk of subsidized housing that foreign teachers get. Her salary was much better than the 800,000 *wŏn* that is minimum wage, and has led to the term for underemployed youth “*80manwŏn sedae*,” or “800,000 *wŏn* generation”; but it still reflects the competition in the *hagwŏn* industry and a fetishization of “authentic English.”

value of *hagwŏn* seemed to be approaching the same level of mistrust of public school education among my interviewees in 2010-2012, and I explore emerging alternatives and coping mechanisms around education in South Korea in chapter 3.

As I observed differences in English *hagwŏn* attendance and changing attitudes toward schooling among my middle class interviewees from different walks of life and widely divergent levels of economic security, I continued trying to recruit interviewees who self-identified as “working class” around the city, and my fruitless efforts eventually led me to limit my study to a broadly defined middle class. Initially I invested time in making attractive recruitment posters explaining my research goals and the offer of English conversation lessons, complete with tear-tabs at the bottom to facilitate contact by phone or e-mail. I put these posters up on the bulletin boards on each floor of my own apartment complex, knowing that my own apartment “village” (*ch'on*) leaned more toward working class than middle class, as the units were mainly *imdae apat'ũ* (rental apartments), as opposed to nicer apartments that were only available to buy outright (similar to the American condominium system) or to put down a large deposit (called *ch'ŏnse*) on. I also put recruitment posters in nearby apartments that seemed to occupy a similar position in the Chŏnju real estate hierarchy. In my own apartment *ch'on*, I was frustrated to find that the posters were torn down again and again, and when I approached the apartment office to ask why, the maintenance man and apartment ladies' association leader in the office guessed that other apartment residents or neighborhood residents who made the rounds in the apartments feared that I would hurt their business. The maintenance man said, “Since this isn't Sŏsindong [one of Chŏnju's nicer neighborhoods] plenty of people just send their kids once a week to a

local *hagwŏn* run by a friend, or a ‘study room’ (*kongbubang*). They don’t want your free English to take their livelihood.” In contrast, in Sŏsindong and other more well-heeled neighborhoods, my “supplemental English” was no threat. This made sense to me, but I was even more frustrated to find that even in places where the posters had stayed up, people took my name and contact information and then never contacted me.

The potential reasons for this conundrum were revealed to me when my Chŏnbuk University Anthropology mentor, Hanhee Hahm, accompanied me on a first-time meeting with the cleaning lady for her apartment complex, in order to recruit her as a research participant. This cleaning lady knew that Professor Hahm had many foreign contacts, and had told her on more than one occasion that she would love to meet someone who could give her daughter advice on getting into university, as the entrance exam heavily weighs English ability, and once a student is admitted to university, English is absolutely *p’ilsu* (required) to fully succeed. Professor Hahm explained that I was looking for interviewees, and would do what I could to help her daughter in exchange for hearing her stories. But once we met up in her apartment the cleaning lady was visibly uncomfortable in my presence, and said at several points in a soft voice, “I don’t think I have anything to say that will be useful to you.” The meeting came to nothing, and afterwards Professor Hahm also seemed frustrated, but said wisely, “Not only does she not see how she will fit into your research on family ideals as a non-middle class person, she also isn’t sure how you will be useful to her in tangible ways.” Professor Hahm suggested that I meet working-class mothers with younger children who might see my immediate cultural and linguistic value to their children, but the few meetings I had also ended awkwardly. I would play with the children for a

while before their mother would say something along the lines of, “They really don’t know English. They don’t go to *hagwŏn*, they have no *pat’ang* (foundation) at all...” The supplemental value of my English as a “native speaker” made sense to my middle-class interviewees, to one extent or another, whereas those few women I met of the working class would cancel meetings at the last minute and then never contact me again, saying “I have nothing to say” and “My child is not ready, they don’t know how to relate to ‘native speakers’ (*wŏnŏmin*)” These children lacked the social capital to have developed even the most basic level of English ability deemed acceptable by middle-class society. My scheme of “English-for-interviews” forced me to think of research ethics and class on many occasions, and while the system worked very well in getting to know some families and spend time in their homes, it illuminated for me anew the fraught nature of English acquisition in South Korea, with English now a requirement for social mobility, and the English education industry acting as gatekeepers in order to make a profit. I do believe that using English as compensation was more useful than not, as I got to know children of interviewees, apartment layouts, and neighborhood geographies through tutoring in homes. However, my role as “tutor” and not just researcher leads me to the issue of “studying up.”

Since Laura Nader (1972) coined the expression “studying up” to refer to anthropological research on informants who possess more social capital or privilege than the researcher themselves, anthropologists have increasingly turned attentions to sites such as corporations (for the Korean case, see Janelli and Janelli 1993) and finance (Ho 2009), and the subdiscipline of medical anthropology has looked at hospital hierarchies in addition to more traditional ethnographic subjects of cancer patients or veterans with PTSD in military hospitals. “Studying

up” sheds light on the workings of power locally and transnationally, stretches ethnographic methods, and can provide a more complete picture of society. The women I interviewed and spent time with for this dissertation project spanned the full spectrum of “middle class,” and just as roughly half of my interviewees were working (while the other half were stay-at-home mothers), I calculated that conveniently, roughly half of my interviewees occupied a class position solidly higher than my own. Sitting in the children’s bedrooms or living rooms of some of my interviewees, I was sometimes struck with an odd feeling as I pulled worksheets from my bag and bowed my head with a smile to accept a beautifully-arranged plate of fruit and a cup of tea. Although no money was changing hands, I had the feeling of being in an awkward position in between guest, professional, friend, and status symbol. Although my banter before and after lessons with the women I had interviewed for months made my visits more comfortable, I felt uneasy at times under the watchful eyes of security guards at the entrances to apartment towers, and I wondered if they wondered if I was an opportunistic foreigner raking in money by tutoring illegally. One day when I was walking with Minsook and Insook’s daughters to grab some ice cream after a lesson in Insook’s apartment, the storekeeper asked, suspiciously and a bit enviously, if I was one of their live-in English tutors. While I was struck often by my relative power vis-à-vis lower middle-class interviewees, with upper middle-class interviewees I was aware of my cultural capital but just as aware of my lack of social and economic capital. With lower middle-class interviewees I benefited from critiques of idealized upper-middle class South Korean society, and with upper-middle class interviewees I often benefited from bold, direct

challenges to my research questions and conceptualizations. This resonates with Leem, Ha, and Lee’s (2013) discussion of the productive value of natives’ “objections” when studying up.

#### FEMINIST METHODOLOGY: FIELDWORK, MEDIA, AND AREA STUDIES

In the field, and later while transcribing and coding recorded interviews, I have been inspired by Wendy Luttrell’s model of “good enough” methods (2005). This model encourages researchers to “think about their research decisions in terms of what is lost and what is gained, rather than what might be ideal” (244). Luttrell interviewed American working-class women about their schooling and mothering experiences, and realized that the interviews were taking the form of life stories, as “the life story is a taken-for-granted interpretive device, a discursive category furnished by American culture—the idea that we have a life story to exchange with others” (quoting Linde 1993). Luttrell found that the “subjects of my research held their own notions of what my project was about and what they wanted from it” and “the extent to which respondents actively shape the research process...cannot be underestimated” (2005, 247). Luttrell felt that she should hold the realist (material conditions) and reflexive (interpretations of ethnographic encounter) in tension, and so devised a three-step coding procedure in which she first looked for an overall point in the stories, next looked for all passages relating closely to her research topic of school and educational views and values, and finally in her last reading looked for patterns across the stories. This eventually led her to “psychoanalytic listening to women’s narratives” (263), which led her to an unexpected connection between schooling and mothering, as well as a conviction in “good enough” methods as feminist ethnographers.

In my research with Korean women I aim to be sensitive to silences (Visweswaran 1994), and also to be aware of any social scripts for telling narrative, as Luttrell suggests. My interviewees did not uniformly shift into the “life story” genre, though some did; in general their discussions of family were contextualized by family histories, such as the life stories of their mothers, or comparisons with close friends who were in similar or different circumstances than their own. An area of silence that more than one interviewee had in common was the presence of family members who had escaped from what is now North Korea, or who remained in North Korea—this did not arise as complete silence, as discourse about the North has opened up a great deal, but rather as unease about unknowables and family history of suppression. Indeed, due to its unique geopolitical position vis-à-vis North Korea, its growing multiculturalism, and its citizens’ overall strong convictions regarding equality despite living with growing inequality (see Song 2009), South Korea is a potentially fertile ground for differential consciousness, “a location wherein the aims of feminism, race, ethnicity, sex, and marginality studies, and historical, aesthetic, and global studies can crosscut and join together in new relations through the recognition of a shared theory and method of oppositional consciousness” (Sandoval 2000, 63).<sup>9</sup> For the Japanese context, Tomiko Yoda (2006) has critiqued the myth of Japan as a “maternal society,” which mystifies Japan’s place within global capitalism, and South Korea similarly obscures its relationship to global capital with its self-conceptualization as a “family-oriented” society. South Korean feminist ethnographers and activists have led the way forward for broader

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<sup>9</sup> The democratic transition began in South Korea only in the late 1980s, after decades of “democracy” in name only. Broad surveys have shown that equality is a strong ideal, and a majority of the population clings to programs such as universal healthcare and government-funded public education. However, lack of regulation, market forces and competition threaten to derail the gains in universal public education with a ramping-up private education (*sagyoyuk*) industry.

awareness of social inequality, beginning with gender inequality in narrow terms but leading to a reframing of masculinity (Moon 2002, 2005) and advocacy over multicultural families (*tamunhwa kajöng*) (Jun 2011).<sup>10</sup> My methodological considerations in this work of analyzing narrative include reflection on my position as a white, middle class, educated American, not to mention a “supplementary English tutor” in some cases, and what this means for my interviewees in telling their stories. Additionally, I reflect a commitment throughout to privileging my interviewees’ voices first, Korean feminist theorist and ethnographer voices second, and Western theorists’ voices last. This means looking for ways that my interviewees and fellow participant-observers theorize their own experiences in many cases, and making sure that Western theory or even ethnography that may not apply fully to the situation at hand is not deployed unreflexively.

I also work towards a feminist approach to media discourse in the dissertation. I acknowledge long-standing concerns over the diminished role of the audience in narrative cinema or television, and share concerns that “cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Mulvey 1989, 25). However, I also observed how the women I interviewed took up alternate readings of television drama plots, focused on marginal story lines or characters, and even on occasion wrote in via the broadcasting networks’ message boards to urge a plot or character development shift, something entirely possible given the fact that the majority of Korean television dramas are not filmed in

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<sup>10</sup> Multicultural families (*tamunhwa kajöng*) refer to a family with children with one Korean parent and one foreign parent. The most common configuration is a Korean countryside resident groom who enters into an arranged marriage with a younger foreign bride from China, Vietnam, or elsewhere in Asia. This demographic trend is also found in Japan and Taiwan. I discuss multicultural families and migrant brides in chapter 3 in some detail—though only in relation to my broader project, as I was not interviewing migrant brides.

advance. I analyze television dramas and related media featuring the sensory worlds of Korean family life, following discussions about the programs in interviews during fieldwork. I follow Rey Chow’s notion that “new ethnography” should deal with “the visuality that once defined the ‘object’ status of the ethnographized culture and that now becomes a predominant aspect of that culture’s self-representation” (1995, 180). Chow chiefly discusses “film as ethnography, “ and though her call for a deprofessionalization of anthropology and ethnography as ‘intellectual disciplines’” (181) alarmed many anthropologists (even those who did find at least certain aspects of their discipline objectifying), the shift to anthropology as a “theory of translation” rather than anthropology as categorization and classification has found resonance in the work of feminist anthropologists from the 1990s onwards (Behar 1993, among others). Even anthropologists who did not do the ethnographic film/documentary making most associated with visual anthropology, or who did not engage “film as ethnography,” began melding discourse analysis and other visual methods with more conventional ethnographic methods as television, the internet, smartphones, and advertising occupied ever more central and constant positions in people’s lives around the globe (see Abelman 2003, Abu-Lughod 2005, Fedorenko 2014, Friedman 2006, Lukacs 2010 and 2013, Mankekar 1999, Rofel 2007). In this project, my three field sites each marketed their offering of different kinds of knowledge for the women who enrolled in classes and clubs: the community center language classes presented “tools,” the film club advertised an opportunity to reflect and “frame” one’s life experiences through film screenings and discussion, and the mother-baby class offered the “community” of other parents engaged in the intensive experience of early parenting. I did not engage with television dramas

ethnographically: that is, I did not conduct participant-observation at a drama fan club or on the set of weekend family television dramas. Unlike film screenings, television viewership *tends* to be less public, and is also frequently less focused, with viewers drifting in and out of the room, tuning in and out of the program (Ang 1985, Mankekar 1999). While I do in some cases connect the “framing” of film with some of the ways some of my interviewees reflected on their lives through television dramas, I am inclined to treat television dramas as more a part of the general social landscape that becomes public discourse.

Stories viewed on the small screen can become “unconscious optics” (Benjamin 1969), opening up a space that film can open still further. However, the audiences for television and film are not necessarily the same, and viewers who may be scared away by a film’s “agenda” may accept the more subtle message of a drawn-out television series, getting close to the characters over time. As an example, one of my interviewees in her fifties (Shin), a conservative Christian, roundly condemned the few feature films with homosexual themes making the rounds in theatres and film festivals, but watched a television drama featuring a gay male romance (“Life is Beautiful,” 2010, discussed in chapter 1). She, like many other viewers, boycotted the show when the romance deepened and the show’s creators made no moves to take a negative stance on homosexuality, but she resumed watching the show a few weeks later. First she justified herself by saying that she watched the other storylines but tuned out for the gay couple’s scenes, but later confessed that she was sometimes drawn in by the storyline of the gay couple as well, partly because they were portrayed as such “good sons” despite their transgression (see Gitzen 2014). These “unconscious optics” are perhaps not as revolutionary as Benjamin had

hoped for, but cannot be entirely meaningless, either. Feminist anthropologist Haejoang Cho has also written on the popularity of Korean television dramas and the “Korean Wave” (*Hallyu*) of Korean pop culture products. She does not overestimate the revolutionary potential of Korean television dramas, but sees potential for consumption-in-common advancing perceptions or practice where a public realm has not yet been robustly constructed, a space in which “middle-class women in the Asian region are engaging in historical reflection through watching dramas” (2005, 178). This also applies in the domestic Korean context, as Korean viewers engage with issues of gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality in small ways over the life of a program.

Finally, in addition to working to achieve balance between women’s narratives and media discourse in this dissertation, I also ask what outlining a shifting sensory landscape contributes toward understandings of gender in South Korea, and what “the sensory” means for Korea Studies more broadly. Herschatter’s concept of dismantling “the house of gender”—meaning, in her case, thinking of gender as a structure such as “gender and the Chinese revolution”—may be useful here. She writes that our task in expanding possibilities for analyses of gender is to attend to “gender not as a structure, but rather as a fractured, unpredictable, and expansive terrain” (2012, 877). “Here gender retains a radical potential, one that scholars have not yet adequately deployed, to ask about where big political projects intersect, or don’t with changes in affect, desire, senses of self, and the smaller projects of everyday life” (878). In Korea Studies, “big” projects involving gender have included “comfort women” under Japanese colonialism, “factory girls” (*kongsuni*) during the industrialization period and gendered aspects of subsequent labor movements, and in recent years, demographic issues such as low birthrate, divorce, and aging. It

is my hope that this dissertation on the senses, affect, gender, family, and media in South Korea contributes to a strong body of recent literature in Korea Studies that takes the everyday seriously, engaging with topics that include militarism, real estate, the body under stress and illness, and food and farming.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is anchored in an anthropology and cultural studies of the senses, emotions, and affect; new kinship studies; and an anthropology of media. I begin with the dominant sense of sight, showing how people watch and are watched within the extended family in South Korea. I then move to the more affectively-situated sense of touch in chapter 2, examining its intersection with other senses in the realm of “sensory education.” In chapter 3 I move back out to the dominant sense of sound, linking fandom, the education system, and the pop music industry. Chapter 4 moves from the “three types” introduced in chapter 3 to three possibilities for manifestations of taste in young adulthood. Finally, I explore smell metaphorically through tracing Chŏnju and the Chŏlla region’s histories of discrimination, oppression, and protest up to the advent of the “culture industries” in Chŏnju in more recent years.

In chapter 1, “Family Looks Beautiful: The Affective Weight of Mothers-in-law in Family Talk in South Korea,” I introduce common issues in the South Korean extended family that my interviewees identified, using the lens of sight to discuss watchfulness in the family and the figure of the ever-watching mother-in-law. I open the chapter with a description and analysis of the family television drama *Life is Beautiful* (*Insaeng ūn Arūmdawŏ*, SBS 2010), a popular

program that was praised for its complex presentation of a myriad of family issues and taboos, even as conservative groups attacked it for its positive portrayal of a gay male relationship. I utilize theoretical frameworks of media subjectivity and new kinship theory to investigate the ways that family formulations are reflected on through media representations of family, and the ways that affective labor in the family resonates in ambivalent relationships. Amidst these broader theoretical frameworks I explore sight and screen cultures, as well as Korean cultural psychology concepts associated with affect and ambivalence. I introduce the twelve women who constitute the core of this project, and also the community center space where I most frequently observed reflections on feelings of ambivalence in the family and complaints about mothers-in-law.

Through a reading of the television drama as well as statements interviewees made about and around the drama, chapter 1 argues that the historically-fraught relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law remains emotionally loaded despite South Korea’s recent shift to nuclear family living structures, and the relationship gains affective force through the circulation of public discourses about this relationship, particularly visually-mediated discourses. Moreover, I suggest that the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship has such powerful emotional resonance that it can stand in for or obscure other difficult family relationships, in effect limiting attempts to suggest alternatives to the patriarchal family. However, this particular drama, as well as others also by writer Kim Su-hyŏn, points to alternative possibilities for working through complex family relationships even with the patriarchal family still in place.

My interviewees identified the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (hereafter MIL-DIL) relationship as their key point of interest even while devoting much more discussion time to the problems of other characters, including those of the gay eldest son and his boyfriend. The MIL-DIL relationship was more often alluded to or mentioned in passing, acting as a backdrop to all other relationships and conflicts. I identify the ideal of the “goodness” of the mother-child bond (Gitzen 2014, Yun 2001) and juxtaposition of the genre of evil mother-in-law stories as the chief reason for this “invisible backdrop.” Striving for goodness on the one hand, while expecting and attempting to avoid conflict on the other, produces an especially heavy affective labor burden for women tasked with caring for the traditional multi-generational family (*tae kajöök*).

Chapter 2, “Pushing Back Against South Korean National Birthrate Crisis Discourse Through ‘Sensory Experience,’” I move in from the multi-generational household to the intense space of mothering infants and preschool children, and early childhood education. I draw on my participant-observation experience in a department store mother-baby sensory development class and preschool parent class, interviews with mothers with young children, and analysis of a television drama script that won a national “raise the birthrate” scriptwriting contest. While mother-baby bonding involves all the senses, the sense of touch was most frequently identified as having a special role to play in not only individual children’s sensory development, but in national “healing,” by extension. These mothers saw the repeated phrase “national strength” (*kukka seryöök*) as a symptom of a runaway national ill that had gone too far in one direction, and instead expressed their own desire to contribute to “national well-being” through their mothering.

The central theoretical framework of chapter 2 is affect theory, which I connect to popular understandings of sensory education both in the present moment in South Korea, but also to earlier sensory education projects that are currently associated with (neo)Confucian morality. I also draw on the literature on neoliberal citizenship, as women’s pursuit of sensory wellness for their children (and themselves) align with ever-changing neoliberal citizen-making projects even as citizens attempt to carve out a space for their children’s development less infringed upon by market forces. I argue that in response to bear more children in the interests of national strength, mothers of young children utilize the language of sensory experience, citing the importance of individual attention and the financial cost of acquiring such experience. Another contribution of this chapter is to connect affect theory to studies of the senses in the hopes of furthering both considerations of affect and the senses in environmental anthropology—as this chapter addresses the environment as a moving target of Korean dreams—and medical anthropology, which also features here in passing, in concerns with children’s psychological wholeness and healing.

In chapter 3 I move from early childhood to school-age parenting, a time marked by concerns over maintaining children’s psychological wellness while building abilities within a competitive, high-stakes education system. Titled “Academic Sneaks, Pop Idols and Fans: School-Age South Koreans and *Hakpumo* (School Parents) ‘Sounding Off,’” this chapter takes up sound and music as constellations of hope and possible futures for children and teenage youth. I present three figures of possibility: the academic all-star, the creative pop idol, and the fan. While academic success has long been the route to social mobility in South Korea, to the extent

that it is often cited as the foundation of the “Miracle on the Han [River]” referring to South Korea’s meteoric economic development, the current mood is that of cynicism. I discussed with my interviewees a television drama that was very much borne of this cynicism, *God of Study* (*Kongbu ũi sin*, 2010, KBS2), as well as the accompanying study guide. *God of Study* literally guides *hakpumo* (parents of school-age children) and the children themselves through new study tips for the university exam each episode. Tapping into disillusionment over the educational landscape and rising social inequality engendered by the two-tiered school and private *hagwŏn* system, the drama set out to teach students the tricks to get into the best universities in the country *without* attending *hagwŏn*. In fact, the drama advocated getting into SNU or Yonsei and then declining to attend, if one’s dreams did not align with that university, as a kind of “revenge” against a credential-obsessed society. In the chapter I also examine the pop music market as a potential future for children in a newly “soft power-rich” South Korea, as well as the highly gendered category of “fan” and hopes of profitable and meaningful “prosumption” in lieu of academic success or creative talent. Though I devote more space to analyzing *God of Study* and its supplementary study guide, I also analyze a drama about pop idol training, *Dream High* (*Tŭrim Hai*, KBS2, 2011) and a drama prominently featuring fandom, *Answer Me 1997* (*Ŭngdap hara 1997*, tvN, 2012), in addition to discussing what my interviewees said about academic, pop and fan pursuits in relation to their children.

Chapter 4 shifts from school-age children and teenagers to youth in their twenties, moving the three categories of possibility of chapter 3 to three new categories of “creative youth taste”: the barista, the baker, and the traditional *liquor* distiller. Titled “Baker Kings, Rice Wine

Princesses, and the Coffee Elite: Food Nationalism and Youth Creativity in the Construction of Korean “Taste,”” this chapter identifies “taste” as a primary marker of youth creativity, with the high-end food service industry presented as a space for unemployed and underemployed university graduates to turn. Taste becomes linked to earlier national fixations on moral consumption versus “excessive consumption” (Nelson 2000); “youth gourmets” are praised when their tastes are seen to benefit the nation, and blamed when their tastes are not appropriately national. I also discuss negotiations of labor around “taste” amidst ever-greater demands for flexibility and creative production, and discuss the competition—particularly in Chŏnju, a city “without industry”—between middle-aged women returning to the workforce and youth in their twenties. Middle-age women boast of their *sonmat* (“hand taste”), cultivated through years of cooking for their families, while youth are thought to possess *immat* (“mouth taste”) by virtue of their relatively more diverse and globalized culinary upbringing. These different kinds of tastes compete in a saturated culinary marketplace. In this chapter I analyze three television “gourmet dramas,” tracing the ways that distilling, baking, and espresso-making represent traditional, modern, and postmodern tastes. I intersperse this media analysis with material from interviewees on *immat* and *sonmat*, and discussion of the national and local culinary landscape.

The final chapter is something of a departure from the preceding chapters two, three and four on sensory aspects of family-making through different stages of child-rearing, as it echoes the broader focus on extended family in the first chapter, but this time takes an even broader view in zooming out to examine the “odor” of Chŏnju and the greater Chŏlla region, and what

this means for families in the region. Chapter 5, “Something Stinks: South Korea’s Southwest and ‘Regional Sentiment,’” uses “smell” (*naemse*) as a conceptual framework for understanding discrimination against the region. I aim to move towards an understanding of “regional sentiment” (*chiyŏk kamjŏng*) through the theoretical frameworks of regionalism (*chiyŏkchuŭi*), “ruralization,” media reception, and filmic affect. In this final chapter I draw on field notes from a film club viewing of the historical comedy *Hwangsanbŏl*, as well as interview data. The final chapter is intended as meditation on Chŏnju specificities as well as the overall trajectory of regionalism and decentralization efforts in South Korea. It is also a departure point for a new project on urban-to-rural migration and back-to-the-land (*kwinong*) movements in Chŏlla and Kangwon provinces.

While recognizing that the senses are easily appropriated by the state to promote efficient care of the self according to neoliberal logics, this dissertation investigates small spaces in which the various senses might open up possibilities for more egalitarian, communitarian living in contemporary South Korea. As shifting affective configurations allow for new sensory understandings, the contagious nature of affect has the potential to contribute to a broader shift in social priorities.

## Chapter 1: Family Looks Beautiful: The Affective Weight of Mothers-in-law in Family Talk in South Korea

When I was first married I felt watched by my mother-in-law. And I watched her too, always minding *nunch'i* (reading the situation), but at some point she stopped watching or I stopped noticing. Now my father-in-law watches me like a hawk, criticizing how I educate the boys and phoning me at the crack of dawn to ask what we're having for breakfast, how many Chinese characters my eldest son knows, and on and on. He watches me, and of course it bothers me, but I won't give him the satisfaction of watching him back.

–Minju<sup>1</sup>

The opening scenes of the first episode of the weekend television serial *Life is Beautiful* (*Insaeng ūn Arūmdawō*, SBS 2010) show the matriarch (Kim Minje) rushing to the airport to pick up her curmudgeonly mother-in-law, who is back from a short trip to Seoul. Grandmother's strength is waning and it is her daughter-in-law, age sixty, who holds the family together at home, and also contributes to both the household economy and family's reputation by starring in her own cooking show on TV. On this particular occasion Kim Minje has fallen asleep in the sauna one afternoon, which sets off an unfortunate chain of events: she gets a late start on her daily cooking show, and then is late to pick up her mother-in-law from the Cheju airport. Though she is only fourteen minutes late, the old woman is too impatient to wait, and takes a taxi back home, telling the other family members once she arrives that Minje was a whole forty minutes late. Minje is scolded not only by her MIL, but also by her husband and brothers-in-law. From these brief opening scenes viewers will recognize the common Korean television drama trope of generational tension, and Korean viewers recognize “Korea's Hawaii,” the large island of Cheju

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, June 12, 2010.

south of mainland South Korea. The rolling hills against the backdrop of the sea, the tangerine trees that grow better in the slightly warmer climate of the island—these mark Cheju as different. Yet the first few minutes of the sixty-three episode weekend family drama work to actively trace the boundaries of the nation, firmly including Cheju Island even while celebrating its difference. The grandmother travels from the capitol of Seoul, literally connecting center and periphery through her movement; and we are introduced to the drama’s father (Yang Byōngt’ae) disturbing a meeting when his cell phone rings loudly, with the ringtone patriotically (and humorously) blasting the national anthem.

The family ensemble of *Life is Beautiful* is able to hold unusual and interesting jobs due to Cheju’s difference: they run an upscale *minbak* (guesthouse), with the father taking care of day-to-day management and also harvesting the family’s abundant fruit and vegetable gardens, with produce used to feed guests as well as themselves. The father’s unmarried brother (Yang Byōngjun) manages one of Cheju’s upscale hotels, and this brother’s niece (Yang Jihye, the daughter of Kim Minje from her first marriage) works in hotel reception, with her husband (Lee Su-il) managing the hotel gift shop. The youngest son of the central couple (Yang Hosōp) is a scuba instructor. The eldest son’s boyfriend (Kyōngsu), a nature photographer and art instructor, is frequently shown out in the wilds of Cheju taking perfect shots of windswept hills and seaside cliffs. Life is truly beautiful in television family life on Cheju Island, though family relationships still do not manage themselves, even for the perennially open and jovial Yang family. The relationships must be managed with an open heart and a generous amount of *nunch’i*, a word sometimes translated as “sense” or more liberally translated as “reading the room” but which can also be thought of here as “management of affect.” William Mazzarella (2009) describes “affect”

as different from “emotion” on account of its being “presubjective without being presocial” (291), and writes that “affect management” is central to political and social life (298). In this first dissertation chapter I analyze how “good mothers” are expected to perform seamless management of affect in the family, and connect this emotional work to public discourses of friction, and of watching and being seen, in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law (hereafter MIL-DIL) relationship. The circulation of this ambivalent relationship, both on screen and in stories between women about their experiences, is satisfying precisely because it reveals the impossibility of perfect affective management in the extended family.

The uniqueness of Cheju not only offers the opportunity to show characters engaged in unusual livelihoods, but also creates a family living arrangement that approaches the traditional Korean family ideal but is rarely tenable in modern life, particularly with the population density and real estate prices of the Seoul metropolitan area. The living arrangement is multigenerational but not cramped, with the main house occupied by three unmarried adult children. The father’s mother—the aforementioned curmudgeonly grandmother, who separated from her philandering husband decades ago and raised her children alone<sup>2</sup>—lives in an adjacent smaller traditional house. The married eldest daughter lives in a smaller townhouse in the same compound with her husband and elementary-school-aged daughter, and the unmarried uncles (the same generation as the central couple) live in a similar townhouse lodging, as roommates. Then there is the large

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<sup>2</sup> The grandmother’s separation from her husband is not to be taken as representative of South Korea’s recent upswing in “golden sunset divorces” (*hwanghon ihon*), as she separated from him decades ago and raised her three sons alone. She is instead meant to symbolize the strong matriarchal culture of Cheju, which goes hand-in-hand with a local tradition of polygamy. Rather than just taking a lover, men on Cheju prior to Cheju’s full incorporation into the Korean nation-state would marry several women at once, but the higher economic participation of women on Cheju vis-à-vis the mainland meant that straying men ran the risk of being kicked out. In *Life is Beautiful* the grandfather has been so intolerable to all his wives that he has been kicked out of each of his households, and finally comes back to the Yang family to spend his final years, with his first wife.

guesthouse that can accommodate several guests, and also has a large dining room for entertaining. This spacious living arrangement allows family members a degree of privacy (which the younger generation in South Korea increasingly demands) but also closeness and help with any problem at a moment’s notice. All the family members eat together for most meals.

*Life is Beautiful* is only one of several weekend dramas that aired in South Korea in 2010, and in most respects did not look so different from the others to the casual observer: like other family dramas that air during primetime on weekends or in the earlier daily drama slot every weekday, the drama features an extended family living in close proximity to one another, experiencing conflicts and reconciliation. However, “Kim Su-hyŏn<sup>3</sup> dramas” are identifiable to those who know her work by a few key features: the prevalence of scenes involving eating, the emotional weight placed on “home,” and character interactions “full of chatter,” meaning that there are few of the weighty silences—often filled with intense music and stare-downs between characters that will look familiar to any American soap opera viewer—that characterize other programs in the “family drama” genre. (This is one reason why Kim Su-hyŏn dramas score low with men—they are “loud and obnoxious,” with few silences to punctuate the chatter) (Yoon 2007).<sup>4</sup> While themes of food and home are by no means exclusive to Kim Su-hyŏn dramas, and can indeed be found in the majority of family-oriented dramas in Korea, Kim’s scripts feature

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<sup>3</sup> In most cases, it is the drama’s writer in South Korea that “brands” the drama, rather than the drama’s PD (producer-director). This is also true for Japanese television dramas (see Gabriella Lukacs 2010 for an examination of the Japanese drama production system and the role of freelance, almost entirely female drama writers).

<sup>4</sup> Yoon, a Communications scholar and cultural critic, argues that “home and food” (*chip kwa pap*) is a distinctive feature of Kim Su-hyŏn dramas in particular. While other family-centric dramas use standard middle-class home sets, Kim Su-hyŏn plays with different types of housing arrangements and explores the relationships between family members through the spatial organization of the house. Similarly, arguments and reconciliation happen over the dinner table to a much higher degree than in other family dramas, and the camera lingers over food. Though Kim Su-hyŏn has relied on “home and food” to form an affective connection with viewers for several decades, other drama writers and producers have picked up on this successful formula. Indeed, some of Kim Su-hyŏn’s dramas feature what could be labeled “food porn,” and the prevalence of “gourmet dramas” in the 2000s and onward (a trend I explore elsewhere) would indicate the success of this strategy.

both lingering shots of food itself, and a recurring theme of conflicts between family members arising *and* being resolved at the dinner table. The camera also tends to linger over elements of “home” that showcase the unique characteristics of the houses where her television families live, emphasizing that her characters and scripts are not “cookie-cutter,” and her shows do not just feature recycled living-room or dining-room sets used for other family dramas. Communications scholar Yoon Sök-jin has written on “home” and “food” in Kim Su-hyön dramas, arguing that her persistently multigenerational spaces—the bathhouse in *Men of the Bathhouse* (*Mogyokchip namjadül*, KBS2, 1995–1996), the multigenerational “villa”<sup>5</sup> in *Who Will My Love Be* (*Sarangimwö killae*, KBS2, 2002), the “country house” in *Letters to Parents* (*Pumonim chönsangsö*, KBS2, 2004–2005), and the Ch’öngju Laundromat of *Mom’s Dead Upset* (*Ömma ppulnatda*, KBS2, 2008)—symbolize conflicts and reconciliation between family members (Yoon 2008). Moreover, in Kim Su-hyön dramas family members are not just “family,” but “mouths to feed” (*shikgu*), not in a burdensome sense but in the sense of becoming “family” through joining the table. Yoon writes, “The ‘food’ that occupies the dining room and causes family members to leave their solitary spaces and enter into a common space carries the meaning of ‘*shikgu*,’ a step apart from the blood-centric concept of ‘*kajok*’” (Yoon 2008, 164). This function of food can be seen in the welcoming of various non-family members to the table in *Life is Beautiful*, from the bickering couple who run the scuba shop where the youngest son works, to the eldest son’s boyfriend, to eldest uncle’s eccentric Japanese-Korean love interest. However, Yoon concludes

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<sup>5</sup> A “villa” (*billa*) is multi-level housing unit, most similar to a “townhouse” in North America. Families can rent out one floor of a villa, but it is common for floors to be shared among an extended family: adult children with their children on one floor, other adult children with their children on another floor, and the elder generation on the top floor. In the real estate hierarchy in South Korea, a villa is more desirable than a single-family house (*chut’aek*)—as these are often branded as unsafe, as well as difficult to cool and heat and keep free of insects—and less desirable than a high-rise apartment (*ap’atü*), which have dedicated security personnel and standardized amenities. (See Valerie Gelezeau’s book on South Korean real estate and apartment culture; in Korean, 2007).

that despite introducing such progressive social issues as “age differences within couples, single motherhood, generational conflict and divorce,” Kim Su-hyŏn dramas still fail to overcome the “blood-centrism of extended family ideology.” In other words, Kim Su-hyŏn scripts leave patriarchy intact while beautifying the blood-centric family, leaving young women, daughters and daughters-in-law, to bear the brunt of patriarchy’s oppression. *Life is Beautiful*, which aired several years later after *Mom’s Dead Upset* (Yoon’s focus in his article) arguably comes closer to moving past certain conservative tendencies. (Kim’s 2012 drama on cable channel JTBC, ratings record-breaker *Childless Good Fortune* (*Mujasik sangp’alja*), further opened up taboos in its treatment of single motherhood).

Writer Kim Su-hyŏn has a career that extends back to the 1970s, and she is now in her seventies. Kim’s confident defense of her drama’s gay relationship through Twitter and other social media platforms earned praise from many viewers, with some expressing surprise and admiration that one of the oldest writers in the industry would be its most staunch supporter of socially progressive themes. The drama not only dealt with a homosexual relationship, but also increasingly prevalent yet still sensitive social issues such as remarriage, the burden of elder care, delayed marriage, and even an intercultural courtship. Predictably, Kim also received criticism from conservative Christian groups, culminating in a *Chosun Ilbo* (a conservative daily newspaper) ad taken out by a conservative mothers’ group, warning SBS (the broadcasting network) that they would have to take responsibility if the drama “turned our sons gay” and “led them to catch AIDS” (Gitzen 2014). Finally, many viewers took interest in the drama because it was one of few entirely set in “not-in-Seoul,” something that the “not-in-Seoul” women I

interviewed regularly commented on.<sup>6</sup> In *Life is Beautiful*, “not-in-Seoul” (*Sŏul e anin kot*) represents a space of possibility, rather than the foreclosed possibility and limitations “the countryside” has so often symbolized in recent South Korean film and television.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter examines ways of narrating social issues affecting families, and perceptions in changes to lived family structure. I used *Life is Beautiful*, as well as other family dramas, as a tool for discussion among the women in their thirties through fifties I interviewed regularly, and so it has become my frame for analysis of family drama that plays out in the living room, reflected in the contours of countless flat-screen Samsung and LG TVs.<sup>8</sup> Women often mixed narratives about their own family lives with fictional narratives from television programs, and particularly in small group interviews this became a narrative strategy to encourage deeper reflection on a particular issue, or sometimes to strategically deflect unwanted attention from one’s personal family affairs. Using these intertwined fictional and real-life narratives, I argue that in spite of a drastic increase in nuclear family living structures, the historically fraught relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law remains emotionally loaded, and gains

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<sup>6</sup> South Korea is highly Seoul-centric, with resources centered in the capital to a degree not found in Japan or China. This is somewhat understandable given South Korea’s size vis-à-vis its neighbors, but even tinier Taiwan does not exhibit such one-sided development. There have been ongoing attempts since the growth of civil society in the 1990s to decentralize politics, business and education, but with few real results. The women I interviewed clearly differentiated universities “in Seoul” (using the English word “in”: *in Sŏul daehakkyo*, universities in Seoul) and lesser universities anywhere else in the country. I heard the expression *in Sŏul* in other South Korean regional cities, but rarely in Seoul or its environs itself, as Seoul is indisputably the center, and everything else is *sigol* (countryside), or sometimes, *chibang* (regions), an unbalanced dichotomy my interviewees chafed at.

<sup>7</sup> Cinematic depictions of small towns and cities as places of backwardness and inbreeding abound in the films of two of Korea’s most well-known directors, Bong Joon-ho and Lee Chang-dong. In Bong’s *Mother (Madŏ)* (2009) the countryside is the family writ large, filled with secrets and judgment, and wholly separate from the anonymity of the city. In Lee’s *Secret Sunshine (Miryang)* (2007), a woman who has been widowed moves to a small town (Miryang, in the southeast) with her young son to grieve and rebuild her life, only to have her life shattered again with the kidnapping and murder of her son.

<sup>8</sup> I interviewed twelve women regularly and in-depth and over the course of a year or more, but also had several other one-off interviews with other women (as well as a few men), as well as participant-observation at a community film club (which had a syllabus divided into themes of “family,” “society,” “friendship,” “myself,” etc.) and community cultural center.

affective force through the circulation of public discourses about this relationship. The relationship is also often cathartic at the level of discourse, with stories about MIL-DIL relationships allowing the storyteller to purge even small grievances that they worry are too trivial, and to add to the oral record of stories in the “MIL-DIL” genre. I do not intend to imply that the tension in this relationship is not real, and nor do I wish to generalize this tension. Rather, I examine the ways public discourse (particularly television dramas) about family relationships intersects with people’s real-life experiences with family. Viewers are not wholly transformed by televised family life, whether watched intently or distracting from a screen on in the background; but nor are they unchanged. As Lisa Rofel writes about viewers of the television drama *Yearnings* (*Kewang*, 1991) in China in the early 1990s, viewers are taught how to be “desiring subjects” through viewing idealized or archetypal representations of “everyday life” on screen (Rofel 2007, 37). I compare this historically fraught structural family relationship of MIL-DIL, already much explored in anthropology, sociology, and folklore and cultural studies, with other emergent familial emotional touch points, such as the mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship (Kang 2014), father-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, and daughter-in-law/sister-in-law relationship. I suggest that the MIL-DIL relationship has such powerful emotional resonance that it both stands in for and obscures many other types of difficult emotional work in families in South Korea.<sup>9</sup> Here I use “emotional work” to mean prioritizing the emotional needs of various family members over others, engaging in “affective management.” (This is a different usage than

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<sup>9</sup> Some of my informants reported that their relationship with fathers-in-law were more tense than with mothers-in-law; Minju said that she once battled her mother-in-law but as she gets older has more sympathy for her “as a woman,” and has come to loathe her father-in-law’s conservatism. Other informants spoke of trouble with their sister-in-laws, another relationship often classified as problematic. Kang (2014) discusses tension in the mother-in-law’s relationship with her son-in-law as indicative of a shift in affective prioritization of the woman’s natal family, even as patriarchy remains structurally.

the “emotion-work” described by Teresa Kuan (2011) in reference to China, in which parents manage their own emotions in a quest to become better parents; “emotional work” does often involve “emotion-work,” however).<sup>10</sup>

I situate familial affect and the “dramascapes” of Chŏnju (the provincial city where I conducted fieldwork), drawing on notions of media subjectivity and embodiment as well as new formulations of affective labor that are restructuring understandings of family and kinship. While the MIL-DIL relationship in *Life is Beautiful*, which I discussed quite extensively with my interviewees, was presented in a nuanced way that revealed the ambivalence inherent in a relationship structured by patriarchy, the relationship depicted in *Life is Beautiful* is but one iteration in a long line of MIL-DIL relationships on screen in South Korea. This affect-laden relationship, as well as the other family relationships it obscures or transforms, contributes to national and local “dramascapes” of watching and being watched.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

Though I interviewed twelve women about their thoughts on family regularly over the course of a year or more, in this chapter I focus most intensively on the reflections of three women whom I interviewed as a group every week, as they talked extensively about their impressions of *Life is Beautiful* and used it as a jumping-off point for discussing their relationships with their mothers-in-law. I also draw on my regular interviews with a woman some ten years junior to this “café group,” who spoke at length about her relationship with her mother-in-law, as she was the only one of my interviewees who lived with her mother-in-law. Additionally, I include stories from

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<sup>10</sup> Hairong Yan (2008) also discusses the emotional labor of migrant women working as domestic helpers in China.

one of the groups at one of my fieldsites, a community center. A lively discussion about the preparations for and aftermath of *Söllal* (Lunar New Year) in the downtime after Japanese class at the community center one afternoon had me scrambling to turn on my audio recorder. With the exception of one woman in the class who worked with her husband in their pharmacy, all the other women in the class (who ranged in age from thirty to sixty) identified to one degree or another as *chönöp chubu*, or “professional housewives.”<sup>11</sup> The Japanese class was an important part of “self-improvement” (*chagi kyebal*) for many of the class members, and constituted a significant chunk of their weekly schedule. Unlike the more rigidly structured department store cultural center classes I discuss in chapter two, the neighborhood cultural center classes were often run as “clubs” (*tongari*) as opposed to classes, and members would linger long after the official class end time, studying and chatting together. Several women in the class also took Chinese or English classes at the center, and a few spoke vaguely of dreams of teaching languages in the private education industry or even teaching Korean abroad. Thus, throughout this chapter (as well as the dissertation more broadly) I also reflect on the ways dreams and anxieties about family and particular family relationships play out in certain kinds of spaces: the cafes where I interviewed the women; the houses and apartments where I “repaid” the interviews with English conversation classes<sup>12</sup>; and the public space of the community center.

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<sup>11</sup> See Rowan and Park 2010 for a summary of *chubu* identity. “Professional housewife” is the equivalent of the English “stay-at-home mom,” but suggests that one approaches childcare, housework, and family management as a “professional.”

<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in the dissertation’s introduction as part of my discussion of feminist ethics, I traded an hour of interview time for an hour of “English conversation time,” which was generally not with the women themselves, but with their children. Women in their thirties with younger children tended to ask for my help with translation tasks or English conversation practice for their own employment prospects (as all of this younger group of women had some connection to the English education industry). The English conversation time with children in particular took quite a bit of time, and meant that I often spent the better part of the day with one or two families. For example, I would interview the café group in the morning, and especially toward the end of fieldwork when the relationships had deepened into friendships, we would then have lunch together. Then I would sometimes have a

This research was not conducted in the Seoul metropolitan area as the majority of recent ethnographies published for a Western audience have been, but rather in the city of Chŏnju in North Chŏlla province in the southwest. I chose to do ethnographic research in Chŏnju after becoming familiar with various provincial cities in South Korea during pilot research in summer 2008. Keeping in mind James Clifford’s (1997) observation that anthropology as a discipline was established on the principle of studying certain phenomena in certain places (caste in India, religious ritual in Latin America, etc.), I sought to avoid circumscribing the South Korean regions apart from the Seoul metropolitan region as a place of “the folk,” or “the traditional.” The regional residents I interviewed were every bit as modern as Seoul metropolitan residents, and face the same modern pressures. While I never assumed that provincial residences would be any less modern, I was surprised to hear from several acquaintances in Seoul the rather contradictory observation that people in provinces were “the same” as Seoulites (erasing difference) while also somehow “more conservative” (in the Chŏlla case, referencing social rather than political conservatism). Rather than go looking for the ways in which “the traditional” was protected and preserved in the South Korean regions, I set out to examine how South Korean residents marked—however subtly—as “more traditional” or “more conservative” by virtue of their distance from Seoul went about the business of living ordinary (and thus modern) lives. I was told multiple times that the more natural place to conduct research on “the Korean family” would have been Andong in the southeast, as it actively preserves neo-Confucian

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few hours to write or organize notes or just take a rest myself before going to one of the interviewees’ apartment to meet with their children when they returned from school. Despite the investment of time, I came to appreciate this arrangement, as it gave me more time “hanging out” with interviewees and their families, witnessing interactions and getting a better sense of their everyday. While I also offered compensation in the form of my time and energy to leaders of the groups in which I was a long-term participant-observer—the community center Japanese teacher and the film club leader—only the Japanese teacher took me up on the offer.

culture; and for the media component of the project on representation of family in popular visual media, people assumed I would be speaking to drama producers, writers, and advertisers in the Seoul area. While both of these would be worthwhile projects, I was interested in the reflections on family and media images of residents of a provincial city that has its own historical identity, but which has been marginalized in modern history vis-à-vis Seoul. There is a gendered component to this marginalization, as a lack of industry or large corporate offices in Chŏnju and surroundings mean that sons are even more encouraged to leave after university than daughters. Moreover, a rather high proportion of men in Chŏnju work in Seoul or other larger cities (particularly Kwangju to the south), and only return to Chŏnju to see wives and children on the weekends, an arrangement that has parallels to the *kirŏgi appa* (“goose father”) phenomenon in which mothers go overseas with children while fathers remain behind to provide the financial backing. I further discuss the ways that gender affects parenting in “not-in-Seoul” places in chapter 3, and regionalism and gender in chapter 5.

The women who are the primary subjects of this project—twelve women I interviewed in-depth each week for a year to eighteen months, and more than twice as many women again whom I interacted with in more sporadic interviews or through participant-observation in community classes around Chŏnju—were all born between 1960 and 1980. Those in their forties or fifties at the time of this research (2010–2012) came of age during South Korea’s most intense years of authoritarian repression and industrialization, while those in their thirties grew up in a newly prosperous democracy and can only vaguely recollect the sights and feelings of the democratic transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not all the women featured here spent all of their lives in Chŏnju, but all have deep connections to the area and unequivocally consider

themselves Chŏnju residents now. All are mothers and actively involved in “mothering”—although I did interview women who were both not yet parents and never intending to be parents, the core twelve voices that fill this particular iteration of the project all reflected on their maternal identity. It should also be noted that while I initially interviewed some men, I ultimately chose to limit the project to women’s reflections on family, as they were by and large the ones tasked with emotional work in the family and the management of affective priorities. Early in the fieldwork four women from each inter-generational cohort (30s, 40s, and 50s) emerged naturally as “key informants.” Minsook (late forties), Insook (early fifties), and Minju (early forties—her pseudonym, which means “democracy,” was given because she is from Kwangju, site of the 1980 democratic uprising) were all Catholic church friends and all *chŏnŏp chubu* (“professional housewives”). Minsook was willowy and soft-spoken, Insook solidly built and quick to laugh, and stylish Minju was very much the baby of the group, requesting commiseration often from her *ŏnni* (“older sisters”). I interviewed the deceptively tall Soyoung (early thirties) almost as often as the “café women,” and she and her startlingly identical twin sister (Hayoung) unintentionally left me behind with their long strides as we traveled through their neighborhood of Samch’ŏndong. Soyoung had a very practical orientation to life’s problems, and resisted her more idealistic husband’s dreams of an idyllic rural life. Kang (in her late forties), a friend of the café group, had a voice that carried for miles that did not quite match with her sleepy expression, a result of a strenuous schedule of graduate study, parenting, teaching, and other extended family duties. Also in her (mid) forties was “Helen,” who had been quite battered by life and a bad marriage but who saw English as a way forward. Also in their early fifties were the passionate and energetic “gym *ajumma*,” the soft-spoken and highly religious Shin, and a woman from the

Japanese community center class. Others in their thirties included Taehee, the perpetually sleepy-looking bakery owner; and Younghi, a woman of few words who I had numerous rather frustrating interviews with, but who would suddenly crack an amazing joke or make a sarcastic remark that would make the whole interview worth it.

I met these women either indirectly through introductions from another contact, several times removed from the source, usually a Chŏnbuk University anthropology professor or graduate student or directly or indirectly through community classes, or an introduction from a community class member. All are middle class, but covering a large range from lower-middle class to fairly upper-middle class, and the interviewees on the lowest end of this socioeconomic spectrum hesitated at times over whether they were working or middle class, reinforcing Abelmann’s observation that South Korea’s rapid economic development has led to “social mobility stories” in which “it all keeps moving, unsettling the construct and moorings of class” (Abelmann 2003, 17). This study accounts for inter-class variation in subject formation within a broad middle class, while looking at television dramas as particularly evocative “cultural models and ideologies that are pervasive throughout the whole of Korean society” (Cho 2002, 169).<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned above, I used television dramas as a “tool for discussion” to elicit conversation about real and idealized family life, but the dramas often took on a life of their own. Ardent drama viewership was not a prerequisite for informants, and in fact several of the women I spoke to reported hardly watching dramas. Dramas (as well as film) still came up in the context of public discourse about family, and it was a common occurrence for my interviewees who stated that they could not remember the names of any dramas or the last time they had watched a

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<sup>13</sup> See Lett 1998 for a discussion of the rise of South Korea’s middle class.

series to suddenly begin talking about a particular drama scene or trope that had stuck with them. I asked about dominant representations of family (such as in television dramas and film) in my initial interviews with all the women I met with, and narrations of and reflections on dramas continued in subsequent interviews with some women and ceased with others. The dramas that took on lives of their own most vibrantly came to act as the narrative and visual glue that held different parts of the project together. Thus, dramas were both part of my methodology and a narrative device used to center the various aspects of this research. As Youna Kim speculates,

The banality of the most ritualized talk often takes place over the most serious occasions of daily life as the only way of saying the unsayable. . . . This is not to suggest that TV drama can be a therapy genre, but that there is a certain therapeutic quality in the emotional way in which women talk about characters and circumstances in drama with particular relevance to the conditions of their own lives and experiences (Kim, Y 2013, 76).

In other words, television dramas such as *Life as Beautiful* often got at the “unsayable” when used methodologically, and also represented the “unsayable” in public culture in their own plotlines and visual aesthetics. This saying of the unsayable becomes clear through an examination of familial affect and the mediated subjectivity and embodiment that facilitates affective shifts in family life.

#### MEDIA SUBJECTIVITY AND FAMILY FORMULATIONS

Issues of social relationships, social changes and class are articulated in complex ways in twenty-first century Korean television dramas, often running contrary to Kleinhans’ critique, in the

Euro-American context, that domestic melodrama “carefully avoids topics that expose the dialectical relation of production and reproduction . . . The psychological dynamics arising in families and personal relations during periods of lay-offs, unemployment, and underemployment are seldom portrayed” (Landy 1991, 203). Since the unprecedented popularity of the television drama *Sandglass (Morae Sigye)* in 1995 following the democratic transition, Korean dramas have depicted historical trauma and social unrest, and since the economic crisis of the late 1990s dramas have frequently dealt with family economic trouble and unemployment issues. Tearful melodrama, social realism, and glossy lifestyle aesthetics combine in unique ways in Korean family dramas, hitting on historically informed points of emotional resonance. In using television dramas to discuss family life, I wish to “reclaim pleasure as a site of potential contestation that might engage, and at times be coextensive with, the critical impulse” (Kondo 1997, 13). At the same time, however, one cannot ignore that the pleasure of seeing glossy aesthetics, and the sense of social connectivity that comes of watching “socially responsible” television dramas, mutually reinforce the message that non-normative socialities are acceptable so long as the normative values of capitalism and social striving are upheld. This connects to Sukyoung Kim’s discussion of “utopia within limits” in her study of both South Korean and North Korean viewers’ readings of the South Korean high school drama *Boys Over Flowers* (2009). Just as that drama reflected a common Korean perception that class mobility could be dreamed of but rarely achieved, *Life Is Beautiful* showed a gay male couple who were “even more normal than everyone else” in the sense that they pursued social status and the accoutrements of upper-middle class life. They could achieve a limited utopia, circumscribed only by their less-than-ideal sexuality. Neither resistance nor social control is straightforward, so neither the “manipulated

consumer” Adorno identified nor the “television viewership as space of resistance” model Walter Benjamin proposed are wholly sufficient.

Since Adorno and Benjamin’s early twentieth century debate over the liberatory potential or lack thereof of the mass culture industries, the debate has been opened up by communications scholars, such as Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, later in the twentieth century. McLuhan had his eye on the intensification of global media, and Ong on the shift from literacy to orality given new technologies. Anthropologists first took up the topic of television in the 1980s and 1990s (Kottak 1989; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Ang 1985; Abu-Lughod 2005; Mankekar 1993), ethnographically examining television’s effects on local cultures—from globalizing influences to the reinforcement of national or regional allegiances. Ang found that most viewers don’t approach a television program as a text, but as a habitual practice with the potential to mediate the sense of loss in everyday life under late capitalism. The television melodrama’s pleasure is found in “the expression of a refusal, or inability, to accept insignificant everyday life as banal and meaningless, and is born of a vague, inarticulate dissatisfaction with existence here and now. . . . By making that ordinariness something special and meaningful in the imagination, that sense of loss can—at least for a time—be removed” (Landy 1991, 490). Particularly beginning in the 1950s domestic melodramas gained popularity in North America; in this genre “the cathartic violence of a shoot-out or a chase becomes an inner violence, often one which the characters turn against themselves” (Landy 1991, 79). Landy quotes Kleinhans (1991, 199), who observes that in domestic melodramas (such as *Dallas*, the 1980s program of Ang’s study) family is depicted as a refuge but continued, disruptive consumption cannot be avoided: “The family becomes the center of subjectivity, cut off from the world of action and decisions . . . The family is supposed

to achieve the personal fulfillment denied in the workplace for adults and denied in school for children. At home everyone becomes a consumer trying to get a bigger slice of the emotional pie.” While Korean television drama viewers do observe these tendencies of domestic melodrama, with children’s school problems and men’s work problems being brainstormed over and finessed by feminine care work, a family in which systemic generational or lineage-related conflict is in play cannot be an unproblematic refuge. Because the family is acknowledged as containing systemic oppressions already, broader social issues—largely absent in North American soap operas—can be let in and addressed without causing harm. And because family is assumed to involve structural conflict in spite of widespread social changes accompanying a shift to a nuclear family structure, a “media as therapy” model is particularly relevant in the South Korean context.

While dramas that are popular with a younger demographic were identified by my interviewees as igniting *taeri manjok* (vicarious satisfaction) and warm, fuzzy feelings of televisual love, family dramas depict persistent social issues and structural issues in the family even when they depict a fundamentally good, loving family. The women I interviewed bemoaned the fact that nearly all South Korean “trendy” television dramas (the shorter mini-series, as opposed to longer family dramas) were love stories at their core, even when they were ostensibly “occupation dramas” (about workers at a restaurant, for example) or revolved around an event from history. Even the aforementioned 1995 drama *Sandglass*, often lauded as groundbreaking due to its portrayal of the 1980 Kwangju massacre, ended as a love story at the expense of a political message. However, my interviewees conceded that without a love story a drama wouldn’t get the necessary ratings. These women in their thirties, forties and fifties tended to

find the trendy dramas about young love to be dull. The three women who I interviewed weekly at the café were particularly tired of the recent trend of featuring older divorced/widowed women and hunky younger men, a pairing which was good for ratings but which they found utterly implausible. Family dramas, however, provided catharsis for viewers dealing with their own family conflicts, and love lines at least fit into a broader structure. If done well, family dramas can capture various demographics by showcasing multiple love stories, from the young couple considering marriage to the long-married couple’s everyday consideration and care for one another. This skillful multigenerational targeting was one reason *Life is Beautiful* was popular with a wide audience. The other reason was the controversy surrounding the gay relationship. The “unspeakable” to my interviewees (*mal to an toenŭn*) homophobic ad in the *Chosun Ilbo* and writer Kim’s eloquent response via social networking platforms including Twitter only fueled the show’s popularity, sending online message boards into a flurry of activity. In her public statements about the show, Kim Su-hyŏn emphasized that the love line between eldest son T’aesŏp and photographer Kyŏngsu was “more pure” even than the relationships of other couples on the show, meaning that not only were they “just like everyone else,” they were even better. The couple never fought over sex, money or jealousy, but only over the situations they were dealt due to society’s prejudices. They were morally clean in the face of society’s condemnation.

Moreover, the T’aesŏp-Kyŏngsu (abbreviated on fan websites as “T’aesu”) pair together make up the perfect man: one a good-looking artist who also lectures at the university, and one a successful doctor. And while the main house the family lives in is nicely decorated and spacious, it is Kyŏngsu’s minimalist and modern apartment the camera lingers over with particular care,

treating the wine glasses, tasteful art and sparkling kitchen appliances as fetish objects. As a doctor, Taesöp would be the perfect son were it not for his sexuality, and as a creative man of taste Kyöngsu would be the perfect catch for a perfect son if only he were female. The taboo relationship is a threat to family reproduction and family status, but not to social reproduction and upward mobility. In short, there is nothing “queer” about this homosexual relationship. The T’aesu pair attracted nearly all the media attention, leaving other difficult family situations in the drama relatively untouched in public discourse. Following the narrative constructed by the media about the drama, my interviewees drew connections between the gay relationship and their worries over parenting their sons. However, it is important to note that they reflected *first* on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship underpinning the drama, only then extending to issues of intercultural relationships, elder care, and delayed marriage for young people, as well as the T’aesu pairing. Kim Su-hyön dramas rely on a fan base of women who watch for the “family drama,” as this aspect remains constant from series to series. The social issues are essentially “add-ins,” though some feel more added in than others.

Even among my small core group of interviewees, relationships with mothers-in-law, as well as outlook towards broader family relationships, varied significantly. Among my interviewees in their late forties and early fifties, one relationship was described as negative (but suppressed), two as neutral (but superior to the women’s strained relationships with their own mothers), and one as positive (attributed to the fact that this woman lost her own parents in early adulthood and was “raised” by her husband’s parents). Among interviewees in their early to mid forties, relationships with mothers-in-law were described in more ambivalent terms, with the women largely attributing these mixed feelings to increased conflicts with in-laws once children

had reached school age. Two spoke of mothers-in-law in basically positive terms, and one spoke of alternating sympathy and dislike. One in her forties had had minimal interactions with her in-laws since she and her husband’s de facto separation. Finally, the younger women I interviewed, in their thirties, reported less intense relationships with mothers-in-law overall, but complained of other tricky familial relationships and expectations to navigate. The exception was Soyoung, the only of all my interviewees who lived with her mother-in-law. While Soyoung spoke of more direct conflict that came of “feeling like a guest in my own home,” the others noted the “weakness” of mothers-in-law (referring to emotional weakness) as a complicating factor in other family relationships.

While the ambivalence in various family relationships will be explored in more depth in the following section, here I consider the mediated and embodied nature of viewing families on-screen. The aforementioned “café group,” ranging from their early to late forties at the time of our interviews, were avid consumers of television dramas, particularly “family dramas.” The youngest among them, Minju, also watched the popular dramas aimed at a younger demographic in the Wednesday-Thursday primetime slot, as she was an aspiring scriptwriter. She already had several published romance novels, and she watched these “not age-appropriate dramas” for professional reasons, with the knowledge that many romantic dramas are based on light romance novels. All three women named several dramas penned by Kim Su-hyŏn as dramas that had left the deepest impressions on them. Discussing another family drama airing at the time, *Life is Good* (*Salmat namnida*, MBC, 2009–2010), Insook and Minsook finished Minju’s sentence as she stated that “a drama must be similar to my own life in order to enjoy it the most.” Minju commented that skilled drama writers can introduce small moments onscreen that resonate in

everyday life: Minju sympathizes with the daughter-in-law in *Life is Good* who has conflicts with her father-in-law (again alluding to the mother-in-law’s “weakness”). Insook, in the same conversation, reflects on the drama *Mindülle Kajok* (Dandelion family, MBC, 2010), in which the father has retired and his wife (the television family’s mother role) has to deal with this change in family dynamics. She goes on to talk in subsequent interviews about her anxieties over her own husband’s pending early retirement.<sup>14</sup> The friends remind one another of respective similarities between their lives and family dramas they recall in conversation; at one point Minju nudges Insook and prompts her: “There’s an episode that resembles your life.” In response to her puzzled expression, Minju reminds her, “You weren’t going to have the baby.” Here Minju references the daughter in *Life is Beautiful* who agonizes over whether to go through with an unexpected pregnancy, as well as Insook’s own decision fifteen years ago to have her second daughter. These three talk about their experiences watching family dramas as embodied—whether they are watching intently or not—and causing the shock and then unease of recognition, and sometimes a sense of “vicarious satisfaction.” Family dramas mediate the unrelenting forward motion of everyday life, providing instruction and inspiration. Insook watched *Dandelion Family* for a preview of what it would mean to have a retired husband in his fifties around suddenly after decades of being scarce at home; Minju watched the same show to feel validated in her criticisms of her father-in-law’s patriarchal attitudes, though seeing the troubles of the adult sons in the drama made her worried about her own sons’ potential future troubles.

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<sup>14</sup> Early retirement has become increasingly common in post-IMF crisis Korea, and since a significantly higher percentage of men than women work as regular workers with ongoing positions and full benefits (with women more often acting as “part-timers”), “early retirement” in public discourse is by and large framed as a male problem. A generation of men being forced into retirement in their fifties has meant that men this age start business ventures, investing their savings to make ends meet further down the road. As Insook put it, this generation of men is retiring right at the age that their children are going to university, at a time in which university fees (*tūngnokkūm*) continue to rise.

And Minsook, the most soft-spoken of the group, chimed in that dramas can “teach” about possibilities and inspire one to think about making plans. Referencing a morning drama in which a sacrificing wife learns that her husband is unfaithful, she suggests that these scenario plant the thought that “this could happen to me, too,” and encourage women to “improve themselves” for their own edification, mining their own talents and even making sure to own their own property, when possible. The fact that a drama might be “unrealistic”—as *Life is Beautiful* was, with its too-perfect central middle-aged married couple—does not erase its perceived educational or inspirational capacities.

Anthropologists and communication scholars alike have pondered the role of television in modern life, wondering if it simply mediates a sense of loss or more aggressively fills the emotional void of life in our times. From interviews with informants who followed this particular Kim Su-hyŏn drama I gleaned that the program did both, first showing an absence or sense of loss to viewers and then filling in the space. The house on idyllic Cheju Island was the perfect antidote to city apartment living. Because of the “chatter” of Kim Su-hyŏn dramas, these three informants spoke of being caught up in the emotional immediacy of the drama and only reflecting on what they had seen after the episode ended, normally in discussion with family members or friends. My interviewees in their forties and fifties most identified with the family’s mother figure, age sixty, sandwiched in the middle and having to exert herself to understand and emotionally provide for her elderly parents-in-law, own grown children, and hard-to-read stepson. If we connect this to stories about MIL-DIL relationships told by my interviewees in their thirties, patterns emerge despite that fact that no MIL-DIL relationship is exactly like any other. Women in their thirties, quite recently married and still quite new to their role of mother,

identified strongly with depictions of daughters-in-law in public culture, and also took note of the diffuse family obligations portrayed in family dramas (though overall women in this age group watched “family dramas” less often than women in the older two groups). Women in their forties felt ambivalence in their relationships with mothers-in-law more strongly, which they attributed to increased conflict due to differing educational philosophies. Conflict over children’s trajectories and their own maternal involvement was reported by several women in their forties as “corrupting” other familial relationships as well, as comparison with sisters-in-law intensifies, for example. My interviewees in their fifties had come to sympathize with mothers-in-law to greater or lesser degrees, beginning to see themselves in this role. But at this age the conflict becomes less at the level of ideology—should my son take English to be a global citizen as I think he should, or should he focus on Chinese characters as his grandparents think he ought to—and more at the material level: elderly mothers-in-law, as well as mothers, require more care just at the time husbands may be forced into early retirement or a career change, and as nearly-grown children enter a period of existential crisis brought on by success or failure in the university entrance exam.<sup>15</sup> The progression is from identification with the daughter-in-law and diffuse interest in other extended family relationships; to conflict with, or at least ambivalence about, the mother-in-law leading to conflict and competition in other family relationships; to

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<sup>15</sup> I witnessed the way this existential crisis played out in one family, my host family in Chōnju in 2008, with whom I remained in touch. Their eldest daughter, gearing up for the November 2008 university exam during my stay that summer, was admitted into a desirable major at a respectable women’s university in Seoul (as her younger sister told me, the “second best women’s university,” after Ehwa). Although she did not expect to get in one of the “SKY” universities (Seoul National University, Korea University, or Yonsei University), she expressed surprise at her own disappointment with her fate after hundreds of hours of bitter late-night study. Her sister later reported to me that once she began attending the university she was even more disappointed by her perception of its quality, and devoted herself to studying to transfer to a better university. Eventually both her mental and physical health suffered, and she gave up on transferring.

identification with the mother-in-law and more direct engagement with broader extended family affairs.

#### AFFECTIVE LABOR AND AMBIVALENCE IN THE FAMILY

From the opening scenes of *Life is Beautiful*, the MIL-DIL conflict is set up as central, with mother Kim Minje responsible for her mother-in-law’s well-being. *Life is Beautiful*, like other Kim Su-hyön dramas, does not subvert this expectation, but rather encourages viewers to reflect on the hazards of assuming inflexibility in family relationships on the basis of predetermined roles. Once revealed to her at the drama’s halfway point, Kim Minje keeps her stepson’s sexual identity hidden from her mother-in-law, fearing that it will send the old woman into a state of shock, and she expends a great deal of energy finessing Grandmother’s expectations that the elder son will marry before the younger. Near the end of the series, however, Grandmother delivers a monologue that suggests that she is not overly concerned with these matters, and indeed that she may have known the secret all along.<sup>16</sup> Kim Minje filters her anxiety over her stepson’s happiness through the anxiety already explicit in the MIL-DIL relationship, worrying over how Grandmother will react when her own fears about T’ae-söp’s emotional well-being and her own sensitivity as a parent are really the more pressing emotional concerns. Because she is a

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<sup>16</sup> Grandmother makes no statement that she knows about her grandson’s sexuality, but in her stoic demeanor there are hints of the father’s role in the Ang Lee film *The Wedding Banquet* (1993). William Leung has called Taiwanese-born American filmmaker Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* and later *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) “the queer film done straight,” with “queer content” but “straight narrative style.” In *The Wedding Banquet*, set in Lee’s native Taiwan, the film passes with the father giving no indication that he knows his son is gay. At the end of the film he quietly announces that he knows. In *Life is Beautiful* the grandmother never reveals that she knows, but also never passes judgment. *Life is Beautiful* has elements of “queer done straight,” and an added element of conservatism as well. On a Wiki page about the drama, Kim Su-hyön is put in the same category as American director Clint Eastwood, in whose film *Gran Torino* (2008) the difficult topic of American racism is highlighted, only to be subsumed under a white male savior narrative at film’s end.

lacking daughter-in-law, her stepson has turned out to be gay. Or, because her stepson is gay, she is revealed as a lacking daughter-in-law. Her relationship with her mother-in-law stands in here for other family relationships.

Cultural critic Kim Wŏn argues that despite tackling social taboos, Kim Su-hyŏn dramas prop up patriarchal structures, by always ultimately suggesting that the daughter-in-law (and sometimes daughter as well) is at fault (Kim, W 2008, 182). In *Mom’s Dead Upset*, the mother runs away from home, declaring that she will not return until her family learns to appreciate her better. While Kim Su-hyŏn famously remarked that through the series she was advocating a “sabbatical for all mothers,” feminist critics have pointed out her tendency to fan the flame of generational conflict, such that women are never collaborators but always adversaries. This connects to Haejoang Han Cho’s discussions of “mother power,” in which “family considerations and the mother attitudes in particular can interfere with decisions and policies,” bringing kinship into the public sphere (Cho, H 1998, 203). However, Cho finds that this system of “mother power” within a formal patriarchal neo-Confucian context undermines women’s independence and also does nothing to encourage men to take more responsibility within family.

Mothers are simply charged with aggressively managing their family affairs, at the expense of both self-identity and interpersonal relationships. Sojin Park (2012) has traced the progression of maternal identity in public discourse from that of *ch’ima param* (literally “skirt wind,” evoking the pushy PTA mother) in the 1990s to *maenaejŏ ōmma* (manager mom) in the 2000s and beyond, following the neoliberal turn and related explosion of the private education industry. “Manager moms” must frenetically manage their children’s afterschool private supplementary class schedules and coach them in their ever-expanding academic workloads,

with this juggling of time and role in the production of successful citizens their only route to so-called “mother power.” Following dominant social norms for maternal identity, the manager mom’s eventual reward is successful sons with obedient wives, and daughters who may be successful in their own right, but are more importantly married to successful men. Kim Wŏn points out that these moms who sacrifice all for their children are then reduced to childishness and pettiness when their children grow up to be inevitably not good enough. She criticizes Kim Su-hyŏn (in her proxy of the titular role of the drama *Mom’s Dead Upset*, played by veteran actress Kim Hyeja) for blaming children for all of their parents’ troubles, and “pretending to be oblivious to the structural contradictions and problems that make losers and unfilial descendants out of grown children” (Kim, W 2008, 183). Moreover, although not her central point here, Kim Wŏn notes that the take-away message of the drama was that even daughters and daughters-in-law who are successful in society should end up back at home doing housework and serving mothers and mothers-in-law. This cycle breeds resentment and tensions in the MIL-DIL relationship for the next generation, tension that then structures other family relationships. Along with the tensions borne of differing expectations transmitted across generations that Kim Wŏn identifies, South Korean *chubu* (“married women with one or more children whose primary occupation is a full-time homemaker,” as identified by Rowan and Park 2010, 354) occupy a space between leisure and work, suspected of being unproductive and often describing their experiences as one of “cultural isolation.” Rowan and Park describe a subway exhibition of letters *chubu* had written to their husbands, characterizing the letters as containing a “degree of ambiguity and unmet expectations” in their reflections on everyday life as wives and mothers. I would suggest that what Rowan and Park mean here is not ambiguity, but ambivalence, which is

defined by Michael Peletz as “the coexistence . . . of two or more powerful contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) toward a person or thing” (Peletz 2001, 414).

“Ambiguity” indicates vagueness or uncertainty at the level of reason, without involving the strong emotional sense of contradiction or division that accompanies ambivalence. The “café interviewees” were ambivalent about family members and about the situations in which they found themselves, and the word “contradiction” (*mosun*) came up frequently in their interviews. Soyoung, who was living with her mother-in-law and raising two pre-school age daughters, was even more actively ambivalent, lacking even the physical space away from her mother-in-law to reflect on their relationship and her desires for her household. All three of the café interviewees frequently expressed gratitude that they did not have to work, and yet Minsook and Insook, whose children were in middle and high school, were questioning the effect of this on their self-identity. They expressed exasperation with the younger Minju—thinly veiled in our group interviews, or expressed more directly when she was out of earshot—who was simultaneously so obsessed with her (elementary school age) sons’ education that she did not manage her own “self-cultivation,” and yet was highly sensitive to perceived criticism from friends who were working mothers. They urged her to continue her romance-novel writing, but about halfway through the eighteen-month period over which we met she had given this up, stating that her sons’ education management required all her time and energy at that point in time.

Women’s ambivalence over mothering and their own self-cultivation tended to lead to ambivalent relationships with family members as well. When I asked about the relationship that triggered the most ambivalence, both Minsook and Insook said “mother-in-law,” with only Minju replying emphatically “father-in-law.” The others were quick to explain that Minju’s

situation was unique, but a short while later Insook changed her answer, admitting that her relationship with her own mother was so embattled that her relationship with her mother-in-law was rosy in comparison. Only Minsook reported the most conflict with her mother-in-law throughout her years of marriage, and attributed the conflict to her mother-in-law’s “weakness.” When Minsook was newly married this weakness took the form of indecisiveness vis-à-vis her father-in-law; in other words, as with Minju’s mother-in-law, she acted as a mere victim of patriarchy, incapable of standing up for her daughter-in-law in the family network. In the recent years since Minsook’s father-in-law passed away, her mother-in-law’s weakness is more physical than emotional, requiring a great deal of care from rotating family members.

I noted that in conversation with the three “café interviewees,” discussions of their mothers-in-law often included at least some reference to the concept of *han*, a term used about Koreans as a people suffering oppression in *minjung* theology in the 1980s, as well as in cultural psychology<sup>17</sup> to signify “a sense of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helpless[ness] because of the overwhelming odds against [us], a feeling of acute pain [and] sorrow in one’s guts and bowels making the whole body writhe and wriggle, and an obstinate urge to take ‘revenge’ and to right the wrong. . . .” (Kim S 1998, 20). Whereas *han* took discursive shape in the 1980s to explain the psychological manifestations of rampant class inequality and the stress of living under authoritarianism, as part of the field of popular psychology and self-help that has grown since the 2000s (see Nelson 2012) *han* has often been attached to middle-aged and elderly women who have internalized the pressures of serving in-laws without ever giving up the desire for revenge. In the case of Minsook’s mother-in-law, *han*

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<sup>17</sup> See Namhee Lee (2007) for a discussion of *Minju* theology and public culture.

over her subordinate position in the family ironically only made her emotionally weaker, and eventually consumed her physically as well. The “café interviewees” used the common Korean pop psychology pair of *han* and *chǒng*, identifying *han* in their mothers-in-law, and using *chǒng* (attachment) to refer to their relationships with their mothers-in-law. While *chǒng* can be beautiful (*koun chǒng*) their attachment to their mothers-in-law was more often on the side of *miun chǒng* (hateful attachment). *Miun chǒng* powerfully captures the ambivalence of kinship bonds: one becomes closer and closer emotionally to the person one is bonded to, all while hating that person.

Another case of a mother-in-law’s weakness leading into family conflict erupted one day at one of my field sites, a Japanese conversation class at a community center attended by middle-aged women. All the class attendees but one (the pharmacist) described themselves as *chǒnǒp chubu* (professional housewives), and all but one had children. The Japanese textbook had asked the question, “What are your future plans and dreams?” and the teacher—a no-nonsense Korean woman in her early fifties who had her own ambitious dream of mastering Chinese and English in addition to her already fluent Japanese—was prodding the women to answer. Most muttered in self-deprecating tones that they had no dreams, but the youngest in the class, a woman in her early thirties with two preschool-aged children, blurted out that it was difficult to think about dreams when she was only thinking the other day whether she could stand to live with her husband for the rest of her life. In this case her story about her mother-in-law was clearly a stand-in for her relationship with her husband and her own gendered social position within the extended family. The others laughed and asked for details. She told a story about her New Year’s (*Sǒllal*) holiday the week before, when she traveled with her family to her in-laws’ place in the

nearby smaller city of Namwŏn. She had been judged by her sister-in-law as not being sympathetic enough to her mother-in-law’s needs; her mother-in-law had fallen and hurt her foot, but she hadn’t been made aware of this incident. She had received a sudden scolding from her sister-in-law when her husband and mother-in-law were out of the room—and what was worse, the scolding was in *banmal* (the form of language used between friends or when a senior is talking to a junior), even though her sister-in-law is younger. When she complained to the class that her sister-in-law always acts like an angel to her brother (this woman’s husband) and mother, another woman in the class chimed in “Of course, it’s because she knows they’re on her side.” She told her husband that she would go back to Chŏnju that night but he convinced her to stay, and the next morning “my sister-in-law’s polite greeting to me in front of my mother-in-law made me fill with rage, and my face got hot and I thought I was going to throw up.” I was reminded of Minju’s frequent outbursts about her mother-in-law’s “weakness,” her alternating sympathy and annoyance regarding the weakness, and her sister-in-law’s judgment; she also made reference to the physical toll this ongoing subordination took. As time in the family as a daughter-in-law lengthened, the increased complexity and ambivalence of the relationship with mothers-in-law—marked by familiar “hateful bonds” even as “heartwarming bonds” formed despite better judgment, out of pity—seemed to sharpen the bitterness of other family relationships, such as sisters-in-law.

Soyoung, whom I interviewed in a decidedly less solidly middle-class neighborhood, was also ambivalent about her mother-in-law. We typically met in a café near her house<sup>18</sup>, and only

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<sup>18</sup> The café where we met, within a ten-minute walk from Soyoung’s house in a south Chŏnju neighborhood, ranked lower in the hierarchy of cafes in Chŏnju than the café where I met the three “café interviewees” (which was the flagship branch of four cafes of the same name in the city). Many people in Chŏnju bragged that though the city

talked in her house when she knew her mother-in-law would be away, which was not often. She had a close relationship with her own mother, who lived in the nearby smaller city of Namwŏn, and her two older brothers and one older sister all lived in the Seoul area. She had met her husband when they were both living and working in Seoul, and they had moved down to Chŏnju after marriage, with her widowed mother-in-law accompanying them. Since her mother-in-law had had children young, with grown children in their late thirties and she only in her early sixties, Soyoung anticipated that her mother-in-law would be living with them for a long time to come. She envied her twin sister, who also lived in Chŏnju but was married to a second son, and so lived comfortably in an apartment. Because Soyoung’s husband was the first son, his widowed mother naturally came to live with them. When I met the sisters together Soyoung’s sister Hayoung would complain about her husband’s family’s poverty and, in even more grieved tones, her troubling infertility, but Soyoung still envied Hayoung’s freedom. As Soyoung began working again during my fieldwork period, in the after-school English education industry, she was grateful for her mother-in-law’s help, but still resented the way her mother-in-law ran the household: she reported conflicts over ways to get her preschool-aged girls to eat well, and more than anything, over the fact that the presence of his mother “made my husband more

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did not have nearly the diversity of international cuisine of Seoul and its suburbs and satellite cities, Chŏnju was a site of pilgrimage, of sorts, for Korean foodies. Chŏnju has been taking advantage of its status as a culinary capital in the last few years, as even the trendy younger generation increasingly consumes artisanal and traditional Korean cuisine, rather than showing their cultural capital through patronizing Western chain restaurants. Chŏnju has an abundance of traditional teahouses to pair with its abundance of Korean restaurants, but interviewees bragged that Chŏnju’s more recent cafes rival the upscale independent cafes that can be found in Seoul. Those I spoke with did not associate cafes with American or Western culture, but simply as an alternative to teahouses---sometimes one feels like tea, other times coffee. I discuss regional distinction, subjectivity, and coffee in more depth in chapter 4 of the dissertation, but simply note here that the hierarchy of cafes in Chŏnju and the meaning of coffee in the 2010s in South Korea diverges in interesting ways from Regina Jee-eun Song’s discussion (in her unpublished 2013 dissertation) of Starbucks and café culture in Korea in the previous decade, the 2000s. See also Hyunmi Kim’s discussion of Korea and international cuisine in her book *Kŭrobŏl sidaeŭi munhwa pŏnyŏk* [Cultural translation in a global age].

conservative overall, and less willing to help with childcare.” (Soyoung’s mother-in-law did all the cooking and cleaning, but was unwilling to help much with childcare, saying she was too tired. When Soyoung began working she sent her children to a neighborhood daycare, entrusting her mother-in-law with them for just a few hours in the afternoon, and then was responsible for all evening and nighttime care). Soyoung said multiple times during our interviews that she would prefer to live in a nuclear family arrangement, but seemed resigned to the fact that this was unlikely.

The emotional work talked about by Minju, Insook, Minsook, Soyoung, and the Japanese class *chubu* involves a near-constant management of family members’ emotions, a careful calculation of which affective attachments are given priority at any given time. This “emotional work” within the family becomes a generalized affective labor with broader social effects, as stories about these efforts are told outside the family. These stories affect wider social spaces, manifesting as shared lines of tension on faces and sighs of *han* being released (*p’ulda*). To echo a line in the introduction to this dissertation, “The family provides a shared horizon in which objects circulate, accumulating positive affective value” (Ahmed 2010, 38). Here I would suggest that Sara Ahmed’s “positive affective value” is propped up by someone’s ambivalent affective labor, as the “shared horizon” for the family does not come without someone’s affective management. The notion of ambivalence as a key driver in the diverse field known as “new kinship studies” connects productively here with the even more amorphous field of “affect studies”: attention to ambivalence in family care labor reminds us to attend to “structures of feeling”<sup>19</sup> rather than established assumptions about roles and relationships. The MIL-DIL

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<sup>19</sup> This is the influential concept of Raymond Williams (1977).

relationship may be described most consistently as the most ambivalent, but the “structures of feeling” created from the management of this ambivalence may in turn inform other emotionally complex family relationships. The extensive archive in public discourse of MIL-DIL stories of *negative* affective value creates a “shared horizon” for the family at large and the women tasked with emotional work in the family.

The circulation of public discourse about family relationships further complicates this affective labor, as a “public” of *chubu* is created by the circulation of fairy tales<sup>20</sup>, magazine articles about mothers-in-law, and television dramas depicting affective management across generations. Mazarella, referencing Warner’s work on publics and counter-publics, reminds us that “although publics only arise through the circulation of texts, their social efficacy depends on their seeming to exist prior to their textual construction” (Mazarella 2010, 303). The public that eagerly tuned in to watch actress Kim Hyeja in *Mom’s Dead Upset* turn her back on her family is not the same public that watched *Life is Beautiful’s* mother Kim Minje heroically hold her family together, though both may be assumed to be the same *chubu*. The viewers who watched the earlier drama may have watched the later, but the public was created anew by each text. The television drama’s impact is also anonymous even as it is intimate. Kim Minje’s familiar face—laughing at her predicament one minute and crying over the effort of her emotional labor the next—may be addressed to us, or not:

The puzzle of public address is its simultaneous intimacy and anonymity. This is, Warner suggests, an intimacy of strangers. A public communication may resonate in a very personal way.

“Yet we know that it was addressed not exactly to us, but to the stranger we were until the

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<sup>20</sup> See Sorensen (1988) for an analysis of the Princess Pari myth; Kendall (1985; 1996) also addresses the role of myth, fairy tales and ritual in South Korea of the 1980s and 1990s, particularly as they pertain to gender.

moment we happened to be addressed by it” (Warner 2002, 57). The paradoxical condition of effective public speech, then, is that it only finds its specific target insofar as it seems at the same time to be aimed elsewhere. (Mazzarella 2010, 305) Television dramas are always creating their publics anew, re-engaging their investments in socially resonant interpersonal concepts such as *han* and *chǒng*, and showing them the kinds of families they would like to have (or not have), and the selves they would like to be (or not be). While publics are always created anew, the intertextuality of the “dramascope” creates a highly affective field of public discourse.

My interviewees’ descriptions of physically manifested stress in dealings with weak mothers-in-law, patriarchal fathers-in-law, and two-faced sisters-in-law, as well as their tales of anxiety (*puran*) over managing husbands’ and children’s emotions, call forth Lauren Berlant’s identification of anxiety as “the affective copy of ambivalence, where we work out conflicting inclinations toward what kinds of closeness and distance we want, think we want, and can bear our object to have” (Berlant 2008, 14). Berlant, too, speaks of emotion work, emotional labor and emotional bargains: “In this discursive field the emotional labor of women places them at the center of the *story* of what counts as life, regardless of what lives women actually live . . .” (Berlant 2008, 19). The Kim Su-hyŏn drama *Life is Beautiful* puts women who perform these care roles in the center of the story, validating and mediating their stress, even if just for a moment so brief it almost goes unrecognized. In Kathleen Stewart’s words, “[s]tress is a transpersonal bodily state that registers intensities” (Stewart 2007, 43). Kim Su-hyŏn dramas hail intimate publics who feel the intensities of private and public life and need the stress of prioritizing affective weight recognized and reflected back: Minju reflected on the drama’s MIL-DIL relationship and then turned her focus to her intense need to know her sons and protect their

emotional well-being, attaching to the Kim Minje-T’aesöp relationship as a model for caring maternal sensitivity; Insook and Minsook used the drama’s MIL-DIL relationship to reflect on the burden of elder care and the realities of their “sandwich generation” more generally. My interviewees in their thirties, including Soyoung, did not watch the drama regularly, but mentioned identifying with the generational pressure passed down that pushed young women to have more children, “when raising one child in this country is hard enough to manage.” Even as some viewers resent the propping up of patriarchy that occurs through Kim Su-hyön’s focus on adhering to family roles, the playing *within* these roles, and the nuanced depiction of stress within roles, is appealing. Although cultural critics such as Kim Wön and Yoon Sök-jin have criticized the regressive effects of the sacrificial altar of motherhood in Kim Su-hyön dramas, the women I interviewed reported satisfaction in watching Kim Su-hyön’s mostly middle-aged protagonists struggle with family roles and associated emotions.

#### DRAMASCAPES AND THE CHÖNJU CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Although my research has involved both South Korean television dramas and South Korean “family values,” I am less interested in either of these on their own than I am in the ways public discourse shapes narratives about family life. Since narratives of one’s own experiences involve a kind of mental geographical situatedness, I suggest that we might look at these narratives about and through dramas as “dramascapes,” referring back to Appadurai’s notion of “mediascapes.” Appadurai writes: “Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information . . . and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1996, 35). Here I would like to hold onto a double meaning for the “drama” in

“dramascapes,” considering both the landscapes of television dramas themselves (producing and disseminating information) and the ways that narrations of the small household dramas that make up everyday life are informed by circulating public discourse. An excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates this tension between Dramas and dramas:

One Monday morning in July 2010 I walked from my apartment in a residential area across Paekche Road and down a sloping street to the nearby business district next to the new provincial office building. It was still a sleepy time of day, too early for the cacophony of voices reciting English phrases from the windows of *hagwŏn* (after-school academies) that would inevitably be audible to any passerby by the afternoon. Minju, Insook, and Minsook were waiting for me at the flagship store of a local Chŏnju coffee chain, already engaged in an active conversation, and as usual I slipped in and turned on my recorder mid-sentence. Although our conversations typically got off to a meandering start, today Minju asked me right away if I had seen the climactic Sunday episode of *Life is Beautiful*. They had reminded me to tune in at our interview last week, though I was already a thorough addict and needed no reminder. In this episode, some four months into the drama’s six-month broadcast, the family’s eldest son and a successful doctor, confesses his homosexuality to the stepmother who raised him, and then finally his father. “I cried, I really did,” said Minju. “I started thinking . . . about my eldest son’s *aegyo* (cute mannerisms)<sup>21</sup>, his interest in crafts and housework . . . it’s not that I worry that he’s gay, exactly, but . . . I really cried when T’aesŏp’s father apologized to his son after his confession, apologized for not knowing his own son as a father should. What if I don’t know my own sons, and what if I do damage by not knowing about them?”

Among the women I interviewed, most referred to their anxiety over the important but burdensome mother’s responsibility to “know” their children and discover their children’s unique talents, which were thought to follow their inner nature. For some young mothers this quest of discovery was a regular obsession, particularly for those who felt that their children

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that *aegyo* (愛巧, 애교, or “cute” or “lovable” mannerisms), is on its own in no way a marker of “gayness” in South Korea. Although this set of behaviors, which include a cutesy, babyish tone of voice, exaggerated pouting, and body movements, are more common among women—segments of variety shows may ask a female celebrity to show off her *aegyo*—it is not at all inappropriate for male children or teenagers to use *aegyo* for fun or to get their way.

were not doing well in school and might not be “academic material.” The relationship between emotional knowledge (“what if I don’t *know my own son?*”) and the continuous knowledge gathering of “manager mothers” for the sake of securing children’s position in the educational rat-race is a complex one. In many cases “knowing” one’s children’s emotions, unique talents and temperaments meant abandoning fixed notions of academic/career success. On this day in the café, Minju voiced her concerns that her sons, particularly her sensitive and ambitious eldest, may end up emotionally alienated as T’aesöp does in the drama, with his well-meaning family members not knowing his true identity. His enviable social position as a successful doctor in the drama hides his fragile emotional state.

Even though knowing one’s children well was thought to protect them psychologically, this no longer creates a guarantee of reciprocal care. The increasing “individualism” of Korean society came up frequently in interviews as a problem. Women in their forties and fifties somewhat sadly but matter-of-factly stated their belief that while they look after their aging parents by living with them or (more often) visiting everyday, their own children will probably leave them in the care of a nursing home. Insook mused that she really wasn’t sure whether she would want to live with her daughter again in her old age anyway: “It would be uncomfortable for both of us.” Interviewees in their thirties, aware that their parents may begin to need care in the next decade or two, were less decisive about what to do with aging parents and parents-in-law when the time came. The vast majority of my interviewees and others I spoke to in passing maintained some distance between themselves and parents or parents-in-law, following a growing tendency towards nuclear family living arrangements. Soyoung was unequivocal about what she would do if she had a choice: she would live separately from her mother-in-law. The

housework and limited childcare her mother-in-law provided was not worth the stress of “sharing my space.”

Even when relationships with mothers-in-law were not particularly strained, the MIL-DIL relationship, with its inherent unequal power relations, comes to represent general ambivalence and anxiety within the family.<sup>22</sup> The relationship, which historically meant not only a legal relationship but also strictly prescribed roles, signifies difficult emotional work. Each year around the autumn harvest holiday of *Chusŏk* and New Year holiday of *Sŏllal* there are a slew of newspaper articles about the amount of stress women (particularly daughters-in-law) feel before the holiday and the prevalence of depression and anxiety, a fraught social mood that played out among my interviewees as well as manifested as the outburst and discussion among the community center Japanese class women. In interviews about the holiday women talked *around* mothers-in-law if they did not talk about them. “As a woman and as I get older, I understand my mother-in-law more and more, but I can’t tolerate her acceptance of father-in-law’s abuse.” “It’s not that my mother-in-law is bad to me, but my husband always sides with her in any little dispute.” “Sister-in-law is so bossy and critical of me, and brings mother-in-law over to her side.” During a café interview, Minju thought back to how kind her mother-in-law was to her after the birth of her first son, but how she perceived that the kindness was impure due to its instrumentality: “She prepared such delicious food for me, such nutritious stuff, you know,

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in the past few years there has been a counter-discourse of “left-behind mothers-in-law,” who complain that daughters-in-law have all the affective power due to a stronger natal family bond and the rise of the nuclear family in South Korea, even if in-laws still have structural power. Many of the women I interviewed reported that their “hateful bonds” yielded to at least somewhat “heartwarming bonds” due to pity for aging mothers-in-law, but that pity over mothers-in-laws’ physical or emotional weakness in turn led to more resentment. Women often expressed fears that their mother-in-law’s weakness was exaggerated or not genuine, and that weakness and helplessness were attempts to infringe upon the strengthened affective bond of the natal family. Whereas in the past daughters-in-law were pushed to visit husband’s parents (and not their own) on holidays out of familial duty, now they were supposed to go to the in-law’s out of love.

but while I was eating it I kept thinking about how it wasn't for me. It was for her grandson, to get that nutrition through my milk.” Minsook chimed in: “My mother-in-law said this once: I have to be so good to you so you'll be good to me if I get sick later. She said that. So then I thought, mothers-in-law are always mothers-in-law on some level [and not one's own mother]. She'd calculated it all out like that.” The calculating mother-in-law is a common Korean television drama trope, and women of various ages I interviewed mentioned mothers-in-law “calculating” over grandchildren.

Among the café interviewees, Minsook's father-in-law had passed away some time ago, but Minju's and Insook's fathers-in-law were still living, and were a common point of comparison between the two. Insook stated that her father-in-law had not been the type to concern himself much with the family's affairs, but now that his son is nearing retirement (meaning the aforementioned early “voluntary retirement” in his mid-50s) he sees his daughter-in-law (Insook) living frugally to help the family. She is at the age, she says, when her parents-in-law have used up all their earlier criticisms of her. But Minju sees her father-in-law's poor treatment of her mother-in-law, and sees no reason to expect her own relationship with her father-in-law to improve once her husband has retired. Minju reminded the others that her husband had been fired once, back during the late 1990s financial crisis, and then had lost the money they were saving for a new apartment in the stock market a few years later. On both occasions, it was her own father who bailed them out, and not her father-in-law.

Not because he doesn't have the money, but because he thinks his own son is so great that my family should naturally help out whenever they can. My husband said he would just study to improve his credentials the year he was unemployed, but he never did, and I was just playing around too. So my father-in-law can always say to me, that whether his

son makes money or not, I’m just a daughter-in-law who plays around. Most men, when they get older, come to rely on their wives, but my mother-in-law has always been a full-time housewife, and he doesn’t respect her any more now since he’s retired than he ever did. He says that if I want equal say then I should go out and earn money too.<sup>23</sup>

Minju’s father-in-law seemed to expect unlimited time and energy from her, instructing her to work while in the same breath telling her she should devote more time and care to managing her boys’ education. She said her relationship with her mother-in-law had gradually gotten better as her relationship with her father-in-law had gotten worse. But when she said, “Honestly, I could get along perfectly well with mother-in-law if father-in-law wasn’t around,” Insook disagreed, saying, “The only reason you get along now is because of your mutual dislike of him.” It is noteworthy that my interviewees did not anticipate their relationships with their fathers-in-law to improve, though they did predict that their own husbands would be less of a pain for any future daughters-in-law to deal with. This generational difference played out in *Life is Beautiful*: the aging grandfather who returns to the family after multiple unsuccessful marriages is troublesome for the whole family, but Kim Minje’s husband Yang Byōng-T’ae is gentle and caring towards both his wife and children. Comparing Kim Su-hyōn’s early dramas to her more recent dramas, there is a general shift from a sterner patriarchy to a kinder, gentler patriarchy.

To turn our attentions to dramascapes as affecting the national landscape, ambivalence within the family has certain parallels with ambivalence in the historical and contemporary relationships between regions of the “national family”: the Seoul metropolitan area dominates

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<sup>23</sup> Interview, June 12, 2010.

public discourse, even as productive connections form or continue inter- or intra-regionally.<sup>24</sup>

Chōnju is a city with a rich historical and cultural identity, but which comes up lacking as a place contributing to contemporary public discourse. Television dramas that are filmed in Chōnju are either historical dramas (generally Chosŏn dynasty era—due to the city’s status as the ancestral home of the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1392—though dramas increasingly deal with the earlier historical period of Paekche, spanning 18 BC to 660 AD, of which the area now known as Chōnju was central) or dramas that need to film a scene or two set in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> I found in my research in Chōnju that people are accustomed to reflecting on Chōnju’s place in Korea and its place vis-à-vis other regions in Korea (not-Seoul and Seoul). *Life is Beautiful*’s setting on Cheju was particularly interesting for viewers, as it is both a place that serves as “Korea’s exotic other,” and a place that has similarities with Chōnju as “not-Seoul.” This sets the drama apart from the majority of television dramas in South Korea, which showcase the new-moneyed Seoul neighborhood of Gangnam, business district of Jongno, old-moneyed neighborhoods of Samch’ŏn and Bukch’ŏn, and sometimes the artsy neighborhood of Hongdae in the case of youth dramas.

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<sup>24</sup> Chōnju is in fact unique among provincial cities for its continued growth; in addition to middle-aged people moving from smaller nearby cities and towns (Namwŏn, Jŏngŭp, Jinan, Iksan, Gunsan) to be nearer to children attending Chōnbuk National University, there are people like Soyoung who grew up in smaller neighboring cities or towns who moved to the Seoul area after university for work, and then returned to Chōnju after marriage, to raise children. The whole province of Chŏllabukdo can be felt in the provincial capital of Chōnju, as certain neighborhoods have a large percentage of people from Namwŏn, and others from Imsil, etc. (Hanhee Hahm, personal communication).

<sup>25</sup> The downtown junior high school my husband was working in for one semester was filming 1970s school scenes for early episodes of the hit drama *Giant* at night and on weekends. Apparently the school “looked more like the 1970s” than schools in and near Seoul. (I discuss this case further in chapter 5). Historically Chōnju and the surrounding area was a common area for film shoots, and Chōnju is now attempting to reclaim this status as “film city” as one path to local vitalization. The annual Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF)—Jeonju is an alternate romanization of Chōnju--adds to this status, and in my discussions with organizers of the festival I learned that Jeonju is promoted as an ideal filming location because “it is like going into the past—you can get the feeling of the 1980s, 1970s, 1960s, 1950s, depending on how far into the countryside you go.”

*Life is Beautiful* offered viewers what they had come to expect from Kim Su-hyŏn’s dramas: houses full of love and chatter rather than over-the-top conflict and implausible whodunnits (*makchang*)<sup>26</sup> found in other family dramas, a focus on food and eating, and attention to detail in creating the atmosphere of the house (unlike many other dramas that seem to all use the same standard apartment or house set). It also offered something novel: the lush, familiar-yet-exotic landscape of Cheju, and attempts to insert local color by, for example, having the older characters speak in Cheju dialect. The official MBC online forum for the program revealed divided opinions over this linguistic choice, with most Seoul viewers praising the actors for attempting Cheju dialect or complaining that they couldn’t understand it (or, in some cases, admiring *because* they couldn’t understand!).<sup>27</sup> A few Cheju viewers, on the other hand, wrote of their disappointment and embarrassment over how bad the elderly actors’ Cheju dialect was. Some Cheju viewers also objected to the portrayal of the estranged grandfather character, who comes home after decades away to spend his final days with his first wife. The program provided this character as a representation of Cheju’s old practice of serial marriages, and some Cheju viewers writing in on the forum resented the depiction, feeling that it showed Cheju as backward.

Chŏnju viewers are also sensitive to regional misrepresentation in dramas, as gangster characters in films and television often speak with a thick “Chŏllado accent” (Americans might draw parallels with a stereotypical New Jersey accent ala the American television show *The*

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<sup>26</sup> *Makchang* is a neologism in the Korean television world, and can be literally translated as “blocked shaft,” meaning that the storyline is taken to its absolute extreme, with unexpected twists and turns rendering the plot implausible. In an alternate reading it means “final scene,” implying that every scene in a *makchang* drama is as dramatic as if it were the final scene. *Makchang* can be used in a negative sense (“that drama is completely *makchang*”) or simply as a descriptive adjective (“I like *makchang* dramas,” meaning over-the-top, dramatic stories).

<sup>27</sup> The network’s website for the drama featured a section on Cheju *sat’uri* (dialect), set up as a language lesson complete with lines from the script along with screen captures of the grandmother (actress Kim Yong-rim) speaking, along with a standard Korean gloss.

*Sopranos*), despite the fact that there are many accents in the region, as well as two separate Chōlla provinces. (Chōnju is in North Chōlla province, and though it shares with South Chōlla a history of being left behind in modern development, people from Chōnju often differentiate themselves from South Chōlla as having the milder accent and more genteel—as opposed to working class—history). As the drama progressed the writer and producer gradually relaxed their focus on Cheju’s difference in terms of accent and customs, and simply focused on a strong story with relatable characters in an interesting locale. Viewers enjoyed watching a family that had realistic qualities but who were connected to the land, with a strong sense of place. Despite the fact that Cheju is a top domestic tourism destination, attracting hordes of tourists each year, the show didn’t fall back on name-dropping famous tourist attractions. This resonated with many Chōnju viewers, who are proud of Chōnju’s one major tourist attraction (the *Hanok Maül*, or traditional house village) but have a certain amount of cynicism over the local government’s efforts to have the city named a UNESCO “slow city,” a designation granted to (mainly European) cities with abundant green spaces for unhurried citizen repose, and a focus on artisanal “slow food.” Residents who grew up in an area largely left off the tourist circuit until very recently, when the traditional village was “revitalized,” express both sadness that the city’s one tourist destination is not all it could be (not “slow” enough) and a kind of pride that Chōnju is *not* slow, but a bustling modern metropolis like other Korean cities. As with family roles and relationships, there is ambivalence regarding regional roles and relationships vis-à-vis the nation’s center. Is it better to have flawed representation of one’s hometown or no representation at all? (Is it better to have sensational portrayals of MILs or DILs struggling with changing family pressures, or just to show content family members? Almost certainly the former, at least

as far as capturing viewer interest and sympathy is concerned). Cheju viewers of *Life is Beautiful* criticized the butchering of Cheju dialect by the drama’s actors, but also appreciated that an attempt was made. Cheju neither had its difference erased in the drama, nor highlighted superficially by excessive insertion of touristic images. Regional particularities in the form of serial marriage led to heightened grappling with patriarchy in the drama, but the expansiveness of the Cheju landscape also allowed for more expansive family relationships.<sup>28</sup> My interviewees in Chŏnju were quick to point out that economic realities structuring the education system and job market meant that this expansiveness did not exist in reality, but still the ideal of more expansive family and gender relations outside “the center” came up in discussion. I take up the issue of the national family in chapter 5, and the concept of space/leisure (*yŏyu*) in chapter 3.

#### DRAMAS AS KNOWLEDGE, DRAMAS AS THERAPY

To return to dramas as a source of knowledge and soother of the tumultuous affective terrain of intimate publics, I suggest that the vicarious experience of watching a drama character with similar life circumstances to oneself, or with similar personality characteristics, may be more cathartic than watching a more “realistic” character on a human interest program. The fictional drama character is presented as a complete picture, with a packaged past history and the ability to accept and process new information in a short time period (an episode or two). My interviewees in their forties through early fifties sympathized most with the mother character in “Life is Beautiful,” as she was also “in the middle” as they were (the previously mentioned

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<sup>28</sup> Ironically, serial marriage has also been linked in the Cheju context to *less* oppressive patriarchal structures, as divorce was less stigmatized and women could return to their natal families without stigma following a divorce. Yoon (in Mattielli) argued that women divers’ greater economic independence and underdevelopment of agriculture on Cheju (on which men could depend) led to a relatively more matriarchal society.

“sandwich generation”—the last to feel a sense of obligation to care for aging parents and the first to be abandoned by their own children in their old age). The character of Kim Minje in the drama deals with a cranky and fatalistic mother-in-law (the affective care-taking made even more difficult by virtue of the fact that she has remarried into the family, marrying the oldest son—Yang Byōng-t’ae—after he is widowed). She also deals with her own daughter from a failed first marriage, her grown stepson, and grown children from her current marriage. Kim Minje suffers mightily from the effort of this emotional work, collapsing, getting headaches, and having panic attacks (quite realistically, without the over-the-top soundtrack of American soap operas or Korean family dramas of the *makchang* variety). But viewers are left comforted that between the care of her exceptionally close family and her own pluckiness (in part fueled by the Cheju landscape and historical “matriarchal” features), Kim Minje eventually will thrive.

In conclusion, I return to the discussion I had with three of my interviewees about the dangers of “not knowing” one’s children. In my investigations of family narratives, media discourse, and child-raising in this South Korean city, I have honed in on two different kinds of “knowledge” that parents (and more specifically, mothers) feel pressured to accumulate in regards to their children. The first kind of knowledge is linked to the education system and Korea’s often-referenced “education fever”—mothers must figure out what their children are likely to be good at and invest in these areas, navigating a complex private education system. The second kind of knowledge is a more emotional knowledge, and is the nerve-wracking duty as a parent to “know” one’s children’s emotions so as not to damage them as they grow into adulthood. This emotional knowledge and affective work often overlaps with the first, more cerebral knowledge, as mothers judge their children’s psyches and talents to select the best

educational choices for them. Despite the fact that all of my interviewees had children in the public school system (with varying combinations of after-school private education options depending on children’s ages, abilities, and family economic conditions), many also talked wistfully about other options, such as vocational schools or alternative schools that would suit their children’s temperaments better and cause them less stress. Decisions about pursuits outside of “the mainstream” were made in this interstice between judgment of academic strengths and emotional knowledge.

“Knowing one’s child” as a way of shaping the “shared horizon” of the family is certainly not a uniquely Korean problem, but there is a qualitative difference in the way the directive is framed; in the North American context, in contrast, there is no imperative to serve in-laws, elders, and ancestors. In this chapter I have argued that the circulation in public discourse of the MIL-DIL relationship as one of ambivalence has ongoing power because it reveals the impossibility of affective balance in South Korean families under late capitalism. Under the neoliberal restructuring of the economy since the late 1990s—a subject I dwell on in more depth in chapter four—the pressures to invest in the self have increased to a degree unimaginable even to previous generations caught up in the competition-inducing machine of industrialization. For the women in this study, self investment also extends to husbands’ second careers after forced early retirement, and particularly children’s educations. The shifting political economy has intensified rather than diminished “familism” (*kajökchuŭi*) in South Korea, and yet as the nuclear family unit has displaced the extended family (*taekajök*) the advantages of entering an alliance with in-laws is frequently not seen as worth the trade-off of personal autonomy. Despite stories in women’s magazines or newspapers about MIL-DIL pairs who are “friends,” free of the bonds

of servitude; and despite the fact that women and their mothers-in-law co-reside much less frequently than in previous generations,<sup>29</sup> lingering tension in the relationship—at least as it circulates in television dramas—validates the strain of a generation of women striving for impossible balance between the needs and desires of elderly parents, challenges facing husbands who will experience “early retirement,” and children’s educational and employment pressures; not to mention these women’s own desires—whether self-imposed or externally influenced—for self-development. Just as a *makchang* drama’s big reveal of a birth secret is padded with hours of screaming matches between a MIL-DIL pair, my interviewees would begin a story by blurting out “my mother-in-law,” but the story would quickly reveal itself to be equally—or sometimes, solely—about the stresses of managing children’s trajectories or dealing with husbands’ crises of masculinity.

Television dramas can give emotional knowledge and serve a therapeutic function-- how might one react to a gay child, a child in an interracial or intercultural relationship, or a child who decides marriage is not in the cards? Rather than dictating how one *should* react, my interviewees described the role of the family television drama as giving them the space to think through ways they might react to these situations in their own lives. Unfortunately, television dramas naturally cannot address the more outwardly labor-intensive form of knowledge accumulation for mothers—that is, how to help one’s child become a successful doctor, photographer, hotel manager or scuba instructor (all careers represented in the idyllic world of *Life is Beautiful*). However, the television drama can create an intimate public that buzzes with

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, while living apart from in-laws may be less stressful, some interviewees who still lived in the same neighborhood (or even the same city) as their mother-in-law reported a different kind of stress: the stress caused by a mother-in-law dropping in without notice.

the satisfaction of being addressed, while also looking around to see what other parallel publics the drama may be creating.

## Chapter 2: Pushing Back Against South Korean National Birthrate Crisis Discourse through “Sensory Experience”

### **My baby can do everything with his hands**

I can do it with my hands/ clap clap clap practice

I can do it with my hands/ jingle jingle tambourine practice

I can do it with my hands/ *k'ungk'wang k'ungk'wang* little drum practice

*5-Kam Paldal Kyoyugwŏn Baby Book*

In the previous chapter, I outlined shifting affective priorities, using my interviewee’s reflections both on their own lives and on the popular and controversial family television drama *Life is Beautiful*. In this next chapter I zoom in from the extended family, turning to one of the biggest leaps of faiths of family-making: the decision to have a child (or have another child) and the subsequent intense decisions surrounding early parenting. In addition to the stories of my interviewees—particularly those in their thirties—I draw on my fieldnotes from an experiential preschool parents’ meeting in late 2010 and a department store mother-baby class in early 2012. These direct accounts and experiences are triangulated with magazine articles about child-bearing and early child-rearing decisions, TV programming aimed at parents of young children, and a TV drama script written as part of a “raise the birthrate” contest. I argue that in response to injunctions to bear more children in the interests of national strength, mothers of young children utilize the language of sensory experience, citing the importance of individual attention and the financial cost of acquiring such experiences. This intensive sensory-based approach to parenting has resonance with parenting philosophies in Japan (Allison 2000, Arai 2006 and 2013) as well as a discourse of children’s “quality” (*suzhi*) in China (Anagnost 1997 and 2004), but has its own

unique conditions of emergence as well. In answer to a modernist, developmentalist call to reproduce national strength, the women I spoke with emphasized national *healing* through individual sensory education. This resonates with other studies of early childhood education in South Korea, particularly with Ahn Junehui’s (2014a) finding that young children are told to both “be communal” and “be oneself,” a bewildering pair of conflicting demands that reflects a shift in modes of subjectivity in South Korea. Whereas in the earlier developmental mode the nation could only be saved through individual sacrifice, in its neoliberal mode the nation must be healed through individual *cultivation*. While the previous chapter on women’s emotional labor in families used primarily a conceptual framework of the sense of sight—the all-seeing mother-in-law, the TV drama family as aspirational—in this chapter I suggest that while all senses are invoked as important in young children’s psychological fortification, the sense of touch was particularly elevated as central in “talking back” to the birthrate crisis story told over and over in the media.

The mothers I spoke with attempted to use “the sensory”—through both formal educational programs and individual practice—in order to honor their children as individuals in the face of a ramped-up national family planning campaign that has shifted its focus drastically in the last decade, from quality to quantity. While the young mothers I interviewed and interacted with in classes did not all feel strongly hailed by pro-natalist state logics, all had clearly internalized the directive somewhat, as all mentioned South Korea’s “birthrate problem” in relation to their own childbearing and childrearing decisions. The perceived benefits of sensory education emerged in the interviews and fieldwork experiences as an awkward vacillation between individual value building and community-building; the focus in the mother-

baby sensory education department store classes was on building individual resilience through cultivation of the senses, while the experiential preschool program was framed as the cultivation of a community of sensorily-fortified individuals. The obvious reason for this is that the mother-baby department store class was for a fixed period of time, while the preschool had an ongoing relationship with children and their families over the course of years of attendance. I would suggest an additional reason for the department store classes' focus on the individual and the preschool's focus on communal possibility, however: the social class position of the department store class attendees was lower-middle to middle class, whereas the preschool parents were middle to upper-middle class. At the risk of oversimplifying, the department store parents were looking for ways to develop their child's sensibilities and inner strength in order to position them to succeed in a competitive society, whereas the preschool parents had relatively less anxiety (at least in a material sense) and could turn to imagining their role in furthering the social good.

While family planning posters in the peak population policy decades of the 1970s and 1980s preached, “Raise just two but raise them well,” policy makers realized with alarm in the late 1990s that the long campaign of the previous decades had been too successful: the birthrate was below population replacement levels, and indeed was one of the lowest birthrates in the world. The Ministry of Welfare launched a campaign to raise the birthrate paralleling the earlier campaign in its thoroughness—albeit with slicker visuals, keeping with South Korea's new identity as a global technology leader—but the citizen response, on the whole, was a mighty shrug. In response to the rising age of marriage and subsequent lower fertility, state actors have devised ever more subtle ways to encourage women to marry and become mothers. These methods include TV dramas with realistic plots around marriage and child-bearing decisions that

ultimately still end with pro-natalist messages, and TV drama screenwriting contests on the theme of “responding to low birthrate/aging.”<sup>1</sup>

Tangible welfare benefits have also followed, including subsidized childcare, a pre-natal debit card, and even monthly financial incentives for each additional child, but the mothers I talked to found these policies insufficient. While all my key interviewees had at least one child, my interviewees in their thirties deliberated over whether to have a second, and in some cases a third (when the first two were of the same sex). In response to a prevalent public service campaign in 2010-2012—seen on Seoul subways and around the country on city and inter-city buses—in which the text “One is lonely” is accompanied by various images of lonely only children, my interviewees and classmates talked back against the concept of “loneliness” in this context of contemporary Korean family life. While acknowledging the emotional viscerality of this particular campaign, my interviewees refocused the conversation on “the senses.” I followed the focus on sensory experience to a department store “senses development” class and an experimental, experiential preschool, staying attentive to the ways the senses, well-being, and population were linked discursively. It is to these two spaces that I now turn.

#### TO KNOW YOU IS TO SENSE YOU

##### *Homeplus Lifelong Education School*

Homeplus is a discount retail chain in Korea, owned by the UK’s Tesco group. It is the second such chain store in Korea (founded in 1999), after E-Mart (founded in 1993, and owned by the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted passages come from the 2008 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Korean Broadcast Writers’ Association Education Center: TV Drama First Impression Prize Winners (Seoul, 2009).

powerful Shinsegae conglomerate or *chaebŏl*). The transition from independent family corner stores (in Korean, *matŭ*, an indigenization of “mart”) to chain stores (“E-Martization”) has been detailed elsewhere (Hahm 2008), and here I look only at the relatively new space of the department store cultural center, and in particular a “five senses development class” for mothers and infants. To provide some background, department/chain store cultural centers go by various names, from *pyŏngsaeng kyoyugwŏn* (lifelong learning center)—the same name attached to cultural programs for the general public at universities and colleges, or at dedicated neighborhood community centers or libraries—to the more cosmopolitan-feeling *munhwa sent’ŏ* (cultural center). While E-Mart, the first Korean “discount chain store,” does not have a cultural center, many Homeplus stores have a cultural center in the basement, officially called a *pyŏngsaeng kyoyuk sŭk’ul* (lifelong education school), combining the official tone of “lifetime learning/education” with the cosmopolitan feeling of the English word “school” (indigenized as *sŭk’ul*). In contrast, the more upscale Lotte Department Store (Lotte Paekhwajŏm) refers to their cultural facility as a *munhwa sent’ŏ*, or cultural center. As of 2012 the provincial city of my fieldwork, Chŏnju, had two E-Marts, two Homepluses, and a Lotte Mart (the Lotte group’s discount store), with only one upscale department store (Lotte). In addition, each district had a community cultural center (*munhwaŭi chip*, literally “house of culture”) for residents, with similar classes in fitness, languages, crafts, cooking, and music as the department stores. The difference is prestige; the Lotte Department Store classes were significantly more expensive, followed by the Homeplus and Lotte Mart classes, followed by the community centers. For two months in early 2012 I attended a mother-baby five senses development class in Homeplus’s basement center. The class aimed to teach new mothers how to nurture their infant’s fragile

senses, through distribution of resources (hand-outs, a songbook and scrapbook) and coached group practice of sensory development techniques (massage, stretching exercises, dance, playing with objects).

I joined Homeplus Lifelong Education School’s “Five Senses Development Class” both to find community and company following the birth of my daughter, and to continue my prior eighteen months of fieldwork, which had been focused on conversations with women in community center classes and other community programs (as well as in homes and other third spaces). My daughter was the youngest in the class at just four months, with the oldest being ten months; there were eight mother-baby pairs in total. Most mothers arrived for the weekly afternoon class a few minutes early, carrying their babies in front of them in a soft baby carrier. In North America in the early twenty-first century, this “baby-wearing” (as opposed to lugging in a car seat or pushing in a stroller) often signifies a particular philosophy referred to as “attachment parenting,” in which children’s cries are responded to quickly, co-sleeping is encouraged, and the physical mother-child bond is emphasized. This philosophy, and others regarding child-rearing, does not map unproblematically onto the South Korean case. The soft carrier is an update on a more traditional baby-carrying method, which was to bind the baby to one’s back tightly by wrapping a long piece of fabric (*p’odaegi*). While the updated front carrier was praised for the greater bonding it allowed between mother and baby, the widespread use of these carriers (of which there are myriad brands) did not necessarily translate into extended (or even any) breastfeeding. Per Korean child-raising practices, however, all mothers co-slept with their infants. Given the level of “skinship” the mothers already enjoyed with their infants, the knowledge they sought from this sensory development class—as expressed during our

introductions on the first day—was in the category of “scientific” knowledge about infant sensory development.

Once they had arrived at the center, the mothers would sit in the lobby area chatting and having their babies interact. Those that breastfed would often take their babies into an adjacent nursing room for privacy before the class began. As the mothers and toddlers from the previous class filed out, we knew it was our turn to enter the room and set up. The teacher was a cheerful woman in her late thirties dressed in the standard-issue apron of the “Five Senses Development Institute” ([www.5touch.com](http://www.5touch.com)) and wearing a microphone through which to direct the class activities. On the first class day we sat with our babies on a semi-circle on the thick blue mats, facing the teacher. On this first session we got an introductory lecture on the philosophy of the Five Senses Development Institute, and also had the chance to go around the room and introduce ourselves. About half of the women reported that they were from other cities, but had come to Chōnju for the birth of their first child and to live with (or near) their mothers-in-law during the recovery and adjustment period. These class members without Chōnju roots mentioned that they had signed up for the class to combat isolation, and the members with more connections in the community stated that their friends and similar-age family members had not yet become mothers, and so they signed up for the class to gain “knowledge” about currently popular child-rearing practices. The remaining sessions, however, allowed little opportunity for gossiping or exchanging information, as the schedule of activities was tight.

The class schedule was divided between more active and social activities involving jogging or dancing with babies in a circle, our rhythm dictated by loud children’s music; and sitting with one’s baby and giving “infant massage” using body oil. During massage time the

teacher would circulate with a squeeze bottle to distribute massage oil to anyone who had forgotten to bring their own, and bottles were also passed around between mothers in the class. As we massaged tiny hands, feet, fingers, and toes we were instructed in various chants to calm the babies and give them a sense of the words that named their body parts. The penultimate activity was generally an experience of a new sensory object, with the teacher passing around brightly colored plastic maracas, castanets, bubble solutions and wands, pom-poms, plastic fruit, and the like. Each class ended with the lights dimmed and the mothers instructed to stand up and rock their babies, chanting in a whisper, “Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you.” Once the class ended many of the mothers would rush off as most babies were getting crabby and demanding food or sleep; the few mothers who breastfed would linger in the nursing room in the lobby.

The official slogan found on the Five Senses Development Institute’s website is “We give parents the tools for parenting, and teach children the tools for friendship” (in Korean). Then, in larger letters in English, is the statement “I See You, I Know You, and I Love You.” On the “Introduction to the Institute” tab on the website, the text reads “Becoming a good parent doesn’t just naturally happen during the course of parenting. There are things parents must know, and it’s necessary to reflect on these things and put these things into practice.” The text continues, in a smaller font, to portray the parenting of “the elders of the past” (*yet ōrŭn*) nostalgically, stating that parenting was rooted in certain Confucian morals. The Five Senses Development Institute began out of “mothers’ motivation to reflect on what it means to be a parent . . . .As a parent, fundamentally, (you) open your ears and look at your child, understanding the reason for his actions and giving your love.” The line in English, “I See You, I Know You, and I Love You” is repeated here, and indeed, we said this line (in English) several times throughout the

twelve-week course. English popped up in the curriculum at odd moments, though the program is not explicitly linked to any pre-existing North American or European sensory education program. These middle-class parents were comfortable reading and singing nursery rhymes in English, although few spoke English conversationally with any fluency.

The timeline of the institute, provided on the website, details the institute’s establishment in 2000, with classes established at centers throughout the nation in 2006, and the copyrighting of the term “5touch” in 2009. Most recently, in 2013, the institute has established online “lifelong learning” programs. The institute has also expanded their programming to include English immersion classes in certain locations. The classes offered in Chǒnju at the time of my fieldwork included the “Butterfly Class”—which was offered as a program for babies 4-6 months in some locations, but in Chǒnju was combined with the 7-10 month class—and the class for toddlers 11–15 months, as well as a “Pretend Play” class for children over fifteen months. The teacher of the class rotated between the two Homeplus stores in Chǒnju, the Lotte Mart in Chǒnju, the Homeplus stores in the nearby smaller cities of Sunch’ŏn and Iksan, and a branch of an elite daycare. For the Butterfly class the sensory activities change every week, but the songs in the book are worked through in the same order in the early part of the class every week. The stated curricular focus is on “activating communal feeling through rocking,” “nurturing a sense of balance,” “strengthening the neck,” “repeating a grabbing motion,” “developing hand-eye coordination,” “promoting attachment through language stimulation,” “interaction,” “fostering a sense of self,” “whole body exercise,” and “encouraging deep sleep through mother’s voice.” While the sensory activities themselves, and brain development and psychological security they are intended to produce, are not tangibly different from those done in North American early

childhood-oriented classes, I was struck by the notion that unconditional love for children could be taught—or at least activated—through sensory development education. The Five Senses Development classes were thus intended to stimulate the sensory *and emotional* worlds of both the babies and parents. While in one sense these types of classes are simply a local node in a global articulation of early childhood investment, I noted the role of repeated affirmations and their role in fostering love. Affirmations also came up in the next site I will discuss, the experiential preschool.

### *Giraffe Preschool*

Unlike the experience at the mother-baby class described above, my experience at “Giraffe Preschool” (a pseudonym) I describe now was a one-time event. The cultural center class was true participant-observation, as I was an enrolled and fully participating class member, whereas my role at the parents’ meeting of the preschool was strictly as an observer. I had mentioned to Professor Hahm, my mentor in the Anthropology department of Chonbuk University, that I was interested in attending parent meetings of an “alternative” early childcare facility (daycare or preschool), having just read about a home-schooling boom (Seo in Abelmann and Park 2012) and so-called communal preschool run by parents (Kim 2000). We located no such groups in Chōnju or the surrounding area, as the home-schooling boom had ended and the communal preschools had also fallen out of favor. My interviewees attributed this at least partially to Chōnju particularities, saying that education there was “all or nothing”—either one opted out by sending children to alternative schools in the countryside or homeschooling, a scary prospect because then they were ineligible to take the university entrance exam; or one encouraged

children to diligently attend school and also after-school *hagwŏn*. Children in Chŏnju could not simply squeak by in school and supplement with more relevant exam prep in the private *hagwŏn* system, as school grades were weighted more heavily for students from Chŏnju due to provincial particularities.<sup>2</sup> “Experiential preschools” were gaining ground for a certain kind of middle-class to upper-middle class parent who had concerns about the rigid South Korean academic model and a commitment to environmental stewardship. Professor Hahm introduced me to Mr. Choi, a faculty member in another department, and I tagged along to a meeting for parents of children who would be graduating to the first grade of elementary school soon. These meetings were only held once, or at most twice a year, and so this was the only such meeting I attended. The meeting lasted three hours and offered an illuminating glimpse into shifting environmental concerns and sense-based education at the preschool level in South Korea.

The preschool is located in a neighborhood quite near to the university, in Ku-amdong, one of the older neighborhoods of Chŏnju. The unremarkable building is on a narrow street in a residential area, and it took my taxi driver some effort to find it. After being led in, I sat next to Mr. Choi on a cushion on the floor of a classroom. Before other parents arrived, Mr. Choi explained the school’s three hallmarks: learning through nature, organic food, and developing at one’s own pace. I was introduced to the school’s director, Director Jang, a dignified woman in her late fifties who was busily preparing hand-outs when we arrived. As parents—thirteen

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<sup>2</sup> An acquaintance who worked in the English department at the private Jeonju University explained that education in Chŏnju (and all of Chŏllabukdo) was too test-focused; when I replied that this could hardly be unique within the test culture of Korea on the whole, she replied that kids in Chŏnju are kept at school later than in Seoul, in a misguided attempt at school “equalization,” which meant cutting down on the burden of private education in the *hagwŏn* system. But this acquaintance said that this only meant that kids attended *hagwŏn* even later into the evening, adding to the overall competitive atmosphere. Also, unlike Seoul, kids must test into high school in Chŏnju, whereas this has been eliminated for all but the most elite schools in Seoul; this is especially a problem due to the shortage of high schools in Chŏnju.

women and three men, including Mr. Choi—trickled in between 6:30 and 7:00 in the evening, we were all served a light meal of tiny hamburgers, crackers, grapes, and sweet potatoes, as well as frequent refills of piping hot herbal tea. Many but not all of the parents knew each other, and during introductions we were asked to state the flower we liked best, and then others in the group had to remember it as we went around the circle in a combined introductions and memory game activity. Director Jang emphasized that we should feel free to ask each other “why?” in response to anything, as this was the same philosophy used with the kids in the classroom, and the way that parents were encouraged to try to talk to kids at home. She explained that kids who are questioned sincerely by adults about their process come to enjoy talking in public, and don’t suffer “injury” (*sangch’ō*) from being ignored or interrupted by parents and other trusted adults. At another point in the meeting, Director Jang advised parents, in her gentle but firm way, to break the Korean pattern of framing things in the negative, instead asking the question in positive terms. I had noticed this linguistic tendency during my first visits to Korea to study language, when living with a host family: my exasperated host mother asked her children “You’re not getting up?” (*An irōna?*) or “You’re not eating?” (*An mōgō?*). Director Jang insisted that this was not simply a Korean linguistic pattern, but a deeply rooted cultural pattern. In a similar vein, she commented on parents’ tendency to say to children, in moments of frustration, “*Miwōhaltaende*” (“I’ll hate you”), in order to effect a change in the child’s behavior. I took note of this as the expression had been an example of cultural dissonance for me upon beginning research in Korea: I simply could not think of a time I had heard a parent blurt out “I hate you!” to their children in public in North America, though I had certainly heard this shouted at parents by children in the throes of a tantrum. In Korean public spaces I seemed to hear this phrase

snapped by parents to their children on a daily basis.<sup>3</sup> During the meeting Director Jang kept coming back to the idea of positivity, urging parents not to set the poor example of being negative and rude in public, and not to compare one child negatively to another. She murmured frequent reassurances after issuing advice, recognizing that children will find it weird when their mother constantly says “thank you” to store clerks when no one else does, and that comparing children is so natural that it is hard not to do. Director Jang, with a serene smile, urged parents to adopt the motto of *chagi saekkal taero sanŭn pŏp* (“living life according to one’s own color”) or *nŏ man chalhamyŏn toe* (“take care of your own behavior/attitude first”).

The director’s instructions to these *hakpumo* (parents of school children) to “grow yourself first and the children will follow” will sound familiar to parents engaged in early parenting in a North American context, and the emphasis on consistency between home and school is hardly a Korean specificity. The Montessori and Waldorf educational philosophies—to name a few of the most internationally well known—emphasize no “screen time” (TV, computers, smart phones), at home or at school. Daycares and preschools in North America that enroll children from educated, middle-class families must market themselves as different from mainstream North American society, and better equipped to help children grow up sound in mind and body—able to inoculate against the obesity epidemic, antisocial disorders, and rampant consumerism. The Giraffe Preschool, with Director Jang at its helm, aimed to serve as an antidote to the selfishness and negativity it identified in mainstream Korean society, and to combat the winner-takes-all mentality in the education system. In her words to parents that

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<sup>3</sup> The difference between the English verb “to hate” and the Korean verb *mipta* should be noted here, however. “To hate” in English has a very strong negative emotional connotation, whereas *mipta* is used more lightly, and is therefore not interchangeable with “to hate.” *Mipta* connotes a strong, but often highly temporary, feeling of disgust and annoyance.

evening, Director Jang repeatedly invoked “the sensory.” As a way of introducing more positivity into family life, she advised mothers to tell children in detail about their *t’aemong*, or the dreams they had when they were pregnant with them—even if they had not actually had any or could not remember anymore, she laughed. *T’aemong* are both the ultimate in an expression of the mother-child bond and a quintessential sensory experience, generally described as vivid, even lucid, a mental counterpoint to sensations of the pregnant body.

As Mr. Choi had summarized for me when we had entered the classroom, in addition to living in balance and with good moral development, at one’s own pace, the Giraffe Preschool is also known for fostering learning through nature, and for its organic food. Director Jang forcefully articulated the difference between her school and similar “experiential” preschools popping up, many of them in the Seoul area. The term for these schools is *sup yuch’iwŏn* (forest preschool), and a search of Korean online bookstores turns up several books on the concept.<sup>4</sup> Director Jang referenced a particular book co-written by a preschool teacher and an education professor, on “Korean forest preschools,” but expressed her annoyance with the activities described and the underlying philosophy. Children at the famous preschool, the subject of the book, go out to perform observation (*kwanch’al*) of nature in a highly structured manner, lining up to collect specimens in bags and later taping these specimens—here the director spit out the word “tape” with palpable disgust—to paper in the classroom and categorizing them. She said such an approach did not reflect the books’ repeated refrain that “we are nature’s guests,” but instead trained children to be nature’s destroyers. To make matters worse, children at this “forest preschool” only went on nature expeditions once every two weeks, while Director Jang stated

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<sup>4</sup> The “forest preschool” phenomenon follows a trend started in Germany, and Louv also addresses American concerns with nature deprivation in “Last Child in the Forest” (2005).

that experiencing nature is a daily occurrence at Giraffe Preschool. Director Jang’s harshest words about the Korean “forest preschool” model had to do with the fact that teachers there still had to struggle over evaluating and giving points, in the end making the experiential activities no less a part of the pressure cooker-like education system than the more standard subjects such as English and math. In contrast, Giraffe Preschool gave no tests and administered no evaluations of any kind, so that when the licensors came by on their annual visit they had once joked that Giraffe Preschool would be “Korea’s best preschool if only they had the numbers to prove it.”

A final element of Giraffe Preschool’s philosophy is high-quality and organic food. I address South Korea’s turn to a gourmet sensibility—very much a part of the globalization of Korean food and a feature of the new economy—in chapter 4, and proceed to touch on some regional factors in food production and consumption in chapter 5, but here I will simply place this preschool’s particular approach to food within the broader context of sensory experience. Since the late 1990s, when the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) turned South Korea upside down not only in economic terms, but in social terms as well, a general “well-being” trend has emerged, leading to a greater awareness of industrial food production and distribution practices (Song 2009). The concept of “well-being” has contributed to food safety concerns that have often—but not always—taken on nationalist overtones: concerns over the poor quality of Chinese-made kimchi in the early 2000s (Han 2010), the massive protests over US beef imports in 2008 (the so called “mad cow disease,” or *kwangubyōng*, protests) (Joe 2009), and boycotts of Japanese marine products following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in early 2011. By 2010 the term “well-being” in advertisements and grocery store aisles was being gradually replaced with the term *yuginong* (organic), though there was still little in the way of regulation of organic products.

Many of the women I interviewed in Chŏnju were less inclined to buy high-priced organic products at the store, but traveled out to farms on a weekly or biweekly basis to buy produce and meat grown and raised naturally. Giraffe Preschool was no exception, as Director Jang mentioned in passing that she had a connection to a local farm outside city limits. That evening, in the same part of her speech in which she encouraged parents to be polite to service workers as an example to their children in public, she said that people often questioned her about the school’s practice of serving organic food. ‘Why bother with organic food when the outside world isn’t like that?’ Even if many of the educated, middle-class parents in the room might already be mindful of food safety and nutrition, Director Jang reinforced the link between eating at school and eating at home. By “the outside world” here, the allusion was to the looming near future, when the children of Giraffe Preschool would begin elementary school and have to eat school lunch food that varied in quality from school to school. But Director Jang clearly saw the Giraffe Preschool’s organic menu as an important piece in sensory development, as the children went on field trips to the farm, were encouraged to touch the growing food, and then to savor the food in the classroom.

Both of the examples of sensory education I provide in the above vignettes illustrate a balance between sensory experience as part of the science of child development and sensory awareness as ethical practice. For the “five senses development class,” the focus was on harnessing the scientific benefits of infant massage and sensory play to shape both brain development and childhood physical health. For the “experiential preschool,” the future possibilities for children have already narrowed in the span of a few years, despite their still being only preschool age. Parents have already developed a sense of their individual children’s

aptitudes and are worried about the various difficulties they may face in elementary school. Although Director Jang did emphasize the scientifically productive power of positivity at several points, mentioning positivity and happiness’ potential for growing brain cells, the focus was on creating a solid foundation through sensory experience. This foundation was meant to lead to both to more psychologically secure future subjects and more ethical—*not* necessarily more productive—community members. The two discourses at balance in these sensory providers’ words and actions, one of scientific progress and the other of moral living in a community, are surprisingly difficult to separate, despite at first appearing to be at odds. As Young-kyung Paik and others (Choi 2009) have pointed out, South Korea’s compressed development led to a particular linking of science and morality: the nation had to modernize “scientifically,” in arenas from agriculture to population, but in a way that was experienced as qualitatively different from former colonizer Japan or United States military occupiers. Building a modern scientific nation-state by connecting a clear line between scientific advancement introduced by Japanese colonizers, or medical practices introduced by Western missionaries, and ongoing national scientific progress was unstable at best. President Park Chung-hee consciously called on a kind of reinvented pre-contact Confucian “morality” as he announced his five-year development plans, minimizing his own Japanese connections. He preached the austerity and obedience of a Confucian moral order while preaching against ostentatious Confucian ritual. Science itself became moral, whether this meant science as plastic surgery, stem cell research, or technological advancement (Choi 2009, Elfving-Hwang 2013, Yoo 2007).<sup>5</sup> Significantly, both sensory experience as “scientific” and as ethical practice provide tools for parents to push back against

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<sup>5</sup> See Yoon S. Choi (2009) on morality discourse and stem cell research, Elfving-Hwang (2013) on plastic surgery and morality, and Yoo (2007) on cyberculture and technology as religious experience.

public anxiety over the birthrate. As I suggested earlier, there are different class implications running through these discourses as well, something I will pick up again later in this chapter. I now turn briefly to a historical background of South Korea’s low birthrate and theoretical framework for thinking through pro-natalist discourses and affects.

#### GOOD WIVES, WISE MOTHERS, AND “DREAMING INCUBATORS”

In the 1960s, as South Korea recovered from the devastating Korean War (1950-53) and began rapid industrialization, the birthrate stood at around six live births per woman. By 1983, when the country was not yet a democracy but stood on much more solid economic footing, the birthrate was down to 2.08 following decades of aggressive birth planning campaigns, and had dipped still further to 1.56 by 1988, the year South Korea hosted the Olympics in Seoul and began the democratization process. The birthrate continued to fall throughout the 1990s, during which public campaigns focused on remedying the severe sex ratio imbalance. A meditation on this problem can be found in writer Park Wan-sŏ’s 1993 short story, “The Dreaming Incubator,” featuring a woman who is forced into abortion after abortion of female fetuses by her in-laws, who view her body only as a waiting incubator for a potential son. The first campaigns aimed at *raising* the birthrate did not occur until the late 1990s and early 2000s. The birthrate hit an all-time low of 1.08 in 2005, and since then has risen marginally, but nowhere near the population replacement level of approximately 2.1 for developed countries with low infant mortality rates. In the 2000s public health campaigns suddenly shifted to focus on the loneliness of only children, as well as the specter of a rapidly aging society. These campaigns from the 2000s and onward match the object of the earlier campaigns, if not the focus: earlier campaigns, in urging parents to

“raise just two but raise them well,” hinged on fears of an abundant but uneducated, uncultured population; images of lonely children in the 2000s bring up concerns over selfish, poorly adjusted, psychologically isolated Korean children. In both cases perceived deficiencies in population *quantity*—either too many or too few—threaten the *quality* of future populations. Apart from troubling images of the child him or herself, both earlier and later campaigns feature images of a nation made unfamiliar by distorted population: campaigns from the 1960s and 1970s feature illustrations of a Korean peninsula chock-full of people, with no room to breathe, standing as an obstacle to national development from the perspective of modernization theory; conversely, images from campaigns from the 2000s and beyond depict eerily empty towns, and subway cars filled with elderly men and women gazing longingly at the few children in their midst. These more recent public campaign images meant to trigger anxiety over landscapes and children made strange by a low birthrate fit into what Young-gyung Paik calls “the space of state intervention created by emergency or crisis” (Paik 2009, 75). While she points out that population management is normally a routine project of modern states, a heightened discourse of “population crisis” creates different modes of engagement. Paik traces interventions not only at the macro level of population, but also at the individual level, by examining government support of middle-class Koreans’ IVF treatment. While so-called migrant brides from other Asian countries are seen as a necessary evil in raising the birthrate, the idealized parent in Korea—as elsewhere—is the middle-class citizen. Along with the relative financial security of middle-classness, to be “middle-class” also signals a certain of level of education.

The women in my study, who ranged from lower-middle class to upper-middle class, referenced the kinds of educational management expected of them, frequently linking maternal

care to earlier national—and indeed, transnational East Asian—discourses of “good wife, wise mother” (*hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ*). While *hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ* is a translation of a term coined by Japanese reformer Nakamura Masanao, *ryosai kenbo*, in 1875, its naturalized linkage to “Confucian values” lead women to think of it as part of a much older set of theory and practice (Choi 2009, Sechiyama 2013). In this formulation of wifely and motherly identity, women are encouraged to be the steadfast organizer backstage, the “inside help” (*naejo*) for their husbands and children. With women as the pillar of the family, men should be able to build a solid career, and children are supported in their educational mobility. And yet, this metaphor of the family as a well-constructed building is increasingly problematic in post-IMF crisis South Korea. The devastating economic crisis of the late 1990s saw thousands of men lose their jobs, and thus, positions as breadwinners; their wives often joined the ranks of the *arŭbaitŭ* (part-timers), working jobs that were often full-time hours but not associated with full-time benefits or stability. In South Korea since the 2000s, educational success has not converted into simple economic success once children leave university and become *sahoein* (“people of society”). Whether women work full or part-time or are “professional housewives” (*chŏnŏp chubu*), the responsibility of child-rearing and education planning still falls to them; the question is, is the traditional steadfast pillar of *naejo* sufficient, or might this model only result in a cold, empty house? This is where sensory education and other types of neoliberal education investment come into play.

Paik rightly points out that while the South Korean state’s recent investment in fertility treatment for the “right kind” of couples—meaning married couples, and ideally middle-class ones—is a relief to some because it has moved infertility “from a ‘private misfortune’ to a ‘social

problem,” it is a burden for others (Paik 2009, 85). If there is no longer any “absolute infertility,” and conceiving a child is largely framed as a matter of perseverance and self-management, then perpetually childless couples must be doing something wrong. There are parallels here with Laura Nelson’s discussion of rising breast cancer rates in South Korea and public health blame on individual “lifestyle factors,” particularly those marked as “foreign.” Both infertility and breast cancer survival become self-improvement projects for the (lacking) individual or couple, part of the larger project of neoliberal subject-making extensively discussed by Jesook Song, among others. National population, and by extension children themselves, becomes a fetish object in South Korea; likewise, a cancer-resistant lifestyle is fetishized. Scholars have noted the neoliberal characteristics of breast cancer advocacy in particular, with its focus on survivors, gendered discourses, and unrelenting positivity (Jain 2013). Nelson notes this reluctance to question traditional gender role behaviors that might be toxic, as she explains that her informants turned the dialogue inward, internalizing a discourse of “bad” lifestyle behaviors and passing this knowledge down to others diagnosed with the disease in their roles as survivors.

The self-development project I approach here is not one targeting infertility or cancer survival, but is directed simultaneously on the maternal self and the child, on the mother-child bond. As with the breast cancer survivors Nelson talked to in regards to the intensive self-care involved in cancer treatment and prevention, mothers saw “sensory education” as a way out of the intensely competitive neoliberal system, yet were circumscribed by the very neoliberal logics they sought to resist, building value into their children through activities that might improve the child’s future competitiveness. Nelson writes of breast cancer survivors that their “critical perspective is constrained by the dominant framing of both breast cancer and stress as caused by

individual behavior rather than as social effects” (Nelson 2012, 253). Likewise, young parents’—primarily young mothers’—investments in sensory development in order to provide their children with the psychological fortifications to protect them from the education system end up adding to the list of supplementary educational activities that become reframed as *p’ilsu* (required). And yet, without spinning an overly celebratory narrative around young mothers’ discourse of “sensory education,” I do not want to be dismissive of these parents’ insistence that such sensory interventions in early childhood education were a key to national healing (in Korean, *kukga/sahoejök hilling*, transliterating the English word “healing” into Korean).<sup>6</sup> The categorization of sensory education as a therapeutic activity both for the individual and for the national body begs attention to ways that national population projects and individual self-development projects are linked discursively. If the fostering of sensory development requires more direct involvement than simple *naejo* (support), even at the bodily level, how is maternal investment in “sensory development” changing the mother-child dyad?

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<sup>6</sup> The transliteration of the English word “healing” goes back to at least the early 2000s and the proliferation of self-help books after the financial crisis, but as my interviewees began increasingly using the word “healing” in 2011 and 2012 I couldn’t help but wonder if the word’s usage was linked to the popularity of a Korean television variety show called “Healing Camp” (*Hilling K’aemp’ŭ*), with the subheading “Aren’t You Happy?” (*Kippŭji anihanga*). The show, which combines talk show-esque segments, games, contests, and performances (the “variety show” format that is highly popular in East Asia), is hosted by comedian Lee Kyung-kyu, and has run since July 2011. The show is built around individual guests revealing their “true selves,” a model that has a precedent in Korean reality television in general, in which actors and idol singers who must perform highly controlled and scripted public selves as part of their contracts are allowed to gain greater sympathy with fans (or even convert non-fans into fans!) through a more “authentic” performance of their identities. Guests on “Healing Camp” have mainly been television and film actors, or pop idols and rock singers, but also include the presidential candidates of 2012, Buddhist monks, athletes, and even disabled motivational speaker Nick Vujicic of “Life Without Limbs” fame (the only non-Korean on the show to date). Although each show is tailored to its individual guest, the general set-up is for the guest to show his or her true self, speaking candidly about life’s difficulties (sometimes extending to giving their side of scandal they are involved in) and getting support from the show’s regular cast members. A search of the term *hilling* in the search engine Naver’s dictionaries, which can be modified by users, also illustrates the popularity of the term since the show’s airing: the two user-generated terms, *hilling syap* (“healing shop”) and *hilling k’osŭ* (“healing course”) were added in late 2014.

In Anagnost’s discussion of China in the 1990s, she writes: “Given the tremendous power of population discourse to shape people’s concerns about national destiny, we must also consider how it figures in oppositional discourse, as well as in popular expressions of hope and despair” (Anagnost 1997, 118). Anagnost illustrates how despite the violence the one-child policy enacts upon dreams of family, the insistence that China must decrease its population quantity in order to increase its population quality is one area in which state discourse and popular common sense generally overlap. However, as in South Korea, oppositional discourse exists. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, as communicated by one of my interviewees, citizens could look around them and notice that most of their acquaintances only had one or two children, and this reality in combination with the continued circulation of now-out-of-date campaigns aimed at lowering the birthrate led to a rare moment of incongruence in which Koreans did not need to worry about issues of population *at the national level*. (At the individual level, we still see reflections on issues of reproduction, though the Park Wan-sŏ short story I allude to above depicts a concern over male preference and a gender ratio imbalance, rather than pure too-high or too-low population numbers). But now that it has become common knowledge that South Korea will become weak and stagnant unless women begin birthing more children, oppositional discourse gains emotional force. Whereas women in the 1960s and 1970s who were the target of sterilization campaigns complained that they needed a multitude of children in order to ensure the survival of the family during South Korea’s rapid industrialization, married women in the 2000s and 2010s who are called selfish for having just one child counter that having more than one child would spread resources too thin. Expanding on Anagnost’s discussion of the Chinese context—in which the pressing issue of population quality “also provides the means to launch a

powerful oppositional politics as a sign of the failure of socialism in China” (Anagnost 1997, 119)—I find that state demands for population quantity in South Korea in the 2010s opens up an oppositional politics targeting the nature of national economic and social development of the last several decades.

Whereas Anagnost points out a connection between discourses of overpopulation and education in China, summarizing a Chinese academic report that warns that “[t]he population exceeds the ability of a modern nation to meet its increased educational needs” (Anagnost 1997, 127), South Korea with its nearly universal high school attendance and high rates of university matriculation is at a moment of national questioning of its educational needs. The “education fever” on which the nation is popularly said to have used to launch itself into the ranks of developed countries in the decades after the war met with a particularly fervent brand of neoliberalism in South Korea of the 1990s and 2000s, forming a perfect storm in the educational arena (Seth 2002, Abelmann 2013). In the wake of massive economic deregulation, belief in the free market was the only hopeful option. The “familism” (*kajokchuŭi*) of the industrial development era, born of necessity in status reproduction after the relative leveling of class during the Korean War, segued into the “familism” needed for class distinction in an era of an expanded middle class (Chang 2010). But in fact in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 1997, with a widespread public sentiment that middle-classness was now unstable, the familism of today and of the past have many commonalities. Both require a “good wife, wise mother” to perpetuate children’s educational achievement and fuel husbands’ workplace achievement. The difference now is that good mothers are expected not to join the PTA and assert their presence in their children’s schools using that buzzword of the 1990s, “*chimapparam*” (skirt wind), but to act

as “manager mothers” for their children, scheduling children’s time and mediating between school (public) and after-school education (*hagwŏn*, the private education industry) (Park 2006).

My interviewees with school-age children spoke of the exhaustion that came with being a “manager mother.” Full-time housewives (*chŏnŏp chubu*) resented giving up their own (non-maternal) identities, and working mothers spoke of guilt of not fulfilling this role adequately because of less investment of their time. Although many protest it, it is difficult to completely disengage from this primary identification for women who are mothers. The women at Giraffe Preschool and the Five Senses Development Class have not quite reached the “management” stage of their children’s educational trajectories, but feeling its approach, question and protest against it. Rather than fearing thinning ranks of young people and the national waning of strength and vitality this is supposed to result in, those charged with reproducing South Korean society fear a lack, produced by an obsessive focus on national development, in the bodies and minds of their children. This calls into question the logic of the entire human capital regime, as investment in children’s education does not ensure success even as there are ever more expensive opportunities for such investment. Andrea Arai has noted a shift in images of “the child” in twenty-first century Japan, and has followed “new education directives that promise ‘less competition’ and address the need for ‘*kokoro no kyoiku*’ (literally education of the heart).” The South Korean state does not promise less competition, but variations of “education of the heart” circulate at the borders of the public school system and the ever-expanding private cram school system. Whereas in Japan, as Arai notes, a combination of school and home “collapse” after decades of economic stagnation has led to injunctions to children to “raise themselves,” the burden in South Korea still falls on the mother. While discourses of “strange children,” which

proliferate in Japan, *do* circulate in South Korea, the focus falls more consistently on the mother-child relationship and its normalcy or lack thereof. With the mother and child serving to represent “the nation” by protecting the values of the home, while fathers only serve as provider of resources<sup>7</sup>—as well as national defense in a context that can still be defined as “militarized modernity”—it is not surprising that “sensory education,” facilitated through the mother’s care, becomes a vision of national healing. The mother-child bond represents the nation, and the nation’s children have been diagnosed en masse as sickly automatons who lack endurance.

Demographer Susan Greenhalgh traces the rise of the “global child” in twenty-first century China, “a kind of self-interested, ‘self-regulating’ subject whose desires, preferences, and interests align with those of a gradually neoliberalizing market and state that have largely shaped those desires, preferences, and interests to their own ends” (Greenhalgh 2010, 64). These desires and preferences are cultivated earlier and earlier in consumer societies. As in China, parenting manuals and online communities for mothers in South Korea instruct expectant mothers to practice *t’aegyo* (*taijiao* in Chinese; literally “fetal education”), playing brain-developing music and even exposing the fetus to English. *T’aegyo* also consists of less formalized practices such as eating foods thought to be especially beneficial for fetal growth—including walnuts, which resemble brains—and avoiding seeing unpleasant things that might lead to a transfer of negative maternal feelings to her baby. The formalized “Five Senses Development” curriculum in which I participated can in many ways be traced as an extension of *t’aegyo* ideology and practice; and indeed, both have precursors in pre-modern practices. *T’aegyo*, as an import of the Chinese (Ming) cultural sphere to Chosŏn, was a set of practices for

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<sup>7</sup> See Moon 2005 for a discussion of “militarized modernity” and gender implications.

elite women charged with producing kings and nobles. As it is currently practiced—though it should be noted that it is continuously changing—it is a fusion of these earlier ritual and aesthetic practices and modern, scientific parenting practices.

The “Five Senses Development” curriculum consciously draws on the comforting wisdom of “elders of yore” (*yet ōrŭn*) while uniting it with the proven scientific benefits of sensory development for infants. Tellingly, these “elders of yore” are amorously positioned in history but are assumed to be imparting this wisdom from longer ago than simply “*ōrŭn*,” elders who may include living grandparents or even the aging parents of women who might take their babies to such a class. Knowledge and practices that are very old are wise, and modern scientific practices are naturalized as good, but the advice of mothers, mothers-in-law, and grandparents that is simply “old” can be safely disregarded. Instead, parenting programs explicitly or implicitly call on symbols of Confucianism, as well as native Korean traditions (pre-Confucian, or more often parallel with Confucian thought). It is thought-provoking to explore links, even subconscious ones, between education in the “five senses” and the “five Confucian virtues,” which are: *ren/in* (humanity), *yi/ŭi* (righteousness), *li/ye* (ritual), *zhi/chi* (knowledge), and *xin/shin* (integrity). Though not matched numerically, the five senses and their deployment as areas that can aid in ethical development and a more psychologically sound nation also have some parallels to the *naehun*, an instructional manual for women written in the fourteenth century by Queen Sohye. The four feminine virtues extolled here are: being a virtuous wife (*pudŏk*), correct (wifely) speech (*puŏn*), proper (wifely) skills (*pyong*), and wifely merit (*pugong*).<sup>8</sup> The *naehun* was on the radar of the mothers I interviewed, taking on similar mythical

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<sup>8</sup> See Si Nae Park’s thesis, *Re-reading Queen Sohye’s Naehun* (2005) for more details on these virtues.

power to sixteenth century artist and writer Shim Saimdang—who feminist critics argued was still primarily known in the history books as the mother of Confucian scholar Yulgok, despite her own accomplishments.

Greenhalgh, after her discussion of the emerging figure of “the global child” in China, turns to new figures of maternal subjectivity in China, including the entrepreneurial “net-mom” who envisions mothering as a “happy” pursuit rather than self-sacrifice (Greenhalgh 2010, 66). The discourse of motherhood as self-sacrifice is strong in South Korea, but participation in mother-baby classes at least includes an element of self-care for mothers, and might be seen as a natural extension of self-development pursuits in department store or cultural center classes more generally. Bae Soo-ok and Yi have both noted the mistrust of the formal education sector reflected in alternative education of the “lifelong learning” variety; Bae examines the space of the department store cultural center and middle-class women’s utilization of this space, and Yi investigates working-class women’s use of “open universities.” The middle-class women in Bae’s study valued their ability to choose what cultural pursuits would be most interesting for them, and were conscious that theirs was the first generation of women in mid-life for whom this educational format was available. Bae delineates the emergence of department stores in South Korea beginning in the late 1970s (though there were Japanese department stores earlier, during the colonial period), linking the entrance of department stores to the widespread sentiment of “now we are living well.” Bae conducts participant-observation at a watercolors class and a Chinese cooking class at the Seoul suburban department store to which she gives the pseudonym “Sarang Paekhwajöm,” but notes that the focus at this particular store is children’s classes, as the suburb in question is not a wealthy enough one that “women would invest freely in themselves”

rather than their children (Bae 2011, 42). Nonetheless, cultural program offerings aimed at mothers are expanding at department store cultural centers and community cultural centers alike, given the focus on self-development in South Korean society more generally.

Song (2014) and others (Abelmann 2005, Lett 1998, Nelson 2000) have commented on a fixation with self-development as a neoliberal symptom. Song writes that “ ‘[c]ompulsiveness with self-development’ (*chagi kyebal kangbakchǔng*) or distress at not being able to cope with social trends is depicted daily in the newspapers as a pathological symptom.” “Flexibility based on individual creative customization” is emphasized, and to equip children to thrive in the new creative economy this customization should begin early (Song 2014, 74). Song also details the shifts in the political identities of the women in their thirties and forties living alone whom she interviewed, noting how these former activists “became immersed in the ethics of enjoyment as a way of denouncing the doctrinaire and patriarchal structure of their former militant, antistate activism” (Song 2014, 85). While my interviewees in Chǒnju in their forties had not been nearly as active in the democracy movement as Song’s interviewees, they had also inhabited more than one “affective regime” in their lifetimes thus far, by virtue of having moved from state authoritarianism to state-supported neoliberalism. Although my interviewees in their thirties, including the women who brought their infants to the Five Senses Development class, had only been children when South Korea’s liberalization began, they too had internalized the affective appeal of South Korea’s new dynamism as symbolized by the 2002 World Cup and its fandom, as well as expanding consumer choice. But what is the line between an “ethics of enjoyment” with productive potential and a compulsion with self-development that perpetuates social inequalities? I am thinking here of the rather haunting figure of “Heejin” central to Abelmann,

Park, and Kim’s (2009) ethnography of South Korean universities, who insists that she will engage in “self-development” projects her whole life, not as a means to an end but as a way of being. The mother-baby senses class does not resonate with Song’s description of a space in which women can “brew new politics through intermission and self-suspension,” as it is above all a project associated with the “self-development” mode meant to produce good mothers and productive children, however sensorily advanced (Song 2014, 93). However, it is worth examining how participants in the mother-baby class and other similar spaces connect self-development, the mother-child bond, and national healing.

As suggested above, the techniques and philosophies taught in the mother-baby senses development class I attended at the Homeplus cultural center are rooted in *t’aegyo* (fetal education) practices. I examined two “Pregnancy and Childbirth Textbooks,” both published by the women’s magazine *Chubu Saenghwal* (Housewives’ Life), but one from 1996 and the other from 2010. While both editions guide pregnant women and their partners through early pregnancy (including sections on infertility treatments), fetal development, labor and delivery, breastfeeding, and infant development, there are significant differences even in the table of contents between 1996 and 2010 in terms of referring to male partners and focus on maternal (rather than solely fetal/infant) health. In the 1996 publication the male partner is only referred to as the baby’s dad (*appa*), whereas in the 2010 publication he is referred to as *nampyŏn* (husband), suggesting a shift in degree of identification with a nuclear family and the conjugal bond, rather than the extended family. In the 1996 publication there is no prominent section on *sanhu chori* (after birth recovery), though a small section can be found through the index. In the 2010 publication, there is a whole chapter on *sanhu chori*, reflecting an entire industry of “after birth

recovery centers” that has grown up since the late 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Notably, there are subsections in the 2010 edition that instruct new mothers on “recovering a beautiful figure” and a “pre-baby weight diet,” as well as “fashion for every season for the new mom.” Childbirth is no longer simply an item to check off the list of life experiences, but an opportunity for self-development and self-management. Both the 1996 and 2010 edition have special sections on *t’aegyo*, but in the 2010 edition this is much more extensive. The 1996 edition focuses on traditionally forbidden foods, and also has an extensive two-page feature on the appropriate music to play for fetal development, which I noted is reproduced in the 2010 edition in somewhat abbreviated form. (The list of music is detailed, listing specific classical composers and individual pieces for waking up, mealtime, taking a break, sleeping, and encouraging activeness, social skills, and a love of nature and animals). In contrast, the *t’aegyo* feature in the 2010 edition is divided into three sections: 1) Methods for couples to make the fetus into a gifted child (*yǒngchae*), 2) KAIST<sup>10</sup> professor Kim Suyong’s traditional *t’aegyo*, and 3) Korean traditional medicine practitioner Shin Chaeyong’s manual for *t’aegyo*.

The notion of sensory development is prominent on the first page of the special section on *t’aegyo* of the 2010 version of the manual. The first feature instructs expecting mothers and fathers how to talk to the fetus at different stages of the pregnancy, and is subheaded “Genius

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<sup>9</sup> The Korean Wikipedia page on *sanhu chori*, while not an academic resource, mentions that the first *sanhu choriwǒn* was in 1997, and connects this emergence to the transition to a nuclear family in South Korea. Another online source notes that by 2001, there were 300 *sanhu choriwǒn* registered: Creative Design Group Momknet.com. Postpartum care Aesthetic Massage. *Sanhu choriwǒn yǒksa sūpesyōl 1* [After-birth care center history special 1]. Accessed May 21, 2015. [http://www.momknet.com/default/story/story\\_03.php?com\\_board\\_basic=read\\_form&com\\_board\\_idx=1&topmenu=3&left=3&com\\_board\\_idx=7](http://www.momknet.com/default/story/story_03.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=1&topmenu=3&left=3&com_board_idx=7).

<sup>10</sup> KAIST stands for Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, a university with extremely competitive admission that has a similar academic cache as MIT in the United States. Students must be relatively well-rounded, as instruction is primarily in English even though the vast majority of students are Korean.

*t'aegyo* methods that help with IQ (*chinŭng*) and sensory development (*kamgak paltal*).”

Interestingly, the section on “father’s *t'aegyo*” is really just a list of things partners must do to help: be grateful to your wife even if her moods are volatile, actively help with housework, prepare flowers for your wife on the day you go to hear the baby’s heartbeat for the first time, stop drinking, quit smoking, give massages, etc. The updated section on “music *t'aegyo*” includes a feature on world-famous opera singer Sumi Jo’s mother’s music *t'aegyo* practices that enabled her daughter to succeed musically.

The next feature is on a KAIST physics professor’s study of traditional *t'aegyo* practices and revival of certain practices both at KAIST and Seoul’s “*T'aegyo* Academy.” His list of practices and rules veers into the inflammatory, as he declares “If you don’t do *t'aegyo* you’ll birth an incompetent child,” and “Children born naturally [not by C-section] are smarter.” A nutritious diet also falls into the category of *t'aegyo*, as explained in a two-page feature on *t'aegyo* and nutrition. The next section, on “modern science and *t'aegyo*,” points out that in the West, parents’ education only begins after the baby is born, and there is no sense of fetal education. However, this section strongly opposes this view in its subheading, “Baby’s first school is mother’s womb.” The KAIST professor chimes in a few pages later in a box at the bottom of the page, with the reminder that “*T'aegyo* done badly produces problem children,” encouraging expectant parents to focus on fetal brain development for the sake of remedying social problems such as youth violence and bullying. The book instructs expectant mothers to only have “right thoughts” (*oriŭn saenggak*) and only look at “bright things” (*palkhin kōt*), staying away from violence, fear, stimulation, excitement, rage, sadness, jealousy, resentment, and the like.

The final feature on *t'aegyo* in the 2010 edition is written by a Korean traditional medicine doctor, who focuses on nutritional aspects of fetal development. She instructs women to prevent miscarriages by taking vitamin E, to prevent stillbirth by eating black soybeans, and to mitigate morning sickness with ginger, bamboo or quince tea. Culinary aspects of *t'aegyo* go back to pre-modern times, when avoidance of food that may have spoiled was of utmost importance. In the twenty-first century, plenty of knowledge of what foods may be harmful—fish with high concentrations of mercury, for example; or raw cheese that may contain listeria bacteria—informs prenatal care around the world, but food consumption rules linked to *t'aegyo* in Korea are stricter and more extensive. Women's magazines, including the regular monthly publications of *Chubu saenghwal* (Housewives' Life), include articles on fostering sensory development, from general “understand brain development” articles to articles about making natural soap or using essential oils on children. During my fieldwork I collected monthly *Chubu saenghwal* issues, as well as issues from competitor *Yōsōng Tong'a* (Women's Tonga). I also collected issues of *Mam & ingpang* (a transliteration of “Mom and Enfant”), a magazine targeting young mothers, and its even more advertising-laden competitor *Ange*, as well as the short-lived monthly magazine *She's Mom*, aimed at mothers of school-aged children (title originally in English, though the magazine is all in Korean—I incorporate discussion of an article in *She's Mom* in chapter 3). The “Mom & Enfant” magazine regularly featured articles on how to choose a *sanhu choriwōn*, or sometimes, the more affordable *sanhu chori* home care assistant. I also took note of articles in the various magazines on the benefits of nature for children and families. A June 2010 article in “Mom & Enfant” with large Roman letters on the first page reading “Eco Friendly” is an account by the magazine's editor of her visit to a “clean

environment preschool” (*ch’inhwangyǒng yuch’iwǒn*). She explains the history of “forest preschools” in Northern and Western Europe, and the rising popularity of forest preschools and “clean environment preschools” in South Korea since 2008. While the author notes that each preschool is different, she identifies commonalities of farming programs and ecology education programs at many of them. The author mentions that mothers’ reasons for sending children to these preschools are various, but range from actively wanting kids to be raised with a sense of the natural environment from an early age, to simply *not* wanting kids to be dragged into the educational rat race from the beginning, to sending them for their health. But like the parents at the Giraffe Preschool’s parents’ meeting I attended, mothers quoted in the article worried about their kids falling behind in English acquisition and other areas, leading to a high rate of abandoning forest/clean environment preschools for regular preschools. Other complaints were about insufficient safety measures for small children on the mountain walks or field visits; lack of proper teacher training in ecology education; too much laundry following walking and farming in mud; and lack of follow-through at home leading to a burden on parents that was somehow even greater than the usual homework demands.<sup>11</sup> Mothers speaking out in favor of these kinds of preschools, however, exclaimed that their children now took a great interest in science; had empathy for all living things; stopped being picky eaters after eating vegetables they had harvested themselves; and had their eczema cured by the organic food and time in fresh air every day. Those for whom the experiential preschool’s benefits outweighed its costs reported passion, empathy, openness, and newfound health in their children; others, particularly those

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<sup>11</sup> The parent who offered up this complaint wrote that her son was sent home with a bottle containing two tropical fish (which the mother further complained could hardly be considered part of the local ecology), with no instructions for care. The water quickly grew murky and mucky, and the fish died.

who had chosen more mainstream early childhood education from the beginning or who had abandoned “forest preschools,” “clean environment preschools,” or other experiential preschools, questioned whether children’s thriving now would translate into thriving later, or if the early flexibility might lead them to be aimless when the stakes were higher later on. Before addressing the relationship between “the sensory” and “success” through linking my experiences in participant-observation and interviews with the broader literature on affect theory (following chapter 1), I deal briefly now with the tension between the birthrate crisis and sensory discourse in the TV drama script *Twoejine k’ün önni* (Piggy’s eldest sister). Through analysis of this text, I connect the (imagined) visual qualities of the drama to the sense of touch emphasized in “sensory education,” and move to connect these to the practice of “talking back” to birthrate crisis discourse.

#### THE “CERTAIN SOMETHING” IN SOLVING THE BIRTHRATE PROBLEM

Early in my fieldwork I met with a freelance drama writer in Seoul, a friend of a friend, and she gifted me with a thin book of television drama scripts, one of which was her own script that had won second place in the “new writers” category in 2008. Apart from her script and the first prize script, the other scripts had won in the “responding to the low birthrate/rapid aging problem” category. The script dealing with the birthrate issue, “Piggy’s Eldest Sister,” is about a forty-year old elementary school teacher who was the eldest daughter in a family of poor pig farmers, who after raising her six younger siblings while her parents worked on the farm is deeply opposed to having children of her own. Additionally, she is still bitter towards her aging parents for their lack of responsibility in bringing so many children into the world. Although her husband, whom

she married late, had been understanding about her desire not to have children, he is now feeling the lack and wondering if they might try to have a baby. In the script for this one-episode drama<sup>12</sup> the bitter protagonist, Youngsook, discovers the true happiness of children through a series of small events. First, she visits her ailing aunt in the hospital, the same aunt who had earlier given her poor family the tuition fees to send her to college. In talking to her aunt she learns how much the old woman regrets not having her own children, despite living in material comfort. Second, she spends time with her nephew, the son of her younger sister, who melts her heart. Finally, she learns from one of her students (Hyōngt’ae) during an assigned speech about “my family” that he also has an atypically large number of brothers and sisters, but sees that he is a happy and good child. Although this drama exists at the level of script only, as it was never produced, the script leads readers through many small moments of family drama with a deeper story of family shame in the background, even though there are no particularly dramatic revelations. After a few scenes setting up Youngsook’s personality and lifestyle—in which we see her crabably arguing with her mother who calls from the countryside home, and shopping for various instant meals at the grocery store rather than cooking for a family—there is a flashback scene in which Youngsook, then nineteen, washes the family’s laundry in the yard while her younger brothers and sisters run amok and take her for granted. A bit later, alongside her mother in the kitchen, Youngsook asks hesitantly if the family finances are doing well and brings up the topic of college. Her mother snaps, “How many siblings do you have?” and then answers for her, “Six below you, six!” This is the end of the conversation and Youngsook “purses her lips.” (We

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<sup>12</sup> Although most Korean TV dramas are in the form of mini-series lasting a few months, with twelve to twenty-something episodes, or longer daily or weekend dramas of fifty or sixty to one hundred plus episodes lasting six to eight months, one-episode drama “specials” of an hour to an hour and a half also air frequently, especially on family holidays such as *Ch’usŏk* or *Sŏllal*.

learn that the aforementioned childless aunt pays Youngsook’s college tuition). The issue of excessive number of children is carried over into the next scene, in which Youngsook’s student is taunted by another student (Minsu) for being poor. In response, Hyōngt’ae says, “Minsu, I think you’re the one to be pitied.” Minsu answers, “Why? I have my own room, I have a computer, I have computer games, and . . . and . . .” Hyōngt’ae counters, “Have you played soccer with your brothers? Who do you make curry with? You play games alone all day, don’t you?” Other students identify Hyōngt’ae as the best soccer player in the class, and side with him when he is goaded into a fight with snobby, only-child Minsu. (Potential) viewers see Youngsook’s combined bitterness over her exhausting work as eldest daughter, and shame that her parents did not control their reproductive capacity—during an era when they were highly encouraged to do so, the 1960s and 1970s. But as the script proceeds we also are reminded repeatedly of the sadness of having no children and the anxiety of having only one lonely, selfish child.

With just a few pages of the script left to go, we catch Youngsook considering the recent events in her life and making a list of the pros and cons of having children. On the con side she lists “costs, time, noise, stress, and on and on.” On the pro side she writes “food, *well-being* . . . and not boring, and . . . happiness.” In the next scene she talks to a female co-worker who says that while she regrets not being able to take care of her children better (because she has to work), she never regrets having them. After a few more scenes involving Youngsook’s nieces, nephews and students charming her, her aunt passes away. In the penultimate scene, Youngsook attempts to seduce her oblivious husband, and when he refuses to tear himself away from the computer she throws a desk calendar at him, on which she has circled her fertile dates. As they lay in bed

Youngsook concedes that they will plan for two and not only one, and the credits roll. The readers/viewers are left not knowing whether Youngsook succeeds in becoming a mother or not, only that she now desires to become a mother. In her notes to the script, the author writes, “As Youngsook closed the lid on her difficult past, she started on a road not knowing if she would be able to achieve that greater happiness, but (at least) she was taking the first step on that road.” The scriptwriter begins her introductory notes to her script by recognizing that government policies are important, but it is important to recognize that each woman also has her own individual circumstances for not wanting children, and it is that “certain something” (*kũ muŏt*) that the author hopes to tackle, by showing “the meaning of children and the positive aspects of childbirth (*ch’ulsan*).”

The “certain something” that leads to not wanting to have children, and the “certain something” on the other side that will encourage women to have children, are understood here to be susceptible to intervention at the level of emotions and the senses. As the scriptwriter notes, policies only go so far—or perhaps this is a cop out, as policies are difficult to effect and costly. In attributing the low birthrate to a “certain something” that is different from woman to woman, there is a danger that a media discourse of understanding and sympathy for women’s “diverse different reasons for not having children” encourages Band-Aids in the form of emotional salves, without contributing to momentum to develop or expand family-friendly policies. In the drama, Youngsook’s main stated reason for not wanting children is simultaneously worthy of sympathy and illogical: she is still “tired” from raising her siblings. She performs this tiredness in her interactions with her mother and a younger sister, as well as with a wayward brother who returns

to the fold.<sup>13</sup> Viewers are intended to see and feel Youngsook’s exhaustion, extending their sympathy to her; and yet, the fact that twenty years have passed—half a lifetime—leads to suspicions that she is misremembering the past, in part because as a childless woman she has never really grown up, and is thus investing the past with overdetermined bitterness. The mothers of Youngsook’s students grumble under their breaths that she cannot completely understand their children or their own anxiety without having children herself, effectively insisting that her earlier period of caring is not enough like mothering, absent as it was of motherly love. Youngsook’s “certain something” (tiredness) is shown as understandable but misguided. Her other, evidently deeper, reason for not wanting children is harder to refute: she is ashamed of her parents for their reproductive excess during a period of national austerity. She snaps at her father that she “never wants to be a parent like him,” blaming him for not controlling family reproduction. She blames her mother less, but several times in the script expresses her hurt that her mother seems to favor her siblings with children, despite the fact that Youngsook once did so much caring labor within the family. Her parents are also depicted as sympathetic characters but misguided in other ways; they naturally wanted to have more children to help with the pig farm, but did not know when to stop. At one point Youngsook snaps at her father, “More pigs meant more profit; did you think more children would mean more profit too?!” Her parents are depicted as both exploitative parents and poor capitalists, unable to grasp the shift from an agrarian to a consumer economy. Youngsook’s shame is justified, but is mitigated by a call to moderation—recognizing belatedly the value of siblings, she can appreciate a crowded, bustling upbringing while also being more

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<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the episode we learn that the eldest brother of the “pig house” has run off and left his wife and children for months, but he returns suddenly near the end of the episode, sobbing that he had planned to commit suicide but could not do the deed in the end. His thoughts of children literally saved him.

moderate in her own reproduction, keeping in mind the deprivation too many siblings entails. Youngsook’s student Hyōngt’ae has too many siblings—his mother says shamefacedly when Youngsook notices her pregnancy that no one congratulates her anymore now that she has so many—but this is still a better predicament than having too few siblings and being a spoiled only child like Minsu. Appeals to Youngsook’s maternal potential help her overcome “tiredness” as an obstacle, and her shame keeps her in check, encouraging her to have “only one . . . or maybe two.”

Throughout Youngsook’s transformation, small events destabilize her “certain something” that stands in the way of her having children, and if we look closely we see that each small event is accompanied by a sensory trigger. One of these triggers is a smell (her father’s cigarettes) but the rest are touches; namely, the feeling of children’s hands and physical closeness. She comforts her students Hyōngt’ae and Minsu after their fistfight, finding Hyōngt’ae to be the psychologically more secure child not in spite of his many siblings, but because of them. When she looks after her nieces and nephews, she observes her husband’s pleasure as he cuddles with the children, and this comforting touch is also associated with a comforting smell and taste; her husband, who never bothers to cook for her, has cooked curry for the children. This scene directly alludes to Hyōngt’ae’s revelation of Minsu’s loneliness in an earlier scene (“Who do you make curry with?”). Finally, Youngsook takes her aunt’s hand in the hospital, and then in a later scene after the aunt has died, notices that her father no longer smells like cigarettes. He says that he quit smoking for her aunt—his sister—and only started smoking in the first place to cover up the smell of the pig farm. The smell of cigarettes first masks shame over rurality, and then the absence of this smell becomes a promise to guard health for the sake

of future generations. We “see” these experiences of touch, among other senses, restructuring Youngsook’s emotional identity as a non-reproductive citizen, enabling her to become reproductive.

Unlike the women in their late thirties and early forties I interviewed, who were deciding whether to have a second child, the protagonist of this never-produced drama came around to deciding to try for a first baby. In her list viewers see her make to reach a decision, the “pro” side includes not only an amorphous state of “happiness” but the sensory marker of “food” and resulting “well-being.” Without a child there is no reason to nourish oneself, care for oneself, or even enjoy the taste of food. While we see Youngsook reject reproduction outright early in the drama episode, by the end her senses are awakened and she is positioned to join the ranks of properly reproductive citizens. However, the drama’s implicit categorization of parenting as a sensory experience, membership in an affective community, and an opportunity for self-development also leaves open the possibility of “pushing back” against birthrate crisis discourse, even as the drama is meant to increase the birthrate. Since Youngsook’s long rejection of childbirth and child-rearing is attributed to a kind of sensory exhaustion (she lists “noise” and “stress” on her lists of cons to having a baby), her belated embrace of the sensory experiences associated with mothering does not signal a return to what she perceived as the excessive fertility of her parents. Just one child is enough to provide sufficient sensory experience to parents, but two children is the ideal because it will provide greater sensory experience for children. For the drama to have promoted more than two children as the ideal would have been unrealistic: although Hyōngt’ae benefits from multiple brothers and sisters, his mother is neither valorized nor vilified for her fertility. Many children are better than no children, but two children is still

best. In fact, in an “epilogue” as the credits roll, we “see” only child Minsu begging his mother for a brother as they walk home from school. His mother is literally overwhelmed by her child’s touch, as he clings to her and inadvertently yanks her skirt off. One child is enough for her but it is not enough for her child. A South Korea full of schoolteachers without children cannot sustain itself, but no one wants a South Korea full of pig farmers either.

VISUALIZE SUCCESS, TOUCH *HEALING*: SHAPING THE NATION THROUGH THE SENSORY

In this chapter I have explored the ways that mothers of young children in parenting classes or parent groups in South Korea use the language of “the sensory” to talk back to the national project of raising the birthrate, as well as connected this talk to public discourse. Women shifted attention from a physical lack (of “fresh” population) to abundance (of positive sensory experience). In the infant “Five Senses Development Class,” mothers learn about scientifically “proven” methods of fostering sensory awareness, in preparation for the longer-term goal of raising emotionally secure children. In the parents’ meeting for the Giraffe Preschool, parents discussed the benefits of raising children in tune with nature, with the aim of growing an empathetic and responsive community of individuals who would not necessarily be optimally “productive” citizens. I have also demonstrated the intensified arena of *t’aegyo* in twenty-first century South Korea, and its connection to concern over urban living as sensory deprivation for young Korean children. Even a television drama script written expressly to raise the birthrate shies away from the chaos of a large family, reinforcing the sensory benefits of “only two” children. Viewers of dramas such as *Twojine k’ün ōnni* are encouraged to “see” the sadness of a lack of children and the potential for success sensory investment provides. The importance of

touch—between mothers and children, and between children and nature—is also detailed in magazines and on screen as well as in public spaces such as the field sites described above. Mothers’ focus on sensory development as a pathway to national healing reveals changing ideals of success and productivity—though it does not ultimately wholly restructure definitions of success and productivity, as some at the Giraffe School would hope. I take up the issues of national healing and individual success through yet another sense, sound, in my next chapter on teenage desire, parental anxiety, and K-pop fandom.

### Chapter 3: Academic Sneaks, Pop Idols and Fans: School-Age South Koreans and *Hakpumo* (School Parents) “Sounding Off”

Suffering bodies, lamenting voices, rough sounds of speech all cue up identifiable personae, stereotypical members of the older generation who serve as personifications of a troubled Korean past. The voice, then, becomes of the medium through which not only bodily dispositions and sensations are linked to contextually emergent phonosonic practice, but also through which emitters of voice are situated within and aligned to a trans-contextual social universe of culturally meaningful identities.

—Nicholas Harkness  
“Anthropology at the Phonosonic Nexus”

Upbeat tempi and bright timbres had silenced the melancholic melodies that used to waft, along with clouds of cigarette smoke, through Myōng-dong’s teahouses and watering holes.

—John Lie  
K-pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia,  
and Economic Innovation In South Korea

If you guys continue this way, you’re going to live your entire lives being cheated by others until you die. In this society, there’s such a thing as rules. You have to live by them. Who do you think made these rules? Smart guys. Laws, the education system, the estate system, taxes, finance, the wage system—smart guys made them up to suit their tastes, to make their lives comfortable. For idiots like you, fools who think using your brains is a hassle, you’ll live your entire lives conned or endlessly injured by those smart guys, and in the end you’ll be defeated.

—Teacher Sōkho  
*Kongbuūi sin* (God of study, 2010)

In the previous chapter I explored mothers’ invocation of the senses to reject state prescriptions regarding childbirth and child-rearing, noting that the sense of touch in particular is invested with hopes of building emotional resilience in individual children, and by extension, “healing” the nation. In this chapter I turn to the *soundscapes* John Lie describes above as central to his

experience of returning to South Korea after decades away, and to the issue of “voice” that Nicholas Harkness associates with the “phonosonic practice” of “bodily dispositions and sensations” as well as a “trans-contextual social universe of culturally meaningful entities.” I consider the voice in terms of its meaning within K-pop for young K-pop idol hopefuls and their families, as well as the voice as mediator between heart and mind for those on the academic track. Beyond academics and pop music, I consider “the fan” in contemporary South Korea society as evidence of social investment in the sense of sound, as fans of pop idols both celebrate sound and add to the collective of sound with their own voices. Whereas the first chapter of this dissertation addressed sight as a metaphor for extended family relationships, and the second chapter examined mothers’ utilization of touch (in conjunction with other senses) as a means of healing individual children and the nation, this chapter investigates sound as a pivot point between school-age children’s and mothers’ expectations and desires.

I offer the third quote above, from a popular speech of a fictional teacher in a television drama, to illustrate certain cynical South Korean interpretations of the contemporary educational system. As anthropologist Jesook Song has written, South Korea’s rapid pace of development and globalization make it an ideal petri dish for studying problems of social alienation and inequality arising around the globe since the gradual and uneven spread of neoliberal logics (Song 2009). The changes in perceptions of the nature of academic ability and artistic ability, and their relationship to paths to success, are not specific to South Korea but do illustrate a particular intensification of anxiety surrounding imagined futures. Here I discuss changing ideas about academic ability and creative potential, concluding with a brief discussion of “the fan,” an ambivalent figure that has become intensified in public discourse as a response to unique social

phenomena in global South Korea. I begin with ethnographic vignettes of three school-age categories of possibility: the transgressive academic all-star, the conventional pop-idol-in-training, and the hybrid category of fan. I share with other Korea observers the observation that as the equal opportunity ideal the South Korean education system was founded on becomes increasingly elusive families, and “education manager mothers” in particular (*maenöjö ömma*, a relatively new maternal subjectivity delineated by Park 2006, 2012), must relentlessly search for new areas in which their children might be successful and happy. Although there are any number of future possibilities children might pursue, I argue that South Korea’s potent combination of a high-stakes education system, the recent investment in popular culture as a source of “soft culture power” for the nation<sup>1</sup>, and widespread internet sociality<sup>2</sup> result in an intensification of both desire and anxiety around certain select types of futures for the child. These three pervasive categories of possibility—the top university graduate, the creative artist, and the fan—are invested with different kinds of hope, intersecting in complex ways. Reversing decades (or arguably, centuries, if we consider the Chosön dynasty civil examination system<sup>3</sup>) of common knowledge about who should pursue which paths, in twenty-first century South Korea academic

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<sup>1</sup> The Korea Foundation, the major funder of Korea Studies projects overseas, has explicitly stated their goal of using the “soft power” of popular cultural products to promote a positive image abroad, particularly in countries perceived to have populations less likely to be interpellated by American cultural products (developing countries), and thus more receptive to South Korean products filling a gap in slick production values and cosmopolitan consumption. See Cho Chung-un, “Korea Foundation to Bolster “Soft Power” on Global Stage” *Korea Herald*, May 10, 2012. <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20120510001142&cpv=0>.

<sup>2</sup> South Korea’s early adoption of broadband high-speed Internet has meant a broad and deep online culture with its own peculiarities. Constant connectivity of youth has implications for fan activity (as fans can be continually in contact with one another and an idol or their agency), as well as the intensive Internet gaming for which South Korea is known. See a recent manuscript published on South Korean online culture: *South Korea’s Online Gaming Empire*, Dal Yong Jin. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> John Lie (2015), among others, has noted that while it is common for Koreans to trace their “education fever” back to the Chosön dynasty civil service exams, this parallel is problematic; the civil service exams were only available to the elite (hereditary *yangban* class).

success is becoming “transgressible,” subject to hacking, and creative pursuits are becoming conventional, a reversal I will soon explain.

#### IMAGINING OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

After a long, rambling interview in our favorite café, Minju, Minsook, Insook, and I grabbed “a quick meal” nearby of green dried radish soup with grilled mackerel, but these three were not the types to wolf down lunch, and after about thirty minutes “Kang” joined us. It was late September but the muggy, blazing summer heat had invaded again, and Kang flounced in and dramatically threw her handbag in a chair, collapsed in another chair and vigorously fanned herself. Since she was back in graduate school she had less time to spend around the neighborhood than her friends, but expressed interest in joining in for the next group interview. She asked when we were planning to see each other again, and Insook laughed and answered that she would be seeing me in a couple of hours, as I was coming to have an English conversation lesson with her and Minsook’s daughters. Kang quipped, “This is really ethnography, huh? You’re spending all day with these *ajumma!*” (Kang and I shared a mutual friend in the Chönbuk University anthropology department, and so she knew more about what anthropologists did all day than most of my interviewees).

Although it took considerable time throughout my fieldwork, tutoring children in exchange for interviews with their mothers gave me the opportunity to better see familial relationships play out. Minsook’s daughter was a tall, lanky girl in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when I met her, prone to excitable hand gestures and with a perpetually sun-kissed look. Insook’s daughter, in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of middle school, was in contrast a solidly built girl with a sleepy expression and pale

skin quick to flare into the common condition of “atopy.”<sup>4</sup> By the time I had made my way up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor Hyundai apartment the early afternoon heat had given way to a fierce windstorm. I had been tutoring the girls for about six months, and we were all feeling a bit of burnout, as the novelty of having a foreigner give them lessons had worn off and I had exhausted my most entertaining English-teaching resources. As we stabbed with our fruit forks at watermelon pieces on the plate Minsook had brought in, Minsook’s daughter suddenly perked up and asked me if I had heard of Justin Bieber, a Canadian teenage pop singer rapidly accumulating screaming teen and tween girl fans across the globe. Insook’s daughter rolled her eyes exaggeratedly and chimed in that she preferred Justin Timberlake (the somewhat older singer who had put in his time in a US boy band in the early 1990s). Bursting with excitement, Minsook’s daughter ran to get a print-out of lyrics to a song of Justin Bieber’s, and that was the rest of the English lesson. We had several more lessons like this, with the girls giving the English their full attention. Eventually Minsook’s daughter, who was more open about her pop culture obsessions, also shared with me lyrics and online videos of her favorite Korean pop acts.

Minsook was pleased that her daughter was focusing more on English because of her current pop star obsession (though she wished she would do the same for math, her weaker subject), but lamented the obsessive nature of this interest. She reportedly would play the same song over and over, laying around and singing as if in a trance. Her mother had to put strict limitations on her time online to prevent her from watching video after video of her latest

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<sup>4</sup> “Atopy” (atop’i) might be more naturally translated as “eczema” or “dermatitis” in English, and receives a similar amount of attention in Korean parenting magazines as food allergies have in North American magazines in the 2000s and 2010s. Very few Koreans I talked to said they knew anyone with food allergies, but were concerned about this skin condition among children and youth. Many speculated that it had to do with water and air pollution, and I saw advertisements for camps in the countryside for children with severe atopy. The community center I attended offered regular one-time classes for making homemade “atopy-alleviating” soap. One friend told me she felt so bad for babies with horribly itching skin that she feared having children herself.

beloved idol, and she seemed to have her cell phone confiscated at least half of the times I came for lessons. Insook’s mother had different but related complaints: her daughter was quieter and not as inclined to tell her mother what she was feeling, which meant fewer overt battles of will but more worry for her mother. She would write love letters to idols (never sent) and obsess over CDs and MP3 downloads she wasn’t allowed to buy. Insook’s mother laughed, not unsympathetically, telling us how her daughter had saved money from relatives at holidays for an expensive CD/DVD set, only to be disappointed in what she had spent her money on. Minsook similarly rolled her eyes over her daughter’s poring over the Bieber CD set she was finally allowed to purchase. Both mothers said they had learned through discussion with friends and media stories on youth culture that their daughters’ generation desired an unprecedented degree of “privacy” (using the Koreanized English word, *p’uraibŏsi*) and found great solace in music. Knowing these differences between their daughters’ generation and their own, they gritted their teeth and tried to be generous.

When I tutored Taehee’s daughter, a petite 4<sup>th</sup> grader in elementary school with long black hair and a feline quality to her face, we met in Taehee’s café and bakery branch, which had Korean pop music (“K-pop”) playing on a loop, as did most retail spaces in the city. The music was not especially loud and invasive, but Taehee’s daughter had a hard time focusing at points, and she would begin mouthing or singing softly the words of a song, her body seemingly moving of its own accord, going through a seated, subdued version of the motions to the dance that accompanies the song.<sup>5</sup> At a song’s chorus an arm would sometimes fly out exuberantly without

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<sup>5</sup> In recent years (late 2000s onward) the majority of Korean pop hits are dance music, a sea change from previous generations’ preference for slow, sad ballads. A great attraction of dance music is that each song has an accompanying dance. During my work as a volunteer at the Jeonju International Film Festival in 2010, the other

warning, and the girl would retract it quickly, smiling with a mixture of shyness and pride as my face registered amused surprise. Taehee told me that her daughter loves dance more than anything in the world, and is also quite good at it. Her love is popular dance and she dreams of becoming a pop star, but her mother says that while she is sending her to pop dance classes at a *hagwŏn* now, she is working on budgeting to send her to ongoing classes in *muyong* (traditional Korean dance), of which there are several *hagwŏn* in Chŏnju, due in no small part to Chŏnju’s increasing attention to its heritage as *yangban tosi* (Moon 2011) and claims to be “the most Korean city in Korea.”

Taehee’s daughter isn’t excited by *muyong*, but her mother is working on convincing her that if she can “find her talent” in Korean dance, she will have the option of going to a good university via their traditional dance department. If she decides not to go to university, *muyong* classes will at least give her poise if she tries to become a pop star. Taehee says that while her daughter is not a bad student at this point, she is not a particularly good student either, and seems resigned that her academic proclivities will probably not change. Her dance ability, on the other hand, is a wild card—it is impossible to look at her petite frame now and envision her as a career backup dancer or, perhaps, the next big star. But, her mother sighs, it is equally as impossible *not* to envision her dancing in the future, as she is so happy when she dances.

I identify two assumptions at work in the two vignettes described above: academic proclivity is fixed, and aspirations to pop stardom are increasingly conventional. However, a third ontological category slips in between the cracks, a category that is quite unfamiliar to

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volunteers (all university students in their early to mid 20s) spent a good portion of their downtime watching popular groups dancing online, and after practicing these dances in the privacy of their own homes, would often perform a song and its dance at karaoke (*noraebang*). Simply singing the song and not performing the accompanying dance was seen as inexcusably lazy, and rather uninteresting, as the song and dance are so tightly linked.

Minsook and Insook’s generation: the ambivalent value of fandom. The daughters of Minsook and Insook seem unlikely to become academic all-stars in the Korean school system, and their mothers are realistic about their abilities, even if sometimes exasperated by their lack of diligence in studying. At the same time, the girls are not interested in becoming pop stars, only in the active consumption of popular culture products that fall under the category of “fandom.” The girls, with their mothers’ help, are still searching for their areas of talent; as So Jin Park notes, this guided exploration is less “fun” and more stressful, as “it is more difficult for mothers to find their children’s talent than it is to make them study” (Park, S 2012, 129). The girls’ enthusiastic participation in fan culture is at times troubling to their mothers, but because of Minsook and Insook’s realism, is generally accepted as an activity that enriches their emotional lives.

“Fandom” is, as one writer of a popular magazine puts it, “a healthy and sincere outlet for kids’ erupting energy at life’s most pure time” and “a creative activity that produces different cultural values,” even if it has no tangible benefits in an individual’s academic or artistic life.<sup>6</sup> Most of the women I interviewed referred to the different degrees of fandom their daughters (and less often, sons) engaged in, particularly during late elementary school and middle school. I surmise that fandom activities engaged in by “good daughters” by the time they began high school were increasingly downplayed to parents, as energies were supposed to be poured into preparation for university entrance hurdles.

In contrast, Taehee’s young daughter’s activities had exceeded the realm of fandom and entered into the territory of artistic ability as potential future career path. I was surprised by Taehee’s resignation over her daughter’s academic trajectory given her young age (myself being

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<sup>6</sup> Nayoung Kim, “Kids Who Fall in Love with Stars.” *“She’s Mom” magazine* (February 02, 2011), 72–74.

a product of an Anglo-American, middle class upbringing that tends to insist, at least in theory, that the spark of academic interest and proclivity might ignite at nearly anytime within the ever-lengthening period of “youth”), and sympathized with her sense of excitement over the image of a happily dancing daughter in the future, despite her reservations. Sordid descriptions of the cutthroat nature of the entertainment industry in Korea, and the accompanying abuse and corruption that surrounds the young idols-in-training, circulate widely, and yet somewhere along the line aspirations to idol status have become as imaginable or more so than jumping from poor or average student to academic all-star in the competitive South Korean education system (Ho 2012, 475). This view of the university entrance exam system, in particular, as a limit to be transgressed, points to a deep societal distrust of the system.

What broader changes in South Korean society have led to this reversal in perceptions of possible futures? How is fame as a popular culture phenom<sup>7</sup> seen as more possible than success via movement up the ranks in school, a path to success that is an inherently “modern Korean” ideal? Korean social commentators have gone so far as to say that the success possible due to academic diligence and the social mobility this affords is *the* key component of “the miracle on the Han” of South Korean national development. In the remainder of this chapter I wish to explore the ways in which pop culture training and know-how is replacing education as the Korean miracle-maker, given that new transfigurations of the “Korean Wave” continue to be invested with hope from multiple sides. While South Korea remains one of the most credential-obsessed societies in the world, those credentials are increasingly viewed with suspicion, while

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<sup>7</sup> Paths to becoming an idol include success following training in an entertainment company, and/or the more twenty-first century route of fame via Internet video (the so-called *ōlkultchang*, or “best face” video clip).

the singing and dancing pop stars are deemed to be relatively transparent.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps there is an element of weariness over the vigilance required to ensure education equality, as Song suggests in a broad statement about public sentiment after the transition from an oppositional mode (*minjung*, the people, against the government) to civil society: “The radical ideals of collective social change have been displaced by the liberal pursuit of individual happiness”(Song 2012, 251). In contrast, the market decides which pop stars are valuable or useless, and there is recently a nationalist impulse as well; as Ho notes, “there has not been such a nationwide jubilation and excitement about having a new possibility for attaining fortune, global recognition and even national pride as K-pop has generated since the IMF bailout” (Ho 2012, 484). While some Koreans expressed pride when US President Obama held up the South Korean education system as a model for the United States in a spring 2014 speech, many more scoffed that he had no idea what he was talking about, and that the Korean school system on the whole was not deserving of such praise.

In addition to interviews and observations with mothers, I examine popular media representations of South Korean school-age trajectories through readings of the dramas *Kongbuŭi sin*, (God of study, KBS2 2010), *Tŭrim hai* (Dream high, KBS 2011), and to a lesser extent, *Ŭngdaphara 1997* (Answer me, 1997, tvN 2012), as well as discourse analysis of popular

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<sup>8</sup> While both the education industry (and with the dramatic rise of the private afterschool education sector in the last decade, it really is an “industry”) and pop culture industries are viewed as corrupt, a series of forged PhD degrees and plagiarized dissertations in the late 2000s set off a debate in Korean society about the nature of academia at all levels. Idol company managers and pop industry executives have lost public trust after a series of sexual assault scandals and other inhumane treatment reported in the media, but idols themselves are not expected to have impressive academic credentials, though they typically still go to university (and are generally allowed to graduate without having attended many, if any, classes). Academically inclined idols are reported about as atypical in the press, and being known as a “smart” idol may do more harm than good (as seen in the case of the artist known as “Tablo,” who was accused of faking a Stanford degree, which ultimately turned into a witch hunt involving his entire family). (See Shin in Choi and Maliangkay, 2014).

magazines and newspaper articles. In particular, I devote space to a discussion of the highly popular study guide based on *God of Study*. Despite irrefutable evidence that the entertainment industry is even more cutthroat than the university entrance exam and job market for university graduates, and despite prominent media attention to the ebbing of the “Korean Wave” of popular culture in overseas markets<sup>9</sup>, the unknown elements of South Korean pop culture’s future invest it with hope. In contrast, the education industry is anxiously unknowable rather than simply unknown, as university entrance exam formats and policies seem to undergo a dramatic overhaul each school year. As the labor market becomes more and more antithetical to stability and requiring of “flexibility” and “creativity” of its workers, the mother’s role in the family becomes that of *knowing* one’s child, discovering and nurturing talents creatively, and doing the emotional work necessary to maintain family relationships and minimize stress to the child. There are resonances here with earlier moments in Korean history, such as the early twentieth century, when the extended family came to be critiqued as an “outdated” obstacle to modernization. Instead, more intensive affective parent-child bonds were emphasized. This emotional work on the part of parents also involves knowing when and how to act on worries about activities that fall neither under academic study nor creative pursuits.

#### FANDOM AS AMBIVALENT CATEGORY

The magazine article I allude to above appeared in the February 2011 issue of the monthly women’s magazine “She’s Mom” (the magazine title is in English in the original), with the title of “Kids Who Fall in Love With Stars” (that month’s article in a column called, in English,

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<sup>9</sup> For an English media report see <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Showbiz/Story/A1Story20100304-202396.html>.

“She’s Mom Advice”). At the bottom of the first page there is a box set apart with a dictionary-like definition of the term “fandom.” The author Kim Nayoung begins the article with a vignette of a girl who doesn’t study “and sees her life as something to give to stars,” with the understandable result that her mother is at her wit’s end, trying tactics such as cutting off computer and TV use, but with no real solution to the underlying problem. However, the author argues that mothers need to attempt a more generous attitude to their daughters’ obsession with stars, understanding that fandom activities are “an opportunity for communication with other people . . . [and] a window for actively contributing one’s voice to the world.” She gives the example of Kim Yōna’s fans (the Olympic ice-skater known in the Western media as Yuna Kim, who has had endless advertising opportunities in South Korea since her 2010 Olympic gold medal). These fans act as “an independent social group,” working together to “help alienated classes on which society has turned its back”—in this case Kim Yōna’s fans gathered on the occasion of her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday to present her with a receipt of their collective donation to Pakistan flood victims as her birthday gift. Kim Yōna thanked her fans for the meaningful gift and promised to “work hard to become a person who works not just for her own happiness but for all of your [the fans’] happiness.” Kim N. also cites the political lobbying element of fan activities, bringing up the case of “Casiopeia” (internet username), fan of boyband TVXQ (Dongbangshinki), who learned of the unfair contract of her idol object of affection and rallied to “bring to light the problem of unfair contracts in the entertainment industry, collecting 180,000 signatures.” The examples in the article are meant to reassure mothers of star-smitten daughters that fandom activities can be a productive, positive force in the world, rather than the slothful obsession most mothers imagine them to be.

Near the end of the article Kim N. also appeals to mothers’ memories of their own youth:

Now you’re a mother, but didn’t you also once experience heart-beating excitement in your youth because of some star? If you remember that pure heart, try understanding the sincere and positive energy kids have for stars . . . .When I, who spent my youth in the 70s, recite the words to Fevers’ (Pibōsū) song “If my love leaves when will he return,” or sing along with Namgung Okpun’s “Love, love, who mentioned it?” those difficult math formulas, my school uniform, and my friends all come to mind as one ‘set.’ If, when my children are my age, Lee Hyori’s [pop singer name] voluptuous dances and 2PM’s [boy band name] raps, along with English grammar, all come to mind as a common denominator, they won’t remember their youths to be so empty. With a variety of stars glittering in our children’s hearts and heads, the reality will seem less dark. (Kim N. 2011, 74)

While today’s mothers of teenagers did not have nearly as active a fan culture to participate in during the pre-democratic transition 1970s, the author reminds readers that teen escapism is hardly a new phenomenon. While love for a star may not improve English or math test scores now, when these millennial children grow up and reflect on their pressure-cooker-like secondary school days, the songs and dances of stars they loved will flavor bitter memories with a touch of much-needed sweetness.

#### FANDOM AS SAFE, PURE LOVE

Another reassuring point about fandom as a focus of school-age energies is that it is an example of “pure first love,” a “sincere and positive outlet.” While the “first love” or “puppy love” of teens has carried emotional weight in most post-industrial societies that have developed popular

peer cultures operating outside of kinship networks<sup>10</sup>, and becomes the stuff of syrupy popular songs the world over, Korean popular culture is typically significantly less cynical than its Western counterparts and the pureness of unfulfilled first love is a pervasive theme. As in Japan, the all-consuming nature of the roles of both “student” and “teacher” lead to relatively greater permissiveness of teacher-student relationships than in the United States, for example (though this is changing as both the “pure motives” of teachers and “purity” of students come under suspicion). The pureness of this kind of first love in particular (which exceeds the United States trope of “crush on a teacher”) is explored in countless TV dramas, *manhwa* (comics/graphic novels), and films. Love for a teacher may even make for a more diligent student!<sup>11</sup> In the article Kim N. implicitly suggests “love for a star” as the next best thing after love for a teacher, because the risk of damage to sexual purity is negligible. In cases in which a teenager’s fandom activities may incline towards crossing the line of sexual propriety (through fan videos posted online, for example), Kim N. simply advocates active parental involvement: “In order to have balanced fandom activities of course a mother’s guidance is necessary. The most effective

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<sup>10</sup> A prerequisite of this kind of love is the possibility of romantic love not necessarily leading to marriage, and affective worlds in which youth feel supported by family and peers to “practice” love through emotional imagining. Debates over free love emerged alongside discussion of the role of women in the family and in the modern nation during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). While it is rare for young people to get married through arranged marriage (*chungmae kyōrhon*) anymore, and “love marriages” (*yōnae kyōrhon*) are the norm, several of my interviewees in their forties term their marriages “half arranged, half love” (*chungmae ban yōnae ban*), meaning that they were introduced via a professional matchmaker or family go-between, but subsequently fell in love while dating or early in their married life. Kwon (2005) traces the usage of the modern word-concept of “love” (*yōnae*) in the first decade of the colonial period in Korea, finding that youth beginning in the 1910s “had no place in the family or state. They had no place in the family because they, being students, had not yet created their own families...nor could they secure a stable existence in the country under the Japanese occupation” (201). Thus freed from the family, at least temporarily, through study in the metropole (for the elites) or labor for the Japanese empire, youth became individuals, which facilitated peer group formation and the practice of *yōnae*.

<sup>11</sup> Love for a teacher is usually, but not always, depicted in popular culture as between a female student and male teacher. The sexual purity of adolescent boys is neither protected nor assumed, and a series of incidents were reported in 2011 involving high school male students sexually harassing or even assaulting their female teachers. Student-teacher relationships are also depicted as heterosexual, though the oft-noted homosociality of Korean social life allows for depiction of male-male platonic love.

method is simply mother’s interest . . . I’m not saying follow your kids to concerts. Start by memorizing the names and characteristics of the stars your child likes, as a basis for discussion . . . That way you can be involved before your child goes down the wrong road.”

What is feared here is some combination of school absenteeism, Internet addiction and online bullying/harassment, and sexual activities with those in the entertainment world or with other fans.

#### FANDOM MITIGATES DARK REALITY

A third positive aspect of fandom listed is its ability to distract from dark reality. “Some youth right at this moment might well be getting through a difficult time because of a song by a star they like. Singers are the surgeons who provide the fastest remedies for youth pain.” No matter how many classes in “creativity-building” are added, and no matter how much the college entrance exam format is tweaked, high school kids have no choice but to live in a temporary state of exhaustion, with third-year students (*kosam*) automatically the most “pitiable” (*pulssanghada*) due to their nearly non-stop cramming for the entrance exam. This is the oft-referenced “entrance exam hell” (*ipsi chiok*). Individual students bear stress more or less well, and better or worse parental involvement and teacher support affect psychological wellbeing. However, despite all these variables, high school is inherently a “dark reality.” Kim N. urges mothers to allow a ray of light into the darkness by permitting children to choose a star. Pop stars are one icon of youth and in South Korea, studying and exam preparation are another: “since ‘study’ is not an icon of their choosing, the star operates outside of that realm where choice is not possible. . . . Stars are a fresh wind for heads aching from study, existing as a foundation to avoid doing nothing but

study and have a phase of rest.” In other words, stars represent both “choice” and “leisure,” two things in short supply among school-aged youth in South Korea. (Although some boys also actively consume idol-related products or follow stars’ personal and professional activities online, as gender roles become increasingly differentiated throughout middle school, and certainly by high school, boys are more likely to choose online video games as their preferred medium of release).

While fandom activities can function as a “ray of hope” for stressed youth, they only make up one part of any given student’s day in all but the most extreme cases. For the rest of the day it is the student’s job to study, or in the case of students who are working instead on an alternative pursuit, as Taehee’s daughter may decide to do, to log long hours practicing dance routines, singing, practicing instruments, or doing athletic training. Mothers searched for activities their children enjoyed (or at least did not hate) and for which they had a certain amount of aptitude, and invested in these potential futures in the form of special *hagwŏn* programs, tutors, and educational curriculum (self-study books). Depending on family resources and level of anxiety about the educational system, some mothers began investing in these areas in late elementary school (or even tried to push children in a few directions of development in early elementary school), but the majority I spoke with became most focused on this task in middle school, as around puberty children were thought to reveal their “true nature.” In-the-know parents of this newly “creative” generation of adolescents recognize fandom not as a dangerous preoccupation, but on the contrary, as an enticement to academic diligence, with the ultimate beauty lying in the fact that they don’t have to nag. A handsome young male star’s televised message to “study hard and follow your dreams,” for example, has a great deal of power:

“Watching my kids study harder with one word from a star, [I understand that] through fandom activities stars can also become an extension of myself.” What, then, if a child has aptitude neither for studying nor ideas for alternative routes to success? Under the rapid industrialization paradigm the answer was always to “study harder,” but when teenagers in millennial South Korea hear “study harder” from a star, is this the only message they absorb? After all, new strategies for success, whether imposed by parents or decided by children themselves, include knowing when to cut one’s losses and try another door.

#### TEMPORAL CONSIDERATIONS OF ACADEMIC ABILITY, CREATIVE ABILITY, AND FANDOM

In the next section I examine discursive constructions of two sides of the same coin: the perceived fixed nature of academic ability (either you’re a good student or you’re not) and the expectation of at least a degree of “flexibility” and “creativity” among this generation of children hypothetically opening the door to pop star success. Flexibility and creativity are social buzzwords widely applied to only non-academic, alternative forms of success. In a social climate in which the virtually unregulated growth of the private education sector has distorted earlier ideals of educational equality, fighting to move up academically is noteworthy behavior, and becoming a teen idol-in-training has become almost a conventional, though hardly ordinary, goal in twenty-first century South Korea. Taehee’s incredulity at her daughter’s aspirations to be a pop dancer were mixed equally with pride. Her daughter had interests outside of the academic track, but interests that were easy to imagine, and which fit in to a shifting South Korean career hierarchy. As the new millennium progresses, more and more young South Koreans list “dancer” or “singer” as their desired future career on career questionnaires, rather than the traditional

*anjŏngdoen* (“secure”) careers of lawyer, doctor or teacher (Park 1997). In addition, the temporality of pop star training has commonalities with everyday life in urbanized South Korea, whereas the temporality of the entrance exam does not. Of course, it is not really possible to generalize about the experiences of temporality of “ordinary Koreans”: are night workers, or online traders and merchants—not to mention the legion of Koreans employed as irregular (*pjŏnggyujik*) workers—“unordinary”? However, it can safely be said that millennial South Korea is a “fast” society, and scores of pop psychology books would agree.<sup>12</sup> Koreans and expats alike note South Korea’s unique “delivery culture,” in which food from most restaurants can be ordered at any hour of the day or night, and will reach the customer steaming hot, in a metal box carried by a young man (almost always) on a motor scooter. Koreans like to say they do everything *ppalli ppalli*, in a rush, though this has positive aspects (efficiency in customer service) and negative (shoddy construction of buildings, for example).

While the private after-school education industry has adjusted to keep pace with this temporality, such that students have immediate score reports for the constant quizzes and drills they undergo in the lead-up to exam hell, exam hell itself stretches on for the full year of the final year of high school, and even longer if the student fails to test into a university or department they are willing to attend and opts to become a “re-testing student” (*chaesusaeng*). The temporality of the third-year high school student and *chaesusaeng* is notably similar to that of those who aspire to those *anjŏngdoen* careers, who must lock themselves away in a *kosiwŏn* (test

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<sup>12</sup> Insook shook her head critically while describing a section in her daughter’s middle school social studies textbook, in which South Korea was heralded as a “delivery culture” (*paedal munhwa*) in the same paragraph as being defined once again as *danil minjok sahoe* (single-race society). Insook was equally incredulous at the insistence on pure blood lines in this textbook (when so many have been revised to include *damunhwa kajŏng* following the migrant bride phenomenon of the last ten years) and the glib way “delivery culture” and “single race” were made equivalent in importance in a social studies unit.

prep dormitory) for several years to prepare for the grueling teacher’s certification, civil service, or in some cases bar exams or med school admission exams. The trajectory of an idol-in-training has certain similarities, as the usual path to stardom was to join an idol management and training company following being scouted or emerging from the crowd victorious at a mass audition, and spend years of serious training before one’s “debut.”<sup>13</sup> However, there are also marked differences in the temporal lives of aspiring stars—children and teenagers can have their talent recognized and be scouted, or seek out audition opportunities, at any time (and not on one stress-filled day of the year, as with the university entrance exam!). Also, in South Korea’s highly “wired” environment, with nearly universal high-speed internet use, many youth dream of being discovered through non-traditional means, perhaps by posting a clip of a self-filmed cell phone video on an internet portal, showcasing their beauty and singing or dancing ability and becoming an internet sensation (the so-called *õlkultchang*, “best face”). In this way the temporality of stardom has much more in common with the popular post-1997-financial-crisis career choice of venture company start-up. In fact, this rhythm of being in the world has been lauded in public discourse in the new millennium as having the potential to save the nation. These youth in post-financial crisis South Korea were praised for their quick and non-linear thinking, their “potential

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<sup>13</sup> South Korea’s idol agency system is most similar to Japan’s *jimusho* (literally “office,” but meaning idol training agencies), which operate as vast machines processing large numbers of potential idols as their raw material. Both Japanese and South Korean talent agencies continue to take a large percentage of an idol’s earnings even after they have become a household name, as contracts are as long as ten or fifteen years, and this is seen as a debt owed by the idol for the many years of training provided. Scholars of the Japanese idol industry (Galbraith and Karlin 2012) have found that a quick calculation of the stipend an idol-in-training receives (not to mention costs of room and board), when multiplied by the great number of youth being “processed” at any given time, hardly create a profit when compared with the revenue generated by the few idols who do make it big. In the South Korean case, however, the trainees are not provided with nearly as generous a monthly stipend—indeed, there is precedent for small stipends in the amount paid to men performing their military service, who depending on rank receive the U.S. dollar equivalent of between \$70 and \$90 a month, well below the monthly minimum wage—and there have been exposes of the poor quality of lodgings for trainees, and even for those who have already become successful idols (for example, a documentary exposing the exhausting lives of girl group *Girls’ Generation* led to a public outcry over the exploitative nature of the industry).

to survive the challenges of continuously changing times,” with their “very bodies [becoming] subject to the autonomous terrain of self-governance” (Song 2007, 333). Venture companies and the entertainment industry are both volatile machines, with great potential risks and rewards, and creative youth are the most efficient fuel. Song notes elsewhere (2009b) that the venture companies, despite their meteoric rise, did not ultimately come to replace the conglomerates (*chaebŏl*), but instead the *chaebŏl* took up the venture companies’ prioritization of flexibility, making a far greater number of their employees contract workers without benefits. Likewise, idol agencies promise to make stars, all the while increasing competition as a virtue and placing the financial burden of training on families (in the form of these new “pop academies”).

#### TO BECOME A “GOD OF STUDY,” OR TO “DREAM HIGH” AT ART SCHOOL?

I now turn to a brief examination of two “high school TV dramas,” one about a regular high school and one about an arts school (not traditional arts, but specifically aimed at aspiring pop idols). KBS2’s *God of Study* aired from early January until late February 2010, and consisted of sixteen seventy-minute episodes. The show became the top-rated Monday/Tuesday show during its broadcast, and after it was through airing the network capitalized on its success by producing a series of “study guides” highlighting study methods used on the show. The plot of *God of Study* centers around five under-performing high school students, taken under the tutelage of a teacher who pledges to get them into South Korea’s top university (the fictional Ch’ŏnha University, literally the university of “all under heaven” or “the whole world,” clearly meant to symbolize Seoul National University). In *God of Study* the students transcend their status by catapulting into the ranks of the academic elite, and the program also promotes the “transgressive” message

that going to college doesn't necessarily matter, but getting into the top school is a form of revenge in a credential-obsessed society such as South Korea.

KBS2 broadcast *Dream High* exactly one year later, from early January to late February 2011. While *God of Study* had been popular with mothers and their teenage children, *Dream High* was more of a targeted “teen drama” (only one of my interviewees reported watching it with her daughter) and had strong but not particularly high ratings. *Dream High* begins as a rather typical high school story, in which talented kids at Kirin Arts High School alternately form friendships/relationships and compete with one another. (Despite overlapping temporally with the American high school musical sitcom *Glee*, the show's premise has more in common with the film *Fame* and others in that genre). The drama takes a dark turn, however, when a storyline involving underage sexual abuse and other kinds of exploitation in the music industry is emphasized. The abused member of the class cannot keep up in the competitive atmosphere of the arts school and plagiarizes a song, beginning a descent into alienation and increasingly desperate attempts to stay in the game. Despite the immature and back-stabbing behavior that landed her in this situation, her classmates and teachers rally behind her and stand up to the corrupt entertainment company. They lose the evil music execs' sponsorship but retain their pride, a decision that later enables them to achieve success via an alternative route.

The differences and similarities between these two youth success narratives offer a glimpse of dominant discourses at work in social imaginings of artistic or academic talent. Both dramas begin with talented students with problems: the five smart students in *God of Study* underperform because of poverty at home, lack of emotional support at home, or a combination of the two. The six students showcased in *Dream High* have similar problems preventing them

from achieving artistic success. Both dramas also begin with a teacher on a mission: the music teacher in *Dream High* is given the ultimatum that he will be fired if he doesn't get three more students to come to Kirin Arts School, and once he has recruited them he takes on the burden of making a class of “problem students” into top national idols. The lawyer in *God of Study* charged with dissolving an underperforming high school makes the discovery that its closure would enable a company that ruined his career to profit through land re-development. He requests a year's time to make the failing school into an elite school, promising to get five students accepted to Ch'ŏnha University. The lawyer, like the music teacher, initially has his own self-interest at heart, but the vulnerable high school students at the core of the mission motivate the authority figures to take their trusted positions of “teacher” seriously, in the process accessing raw, as-yet unresolved emotions from their own childhoods, the result of adult betrayal and society's low expectations of their success.<sup>14</sup> The lawyer-turned-teacher in effect proves the value of human capital formation over the shady manipulations of financialized capital (in the form of the company intending to re-develop the land the school sits on).

It is with the vulnerable teens and fallible-but-good-hearted teachers that the similarities between depictions of the star-making school and academic elite-making school stop. The arts students are training to become idols because of their inherent talent, and also to avoid the

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<sup>14</sup> The filmic trope of cynical (or otherwise broken-by-society) teacher helping students who are Others vis-à-vis accepted categories of social belonging, and helping themselves to finally be well-adjusted, happy adults in the process, is ubiquitous in other cultural contexts as well. In the US it is often the figure of benevolent but personally unfulfilled white teachers (formally or informally) taking on the task of getting through to tough black (or other non-white) students and providing opportunities for them. Since South Korea does not have the same history of racial heterogeneity—though it must be noted that recently there are a few films about benevolent Koreans helping “ethnic others” such as migrant brides from Southeast Asia and manual laborers from South Asia—the students made into Others come from non-normative families. Four of the students in these two youth dramas come from economically disadvantaged families (three urban and one rural) made up of only a single mother, grandmother, or deadbeat single father. Two of the students are fat, a symptom of parental negligence. And two male students come from families of the opposite extreme, one with a cold and opportunistic big-business *chaebŏl* father, the other with a cold and opportunistic politician father.

soulless ordinariness of study for the university entrance exam. In *Dream High*, the students are threatened by the prospect of being left to rot in the “academic classroom” if they do not work hard to perfect their singing and dancing. In one scene in an early episode, a visitor to the school is shocked to find desperate messages carved into desks in the academic classroom (“My life is over” and “I still want to sing”). Preparing for the entrance exam is clearly second-best here, a last resort for the untalented. In *God of Study*, however, the students are not depicted as inherently of superior intelligence; the message rather is that *anyone* can get into Ch’ŏnha University if they work hard enough. The lawyer-turned-teacher swears by “study secrets” that will turn studying hard into studying smart. As the lawyer makes his rounds around the low-level high school to recruit students for his “special Ch’ŏnha University study class” he is greeted with jeers from under-performing students. He knocks playfully on a boy’s head and proclaims, “Just as suspected: empty. All the more reason to join the study class—it is better to be a blank slate.” The underprivileged students in *God of Study* are transgressing social expectations by studying to get into Ch’ŏnha University, and their fly-by-night teacher does not hold up the education system as something that can help the wayward students, but instead believes South Korea’s educational system to be deeply broken and only views it in cynical terms. In a speech that is supposed to be reminiscent of the “O Captain My Captain” scene in the 1989 Hollywood film *Dead Poet’s Society* (a runaway hit in South Korea), the teacher declares that by not trying the students are dooming themselves to a life of serving and being looked down on by others. The long-term teachers at the school are incredulous at the lawyer’s arrogance, and the students are not suitably impressed. Yet, the minimum of five students required to enroll in order for the class to go

forward show up, because all have nagging, as-yet unvoiced suspicions that something is wrong with the system and there must be some logical way out of it.

In short, the narrative of academic success in millennial South Korea is about cracking the code, uncovering the secrets of study, and beating the system, whereas that of pop idol success is about tapping into inherent talent and creativity. While it is certainly true that the successful idol is not the result of true ability, but created through clever marketing around their “look” and personality, there is the general presumption that there is some underlying talent there that can be augmented (through training, or through image manipulation or even plastic surgery to get the “look” right).<sup>15</sup> By contrast, academic success has become smoke in mirrors. Academic success and pop idol success as potential futures have been entirely inverted since the high-growth era of the 1980s and 1990s, when academic success was a natural outgrowth of innate ability developed through hard-work (or at least was popularly thought of as such). Artistic ability was broadly depicted as residing in the chosen few, but most easily located in the children

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<sup>15</sup> Both Galbraith and Karlin (2012) and Lukacs (2010) have written about the unique features of the pop idol universe in Japan, in which the tarento are ironically famous for *not being* talented, but rather being endlessly malleable, commodifiable, and above all, easily identified with by the average consumer (who is also generally not a talented singer, dancer or actor). These Japanese tarento are truly idols rather than pop stars, as they are icons before they are performers. Galbraith and Karlin note (in their introduction to a volume on Japanese celebrity) the intertextuality of Japan *tarento*/idols: “Due to their sustained exposure, across genres and platforms of performance, they cannot help but appear as themselves in a drama or other fictional context; the perception is that they are not playing characters so much as playing themselves. As a result, the real world and the onscreen world cease to be different, and instead a deeply intertextual form of televisual pleasure is created between the performer and audience” (11). Lukacs comments that “the growing number of actors without acting talent dates back to the rupture between the film and the television industries in Japan. Indeed, it was at this point that smart marketing and overexposure to viewers were institutionalized as practices that could compensate for lack of talent” (45). In South Korea there is no such rupture between film and television, with actors freely moving between the two mediums. Though some dismiss the recent slew of “idol actors” appearing in dramas, idols have successfully appeared in serious film as well. This indicates that the South Korean entertainment landscape is beginning to resemble Hong Kong’s (with many top stars filling the dual roles of actor and pop singer) more than Japan’s landscape of self-referentiality. There is also no cult of “no-talent idols” in South Korea—an idol must be good at *something*, even if they can’t pull off singing and dancing equally well.

of the wealthy who could afford dance and music lessons.<sup>16</sup> With the expansion of the private education market, however, gaming the system to climb the ladder of academic success takes considerable resources, whereas “getting scouted” at random is still an imaginable possibility for South Korean pop idol hopefuls who cannot afford to attend pricey “pop dance” academies.<sup>17</sup>

Earlier I gave the examples of Minsook and Insook’s daughters, who are neither academic all-stars nor serious pop idol hopefuls, but instead occupy a kind of third space as what can be called “prosumers,” producing new cultural products in their acts of consumption. In a new economy in which creativity is prized and enterprising individuals can sell their crafts and inventions through one of many “online shopping malls,” this “prosumption” could translate into future employability—but then again, it might not. I also told the story of Taehee’s daughter, who dreams of dancing on the concert stage. What are the dangers, then, for children who perform well academically? Minju spoke with particular anxiety about her eldest son, in the sixth grade of elementary school at the time of our interviews. “What if it turns out that I don’t know my own son?” As her husband spends long weeks and months away in China on business, Minju said that she often felt like a single mother, at least in terms of day-to-day household operations. There is a sizeable gap in academic achievement between Minju’s two sons, ages ten and twelve. Her eldest son excels in all subjects, and seems especially suited for the sciences, although he

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<sup>16</sup> It should be specified that as Western music became increasingly associated with the elite or at the very least the emerging middle class, Korean instruments and music became associated with poverty and backwardness during rapid industrialization, and have only recently experienced a revival.

<sup>17</sup> Dreams of getting scouted or capturing national attention through televised audition have only become more tangible since a proliferation of shows such as “Korea’s Got Talent.” While the most conventionally attractive, talented but not terribly interesting singers tend to win these contests, being more talented but quirkier will often gain contestants a rank of second, third or fourth place, which is often the ticket to getting a major record deal. In 2011, a young homeless man in his early twenties named Sung-Bong Choi won second place on “Korea’s Got Talent” singing opera arias. This singer had grown up on the street after being abandoned at age three, and although he attended an arts high school, wasn’t able to pay the fees to actually take voice lessons. Many reported being inspired by Choi’s teaching himself to sing through searching for and imitating clips of famous opera singers online.

also enjoys speaking English and studying Chinese characters, the latter a skill that makes him both more erudite in older Korean texts and also positioned to learn modern Chinese. He very clearly feels himself to be on the academic track, emphasizing that he enjoys the sense of accomplishment that comes with acing a test, but admits that his mother’s expectations make him tired. Many of the times I visited the apartment for tutoring he sighed and complained/bragged that he had been up past midnight studying. Minju knew that her expectations made him tired, and often apologized to her son, imploring him to keep studying hard. The structure of the South Korean education system is such that there is little time for rest or regrouping, as even summer and winter breaks are expected to be taken up with school homework and extra work at *hagwŏn*. Minju’s eldest son was about to enter the relatively more intense atmosphere of junior high school. This stress only intensifies as junior high school progresses and leads into preparation for the university entrance exam, but Minju said she tried to tell her son, “Just a little more for now,” creating a psychological space for rest in his mind even as no such break existed in reality.

Minju’s second son, in contrast, exhibited developmental delays from an early age, speaking late and having a very difficult time with learning to read and write in Korean, let alone succeed in English classes. He and his brother’s ability were unequal enough that he was relegated to sitting on the sidelines while I tutored his brother, to “just absorb as much as he could.” He was an affectionate child and thoughtful and caring towards others, but was limited in social interaction at school or *hagwŏn* because of a severe stutter. Minju traveled to her hometown of Kwangju each week to visit a language pathology specialist to work with this son. It was clear that she had invested a great deal of emotional energy as well as significant financial

resources into fixing the younger brother’s speech problem and helping him find a path that would enable him to be successful in the future (she and her husband talked about sending him to a “master school,” a new type of trade high school based loosely—too loosely, in Minju’s assessment—on public schools in Europe in which students complete apprenticeships to prepare for a trade rather than study for university admission). But now that her eldest was approaching junior high school her anxiety about him had intensified to match or surpass the worry about her youngest son. She felt like she had neglected him in the ongoing search for solutions for his brother, and she felt that there was a greater danger in “not knowing,” on an emotional level, this more academically inclined son. The concern that came up frequently in my discussions with Minju was not whether he could beat out the competition to beat the system, but whether he would have the energy or creativity left at the end of the battle to later “break the system.” It is commonly said by Koreans that the first year of high school is when kids are at their most creative, as by the time they get to the end of high school they are simply memorization machines for the college entrance exam. Many of the women I interviewed had concerns that the onset of “memorization machine syndrome” was creeping ever younger as competition became more intense.

If the education system isn’t flexible enough to allow academic mobility for students (such that a poor or middling student, after a certain age, has little chance of becoming a good student), then the pot of gold at the end has also been emptied of value. Whereas for previous generations studying hard was a means to an end, with that end understood to be subject to manipulation by the successful individual, now studying has become “total war,” limiting its soldiers to still more war even after achieving victory (Cho 1995). This is the quintessential

neoliberal condition, which Cherniavsky describes evocatively as “a specific resolution to the duplicity of the modern nation-state, constituted in the double-imperative to advance the public good and to secure private property in its myriad and proliferating forms,” but which ultimately chooses profit (Cherniavsky 2009, 4). (Hence, the *hagwŏn*, also discussed in terms of *sagyoyuk munje*, or private education problem). Getting into a top university and shedding one’s subpar academic identity, fixed as early as elementary school, is transgressive behavior. But for children like Minju’s eldest son, who have always been good students, the transgression may occur later, when they cannot establish the kind of career deemed acceptable for a top university graduate and have to make something livable out of second-best.

The TV drama *God of Study* explores what it would mean to engage kids in a study battle that monopolizes only their minds and not their hearts, leaving room (*yŏyu*) at the end for rewarding adult lives. We find parallels in Arai’s discussion of “love” and “heart” in the Japanese educational context. Arai argues that discourses of love/heart “that have (re)emerged so strongly in the recessionary context of Japan are vehicles for subjectification ‘by other means’” (Arai 2013, 177). The takeaway message of *God of Study* is that you *can* get through the grueling university entrance process without sacrificing your heart. This is a stark departure from the traditional Korean Confucian model of study (or at least the contemporary reimagining of it), which was supposed to engage the whole, morally virtuous scholar. But the *God of Study* methods are not only a departure from the holistic model of fabled Confucian scholars of yore, but also an antithesis to the use-you-up-and-spit-you-out neoliberal ethos. *God of Study*’s lawyer-cum-teacher advocates a kind of utilitarian humanism. Open your mind to study, but don’t let it consume your heart. The heart’s role is to dream, so that the mind has a reason to study. One’s

heart (as the locus of dreams and desires) must be free to roam, but one’s mind and body are a team in the study battle. In an early episode of *God of Study* an eccentric old “study coach” is called in to play “math ping-pong” with the Ch’õnha University prep class. This involves serving square roots to students, who must give the correct answer in order to hit the ball back. Numbers flash across the screen video-game style, complete with bloopers and bleeps. The coach urges the students not to think but just do, to just “feel with your body.”

This kind of academic labor appears quite different when compared to the disciplining required of idols in training depicted on television. Unlike the successful Korean student, the successful Korean idol has not traditionally been expected to be a well-rounded, moral individual. Though the figure of the “idol” is relatively new, traditionally Korean musicians and other kinds of entertainers and performers were not from upper-class *yangban* backgrounds. Several popular and critically acclaimed Korean films attempt to portray the lives of performers of traditional arts, with varying degrees of realism: the poor family of *p’ansori* performers wanders the Korean countryside searching for opportunities to perform in exchange for food and lodging in Im Kwon-Taek’s *Sõp’yõnje* (1993), and Chosõn dynasty clowns attempt to court the king’s favor in Lee Jun-ik’s *Wangũi namja* (The king and the clown, 2005). However, during the era of high-speed development, academic study became a target of equalization policies and Western arts education (piano, violin lessons) became the domain of the children of the wealthy, turning the traditional relationship on its head. Now at the turn of the millennium the private education industry’s unfettered growth has inverted the relationship once again (at least in conceptual terms; the spread of “pop *hagwõn*” to meet social demand for this new field of possibility is quickly putting it out of financial reach for many). As shown in the drama *Dream High*, those

kids on the idol path must train with their bodies and hearts, but their minds are free. When they reach the end of their shelf lives as idols they can embark on other endeavors.<sup>18</sup> Well-rounded high-profile pop stars exist, but with the intense training schedule required before an idol debuts as part of a group or a solo artist, most on this path miss significant amounts of school, and later must apply for special consideration for admission from universities. People I talked to complained about young celebrities, from barely C-list nearly-no-names to major stars, for attending university but being too busy with stardom to go to classes, but still somehow graduating. However, the most severe mockery was reserved for the universities themselves, which in South Korea (as in most of East Asia) are notoriously difficult to gain admission to but easier to coast through once matriculated. The mothers of high school and university students I talked to emphasized, though, that kids these days worked very hard in university, drawing a contrast with university students of their own generation, who played and dated through university and cut classes to participate in widespread social demonstrations (*demo*) against the dictatorship. The difference was that university students in Korea in the twenty-first century don't study in their majors, but relentlessly add to their “specs,”<sup>19</sup> always adding value to themselves with extra English classes, various business classes, and job market prep and networking activities. The university idols were mocked for not being so bright, and there was sometimes resentment expressed that they were probably admitted into high-ranking schools

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<sup>18</sup> A common trajectory for idols is to debut as a member of a boy or girl group, eventually splitting off to forge a solo career when the group has lost its novelty. As elsewhere, pop stardom is about marketable assets, and youth is a particularly valuable asset. However, idol groups that persist longer than the norm are said to be able to do so because of considerable talent. (Korea's longest-existing idol group, Shinhwa, formed in 1998. Though the members are all in their thirties now, and have received sporadic criticism for being too old for the business, they continuously and publicly improve their dancing, and write many of their own songs).

<sup>19</sup> “Specs” can be defined as all of those skills and attributes that should be accumulated to list on a resume to submit to a potential workplace or matchmaking agency.

under special circumstances (including monetary donation to their school), but there was also understanding of their desire to network and gain skills outside of the star industry through university attendance. Idols thus symbolize the new “creative citizen” in South Korea, pouring their hearts into their work, their minds always drifting ahead to the next move, calculating pathways to future success.

What are the societal implications of teen idolhood becoming a conventional desire, and academic improvement ever more shrouded in mystery (such that books on “study secrets” become bestsellers)? The danger here is that as young Koreans increasingly opt out of study for study’s sake<sup>20</sup> and seek a new up-and-coming area of possibility, often with parental encouragement, the new horizon of possibility also becomes colonized, eventually becoming as rigid as the academic path that was avoided. There are early signs in the entertainment industry of the need to break the system. Young idols have begun publicly questioning the “slave-like” conditions of their contracts with their management companies, and some have formed their own companies or simply become their own managers. Just as the unconventional high school teacher in *God of Study* questions the prevailing college entrance system, the teachers at Kirin Arts School (in *Dream High*) stand up to abuses in the corrupt management company contracting with the school. Yet, despite the sinister portrayal of sexual predation on creative youth, standing up

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, such a pure conceptualization of “study for study’s sake” has most likely never existed, as education is always linked with class distinction if not actual social mobility; Seth has noted the dissonance manifested in “concern for uniformity of standards and opportunity while being preoccupied with academic ranking” (Seth 2012, 27). The constant call for universal educational opportunity signals both an understanding of education as a driving force in social mobility and recognition of education as a fundamental human right, in which study is a key element in the pursuit of happiness. Preoccupation with academic ranking, on the other hand, indicates widespread awareness that the system is not equal, that studying doesn’t necessarily produce happiness, and that happiness is not necessarily linked with security.

to a few wicked adults within a system is still seen as more of a navigable imaginary than the inhuman face of the entrance exam, a matrix of unknowability.

#### WHY BE A SUCCESS LATER WHEN YOU CAN BE A FAN NOW?

If the heart floats free for diligent university hopefuls per *God of Study*'s instructions, and the mind projects forward for creative trainees, both acting as placeholders, let us return to the figure of the “fan” for a moment. The fan is most certainly not outside of capital or the dominant neoliberal logics of South Korean society, but in their most fervent practices fans might be said to escape the academic transgressor/creative strategist binary. Returning to the notion of academic striving as temporally “old-fashioned” in a fast-moving society, and pop star aspirations as more in-line with a millennial South Korean temporality, I have suggested that these differences in perceived temporality are powerful motivators for making “insecure” paths such as that of entertainer desirable for school-age students and their families trying to game the system. However, whether one suffers through a year or even years (as *chaesusaeng*) of exam hell, or is discovered via Youtube video and becomes a star virtually overnight, the commonality is that there is temporal closure to these pursuits. In the case of the dramas discussed, the students studying in the special Ch’õnha University class in *God of Study* must either resolve their heart/mind split by achieving their stated goal of going to this prestigious university—as three out of five of the students do—or else they must render the split anew by choosing the alternative of creative pursuit instead, propelling their minds ahead as they throw their hearts into

art, as two students do.<sup>21</sup> The students in *Dream High* all achieve closure by “making it” in the entertainment industry to some degree. This is where “fandom” activities are distinctive: although (as the writer of the advice column reassures mothers) fandom activities will naturally diminish in frequency and intensity as daughters move towards young adulthood, in the fans’ minds there is no end to fan activity. One does not “make it” as a fan, except insofar as affective ties constitute success (a returned letter from an idol, or idols’ words of address to their fans at concerts and gatherings, for example).

A drama that became a cult hit, *Answer Me, 1997* (2012), played with the figure of the fan and its meaning in millennial South Korean society. The show garnered unprecedented ratings for a cable program, and while it was popular across generations, it found its most passionate viewers among Koreans in their early thirties, who would have been in high school in 1997, the year in which the events of the drama take place. While the social upset following the 1997 financial crisis is referenced in passing, the show revolves around high school friends who are largely unaware of broader social forces, spending their days obsessing over stars, developing feelings for one another, and imagining their futures. The two girls in the group are active members of fan groups for boy bands, and their friendship almost comes to an end when they end up in fan clubs for rival groups. The lead character, when asked what she will do with her life in light of her poor grades, only talks of “becoming Tony’s wife” (Tony is a singer in the idol group she supports; this is not a fictionalization, as Tony Ahn was a singer in one of most

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<sup>21</sup> It is notable that the students who do not go on to university choose creative pursuits (pop dance) as an alternative; none of the characters decide to enter a trade or take over the family restaurant. The male student who chooses pop pursuits does not apply to the elite university in the first place, and the female student is rejected; it is not entirely clear what the female student is left having decided to do by the end of the drama, but given that the actress playing this role was the token high-profile idol (Ji-yeon from the girl group T-ara), her pop proclivities are in a way already presumed.

popular real-life boy bands of the 1990s in South Korea, H.O.T.<sup>22</sup>), much to her father’s dismay. Yet, she is able to secure a spot in university through winning a writing contest—she is persuaded to enter by her teacher, who happens across her over-the-top fan fiction and recognizes greater talent under the surface. Certain scenes in the drama portray the lead character as what has come to be known as a *sasaeng* fan, a fan who is obsessively concerned with her idol-of-affection’s private life (*sasaenghwal*) and whose fan activities extend to stalking and other extreme behaviors. After camping out outside of Tony’s house on several occasions, our lead finally writes a placard declaring her love in her own blood. She is proud of her display of commitment, and only realizes later that she has shocked even the most ardent of her fellow fans, and the school hallways buzz with rumors about her crazy fan behavior. As there were frequent media accounts throughout 2012 of even more extreme *sasaeng* fan behavior in real life, the drama’s portrayal of an otherwise likeable high school girl engaging in disturbing fan activities drew online criticism from some viewers, who worried that the show was glorifying (or at least normalizing) the behavior. However, the heroine’s realization that her own fan behavior is excessive is presented as an important turning point, after which she tones down her fan activity and finds an outlet through writing. Later episodes of the show, set in the present (2012), playfully engage the idea of the “forever fan,” as several women live productive lives as workers and/or mothers while still going to boy band concerts, buying merchandise, and acting as fan

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<sup>22</sup> Part of *Answer Me 1997*’s appeal was the endless stream of pop culture references, both past (1990s, the dawn of boy and girl bands and mass fan culture) and present. In addition to featuring cameos by H.O.T. singer Tony Ahn, one of the gang of friends is none other than the former singer from H.O.T.’s rival band, Sechs Kies, Eun Ji-won. There are literally dozens of cameos by other former and present pop stars. In addition, female lead Jung Eun-ji is primarily known as an idol in the girl group A Pink, male lead Seo In-guk was a winner of *Superstar K* (a reality show similar to “American Idol”), and another member of the circle of friends, Lee Ho-won (stage name Hoya) is a rapper and singer in the boy band Infinite.

club organizers or moderators of online fan sites. Passion and interest are still there, but the all-or-nothing mentality is gone.

As South Korea begins the second decade of the twenty-first century, the difficult decades of the postwar period and industrialization, and more recently the financial crisis at the turn of the millennium, remain as specters. Persistent challenges to entrenched academic hierarchy may bring society closer to the widespread educational egalitarianism that has long been a goal, but education equality advocates are concerned that “gaming the system” and voicing challenges also requires considerable resources. Moreover, the larger problem of high unemployment rates for university graduates remains untouched. Searching for new vistas to develop creative capital, artistically inclined children and their parents flock to dance academies, but how far can the “Korean Wave” expand to incorporate them? Perhaps the fan, expecting nothing from society but diffuse love, producing only to consume, links minds and hearts in ways that demand further exploration. All across East Asia (as well as farther afield), unemployment and underemployment is a growing problem for university graduates, and the competitive nature of the job market means that competition begins earlier, with university entrance preparation (which may begin as early as middle school or even elementary school). The last decade has seen education migration increasing personal contacts across the Asian region: from Korean mothers traveling to Singapore or the Philippines with their children for English-language education, to Chinese students attending Korean universities, or Korean students attending Chinese universities. Fandom plays not a small role in both domestic and transnational contexts. While Western research on fan activities has focused on “fan resistance,” “East Asian scholars propose the concept of ‘intimacy,’ which ‘impels individuals to act in ways

that go beyond the bounds of self to seek greater communion with the object of their adoration” (Chin 2007, 213). This has connections with Mazarella’s description of affect, in which affect resonates between a “register of affective, embodied intensity” and a “register of symbolic mediation and discursive elaboration” (Mazarella 2009, 293). Fandom connects these embodied practices and symbols effectively.

The three high school dramas discussed in this chapter, alongside my interviewees’ stories about navigating children’s trajectories, highlight the importance not only of the “affective turn” and considering love and intimacy in conceptualizations of fandom and youth; they also bring to the fore the workings of hope, which Miyazaki argues “lies in the reorientation of knowledge” (Miyazaki 2003, 143). While the liberatory potential of fandom has perhaps been exaggerated in some cultural studies scholarship, anthropologists on the other hand have only quite recently taken seriously the complicated possibilities of diverse fan practices in late capitalism. Miyazaki, an anthropologist of finance and hope in Japan, considers the hopes and dreams of his informant, a middle-aged Japanese securities trader, who simultaneously cynically and enthusiastically participates in global capitalism. He is always fully committed, even as he is always looking ahead: “his commitment to work in the present was intimately tied to his hope for an exit from that work in the future” (Miyazaki 2003, 162). Although fans have been criticized for living in fantasy and not realistically planning for the future—in South Korea and elsewhere—the portrayal of the teenage fan in *Answer Me, 1997* is that of a girl who lives in the present but who knows and hopes that she will live differently in the future, even if the path is not yet clear. There is no end point to fandom, but there is a reorientation of knowledge, and with it, value.

## ASK A STUDY IDOL: TRANSLATING SUCCESS

The drama *God of Study*'s power to tap into national anxieties about the Korean education system is evidenced not only by the high ratings of the drama itself, but also by the popularity of the accompanying study guide and workbook, published after the drama had finished airing. The study guide draws on scenes from the drama but also tips featured in the original Japanese manga *Dragon Zakura* (which was also adapted into a drama of the same name in Japan in 2005). The guide was written by “The Republic of Korea’s Study Trainer,” Kang Sŏngt’ae, who became a *kongsindol* (“god of study” + “idol”) by virtue of getting only two answers wrong on the *sunŭng* (university entrance exam) in 2001, putting him in the top 0.01% nationwide. This distinction allowed Kang to join the ranks of South Korea’s highly-paid “celebrity lecturers.” In Kang’s case, this means acting as the MC on the MBC network’s program “Study King,” writing a steady stream of education columns in newspapers and magazines, giving invited talks, and offering consultation through his website ([www.gongsin.com](http://www.gongsin.com)).<sup>23</sup> Before writing the guide, Kang

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<sup>23</sup> A number of Western news articles reported on the South Korean “celebrity teacher” phenomenon in late 2014 and early 2015. ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-education-crazy-south-korea-top-teachers-become-multimillionaires/2014/12/29/1bf7e7ae-849b-11e4-abc5-5a3d7b3b20b8\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-education-crazy-south-korea-top-teachers-become-multimillionaires/2014/12/29/1bf7e7ae-849b-11e4-abc5-5a3d7b3b20b8_story.html); <http://www.ryot.org/teaching-jobs-in-south-korea-cha-kil-yong-celebrities-rich/903737>). Another factor fueling connections between education and celebrity are the multiple TV stations focusing solely on education, in addition to education-focused programs on all the major channels. There is one broadcast station, EBS (Educational Broadcasting System), which began in 1990, and now multiple spin-off satellite channels focusing on niche markets within supplementary education (university exam prep, pre-K, etc.). EBS can be compared to the U.S. channel PBS, but at any given time one can view multiple math lectures, foreign language lessons, and quiz shows by flipping through the channels provided as part of the most basic cable package. There is also the long-running “Golden Bell Challenge” program, which has been on the air since 1998 (on KBS), in which high school students compete in a Jeopardy-like contest (but with much harder questions on history, science, literature, and the general humanities). All the students sit on the ground holding whiteboards, and wearing the tight white cloth headbands that symbolize exertion in study. When a student gets an answer on their whiteboard wrong, they leave the stage.

had already served as “study expert” for the development of the drama’s script. In the introduction to the guide, Kang writes:

I was also a fan of the drama. My blood also boiled while watching Paekhyŏn fail the exam through an error, and Bongu and his desperate struggle against sleep was the exact likeness of myself in high school. It was wonderful to see the dialogue I had written come out of the mouths of the characters. And the lines that satirized the Korean education situation made me shout and clap with glee.

But I still have some regrets. I worry that my message about study will get lost in the conflict between characters, and end once the drama ends. So I wrote this book to transmit my message in more detail.

This is the main message I want to get out to the people. To raise your scores, you need to know how to study and need to have the right attitude. You can’t possibly (*sŏlma*) still believe that you need expensive lectures at *hagwŏn* or private tutoring, or else you can’t study? (Kang 2010, 4)

In the remainder of the guide, Kang goes on to offer strategies for studying for the exam, breaking his advice into several “steps” (all in English in the table of contents): “Mentoring,” “Skill,” “Principal” (sic), and “Subject.” Step 1, Mentoring, is devoted to how to overcome the weaknesses (*yakchŏm*) of the five character types, represented by the five students in the “special Ch’ŏnha University prep class” in the drama. Paekhyŏn is the type to “make the same mistake again and again,” often by missing trivial details. For this type, Kang advises keeping a “mistake notebook” so as not to repeat the same errors. P’urip is the distracted type, and Kang advises students like her to “conquer class and review sessions with a notebook” (rather than assuming that she will remember what she is in the middle of). Bongu is the “chronically sleep deprived” type and he is advised to treat sleep not as an enemy, but as a friend. In what may be the most revolutionary part of the study guide, Kang advises perennially sleepy students like Bongu to

sleep *more* in this crucial third year of high school, and simply make sure they have a plan for attack for both sleep and study, studying immediately upon waking. Hyōnjōng is characterized as the “single-minded unrequited love” type, as she is in love with Paekhyōn and lets her feelings get in the way of studying. Kang cautions that while it is better to study for oneself, studying for others is not always bad either. Most of the students are studying to satisfy their families, and studying to impress an object of affection is not much different.

“Love is always a blessing,” Kang writes, so even if it seems to be a distraction, use it as fuel. Finally, Ch’andu is the type who is “distracted with other things”—in his case, dreams of becoming a dancer. In his section, Kang repeats a question the character asked during a study session in the drama: Is it okay to listen to music? Kang answers that no, it is not, as the brain is not good at focusing on more than one thing at once. However, Kang ultimately advises students who are as passionate about something that is *not* studying to just give up on an academic path, since “you can’t have it all.” Kang references soccer player Park Jisung, as well as various pop artists Ch’andu looks up to, telling him to follow their example of “becoming the coolest person in the world by knowing how to give up.”

In his introduction to the guide, Kang describes his own experience of being a prisoner to the university entrance exam. He tells his readers that he tied himself to his chair in order to write the guide, and this is not meant metaphorically. He ties himself down in order to bring back his memories of studying for the exam, in order to translate his own experience for readers: “When I couldn’t bring myself to tie myself to the chair, I got my little brother to do it. Sometimes he tied it too tightly so I’d have to stumble out of the room attached to the chair and get my family members to untie me. It’s funny, right? At the time it was so exhausting and

frustrating” (Kang 2010, 5). But while Kang’s own experience of confinement was hardly pleasant, he stresses that the “entrance exam can also be seen as a gateway. The result is important, but you’ll also learn a lot of things on the way.” By emphasizing that the exam is more than just a gateway for university, but for life itself, Kang rejects the grueling, slippery temporality of the entrance exam, arguing that it is simply a checkpoint along the way. His philosophy of trickery, too, is appealing: everyone can get into top universities, and everyone should try (using his tricks), if only to undermine the whole South Korean education system.

Kang’s study guide, a glossy bestseller based on a popular television drama that generated significant profit for its broadcasting station and advertisers, clearly cannot be read out of the context of the capitalist private education industry. And yet, its message that extra *hagwŏn* study (and the financial burden this poses) is unnecessary is seductive, and the “mentoring” Kang provides for the various “study types” has potentially revolutionary aspects. In addition to practical advice provided throughout on note-taking, scheduling, time management and focus techniques, he encourages students in the trenches of *kosam* to sleep, love, and finally, to know when to give up. Kang’s encouragement to sleep six hours a night (with twenty minute naps during the day as needed) may still seem quite skimpy to those familiar with Western medical recommendations of ten hours for adolescents, but it directly stands up to the common Korean expression *sadang orak* (sleep four hours and pass, sleep five hours and fail; in recent years this has even been shortened to *sam(3)dang sa(4)rak*). Kang writes sympathetically that he would love to recommend more than six hours a night, but given the amount that must be covered before the exam, more sleep will probably be unrealistic. The advice to use love as fuel fundamentally recognizes the importance of social life for high school students, and reassures

readers that the suppression of one’s social and romantic self will only be temporary. In fact, the better one does on the exam the sooner one will be able to rejoin the realm of the living: Kang describes his own crush on a girl a year below him in school, and his experience one day of hanging out with recent graduates, who had come back to the high school to offer encouragement and advice to their “juniors” (*hubae*). Kang realized that if he did not do well on the exam and enter university, he would not have the courage to show his face back at the high school, and would miss that opportunity to return to his love as a potential suitor. We never learn whether Kang was reunited with his love, but he tells us that when his crush entered her *kosam* period the following year, she asked him to act as her guide and advise her on how to succeed through daily text messages. Rather than selfishly act on this request, Kang told the girl to cancel her cell phone service. Instead, he made her a mix CD of music to listen to on study breaks, with the first track the band Yangpa’s song “my mind,” which was written for the lover the singer was forced to break up with due to his studies! *Kosam* is a liminal time in which love cannot be realized, but “those who love someone are strong . . . because they are not alone” (Kang 2010, 56).

The rest of the *God of Study* study guide continues to stress the attributes of perseverance and organization, but equally emphasizes sincerity (*söngsilsöng*). A large portion of the “Skill” section centers around admonishments not to neglect *naesin*, or school grades. As the university entrance exam becomes the main focus, students sleep through class and look to cut corners in their schoolwork. Kang argues that taking *naesin* seriously demonstrates sincerity and is a good preparation for university study, and besides, there are special programs or particular universities that take school grades into consideration. Not neglecting *naesin* leaves all doors open, and Kang maintains that with proper planning, attitude, and study techniques, there will be no need to fall

asleep in class, at least not most of the time, as time-consuming evening *hagwŏn* study will be eliminated or minimized. Sincerity is also demonstrated in the *God of Study* drama by the class’ surprising return to *ch’oding suhak* (elementary school math)—although the students balk at going so far back in their review, they throw away their pride and their math problem-solving skills are ultimately better for it. Sincerity and an attitude adjustment are also what allow pop dance hopeful Ch’andu to give up gracefully, as he stops holding onto the possibility of “doing it all,” staying true to himself and making his elitist parents happy.

One of my interviewees, who went by the English name Helen, used the study guide with her middle school-aged daughter (who was preparing to enter a competitive foreign language-focused high school), and also put it to use in the classes she taught in her home as a *kongbubang* (study room) instructor. Insook also watched the drama with her daughter from beginning to end, although she did not buy the guide. The drama and its related products ignited a lively, if ephemeral, questioning of the winner-takes-all conditions of the South Korean education landscape. The actions of the “special Ch’onha University prep class” students are transgressive, but Kang urges more students to transgress the academic gatekeepers, striving for high scores on the university entrance exam irrespective of ability or desire to invest in supplementary *hagwŏn* study or *kwaoe* (private tutoring). Kang urges nothing less than a widespread hacking of the university entrance exam preparation process, and by extension, the South Korean education system as a whole. Kang’s study tips and “mentoring” are in themselves of interest, but threads involving creative pursuits in pop culture and fandom are also woven throughout the guide. *Kosam* students should not distract themselves with music while studying, but consumption of pop music in fleeting roles of fans keep weary students going during their limited study breaks.

The possibility of the desire for pop idol status derailing the whole academic path is presented in the figure of Ch’andu; not everyone is suited for university, and teens who strive to become “cool” (*mōtchin*) pop stars also increase the “cool factor” of South Korea. In the final section of this chapter, I return to the soundscapes of K-pop, suggesting that sound and voice become a pivot point between pre-teen and teenage children’s and mothers’ expectations and desires. If the management of familial affect involves an encompassing sense of sight, and sensory cultivation between mothers and young children—particularly touch—“heals” the nation (rather than mindlessly populating it), family expectations and desires wrapped up in sound propel the nation forward in soft culture power.

#### HITTING A WALL OF SOUND: NAVIGATING SOUNDSCAPES IN FLUX

Inkyu Kang, in his work on the political economy of the idol industry, argues that neoliberalization has made “stardom” (broadly defined) the only acceptable alternative to academic success; this supports a refrain in the interviews I conducted that pop idol aspirations have become “conventional.” The women I interviewed who were parents of teens expressed surprise at this reversal in acceptable pathways in a country that had only decades ago mocked performers of *taejung ūmak* (music for the masses) by labeling them with the derogatory term *ttanttara*<sup>24</sup>, but there was often a palpable sense of excitement in imagining how far pop culture might take their children. This excitement may be tempered, though, by the heaviness that comes with knowing that this choice is not truly a choice. Inkyu Kang writes: “Unfortunately, elite

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<sup>24</sup> *Ttanttara* is an onomatopoeic word mimicking the sound of a trumpet. Attitudes toward entertainers began to change along with the rise of fandom accompanying mega-hit singer Seo Taiji in the early 1990s.

universities can be counted on one hand; the majority of Koreans have no choice but to pursue stardom as an alternative option to academia. In other words, Korean youth only have two options: the classroom or the stage” (Kang 2015, 61). Sociologist John Lie, in his recent work on K-pop, addresses the generational dimensions:

And so young people, equipped with the wherewithal of consumption, forge an identity from a brand of popular music that marks them as separate from their parents and from the previous generation . . . The dialectic of the parent-child relationship spirals around the still point of musical preference, producing generational misunderstandings . . . The perpetual modernity of the popular-music canon goes hand in hand with a constant forgetting of the past (Lie 2014, 17).

Lie laments the loss of a prior soundscape, the grainy sounds of folk and the rural-tinged, driving beat of pseudo-traditional *trot* music—in a minor key more often than not, crooned or belted out but never chirpy, and charmingly low-tech—even though he had never considered himself a fan of the previous soundscape. I would suggest here though, that the “dialectic of the parent-child relationship” spirals not around musical preference per se, but around beliefs about what participation in this changing soundscape—as a performer or spectator—might mean for the child’s future. Lie’s point about the ephemerality of the K-pop industry, and the “constant forgetting of the past” or “cultural amnesia” of K-pop is on the mark, as even a cover of an older song is known in Korean as a remake (*rimeik’ũ*)—the focus is not on the song that is being covered, but the (re)invention of something new. While exceptions exist in K-pop performers with staying power, in today’s idol-saturated market teens put in grueling hours training before they “debut,” and then if they make it perform in a girl or boy group for a few years before becoming stale, only in quite rare cases continuing on in a solo career. But as I mentioned earlier

in the chapter, even the ephemerality and instability of a K-pop career does not scare idol hopefuls away, as both the temporal and corporeal effects of K-pop as a pursuit are more palatable to the younger generation. Within the entertainment industry the possibility for sudden stardom—however slight—does exist, and even if the heart is invested in K-pop the mind is free to explore future possibilities. In the lead-up to the university entrance exam, there is little room for plotting alternatives, except perhaps while listening to a bittersweet song in between studying English and math. Inkyu Kang’s characterization of post-IMF crisis South Korean society is applicable here: “People did not recognize until later that they were no longer living in the same country . . . the Asian financial crisis brought a shift from lifetime employment to lifetime job searching” (Kang 2015, 60). For pre-teens and teens who have only known post-IMF crisis South Korea, searching is more comfortable than finding but doubting the lasting value of what has been found. Studying for the entrance exam is like lifetime employment, and pop culture dreams like lifetime searching.

The three different types of possible futures I have written about in this chapter—the academically inclined (whether by nature or as “academic sneaks”), the idol-in-training, and the fan—are all encompassed by the concept of soundscape. In any given South Korean city the sounds of elementary school and middle-school children shouting English phrases in unison drift from open *hagwŏn* windows, and give way as night falls to the more muted sounds of study hall for *kosam* students, whose pencils on practice test paper emit scratches that might inspire a kind of nostalgic dread in their parents’ generation. These out-of-time sounds of cramming and test taking are punctuated by the electronic sounds of smartphone notifications and text messages, and noise pollution from headphones playing a K-pop song (whether illicitly during study time,

or on a scheduled break as Kang Sŏngt’ae recommends in his *God of Study* guide). The sound of music leaking from headphones may also signal a fan, who will add her (or his) voice to the screaming crowd at a K-pop concert or fan meeting later that night. The screams may be broken up by organized chants professing love or support for the idol, or even by frenzied crying in a moment of emotional excess. Finally, the South Korean soundscape is composed of the K-pop blaring out of competing cell phone stores on a street corner, the latest K-pop ringtone on the bus or subway, and large TVs in public squares broadcasting the most recent episode of *Superstar K* or other “audition programs.” The sounds associated with the brainy student—for example, the sound of a hundred markers writing the correct answer on white boards in the *Golden Bell* quiz show I described—have significant emotional power, but are being overtaken by the noise (as well as visual spectacle) of K-pop as a source of national “soft power.” Parents in South Korea may mourn the soundscapes of generations past, but engage with their children with cautious hope over the new soundscape of K-pop, and navigate academic and alternative possibilities with children. Notably, the terms for music, sound and voice are blurred in Korea: sound is *sori* and voice is *moksori* (throat sound), and even music (*ŭmak*) can be referred to as *sori*.<sup>25</sup>

Anthropologists of voice such as Amanda Weidman have argued for “the importance of keeping these concerns [of “voice” as subjectivity and as actual vocal practice] together, suggesting that attending to voice in its multiple registers gives particular insight into the intimate, affective, and material/embodied dimensions of cultural life and sociopolitical identity” (2014, 38). I bring this concern with voice into the next chapter, when I look at the actual employment and unemployment of young adults who were formerly elite university or pop idol hopefuls, but who

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<sup>25</sup>The annual traditional and world music festival in Chŏnju is known as the *Sori Ch’ukje*.

are now making a living in the massive food service industry and contributing to national understandings of “taste.”

## Chapter 4: Baker Kings, Rice Liquor Princesses, and the Coffee Elite: Food Nationalism and Youth Creativity in the Construction of Korean “Taste”

My kids like foods that are new, exciting, and sweet. They eat spicy food like it's a competition, not to appreciate complex flavors that happen to include chilies. They don't eat kimchi. They like meat so much that I'm worried their bodies will change. That much meat is okay for Westerners, not for us. When we sit at the table with their grandparents, the three generations might as well be three different countries, as far as tastes are concerned.

–Minsook<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, during my second summer studying in a language program in a neighborhood near Sinch'on in Seoul, I often spent the lunch hour in hole-in-the-wall student-oriented restaurants with classmates from Japan and Taiwan, talking about the newest plot twists in current TV dramas. Then in the afternoon I would take a rather long subway ride to an apartment I was sharing with a host family, where I would normally find the twins' mother sitting and watching a drama rebroadcast as she made the jewelry she sold at markets or just relaxed in between errands out in the summer heat. Some of my most memorable conversations with her about her life trajectory and raising children were inspired by the narrative turns and affective space of the TV drama *Catch [up with] a Kangnam Mother (Kangnam Ŏmma Ttarajapki)*, about a transplant from the northern part of Seoul to the heart of South Korea's “education fever.” (The neighborhood in which I was staying, Jangsŭngbaegi, was *in* the large Kangnam district but not *of* Kangnam, as a decidedly working-class neighborhood).<sup>2</sup> In the late 2000s there were more TV

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, January 8, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Kangnam (Gangnam) has become South Korea's most identifiable landmark, internationally speaking, since the surprising 2012 success of hip-hop artist PSY's music video, “Gangnam Style.” PSY gently mocked Kangnam's elitism and conspicuous consumption, while mocking himself as a son of the neighborhood. Of interest to the topic of this chapter—the consumption and production of coffee, alcohol and bread as markers of youth creativity—is

dramas being aired in South Korea than ever before, and one could hardly go a day without encountering the faces of the ancient Koguryŏ royalty of *Jumong* or the well-groomed baristas-in-love of *Coffee Prince*, whether on the subway, on billboards and screens in public spaces, or simply evoked by a cell phone ring tone. While much attention has been paid in the last decade to *Hallyu*, or the “Korean Wave” of popular culture exports across Asia (and even farther-flung countries), in this dissertation I have been more concerned with the ways these cultural products, particularly television dramas, present multiple “affective codes” to Korean domestic consumers and align with my interlocutors’ framing of their world through the senses. Without overstating the importance of the affective power of these moments on screen—for they are only small moments in any viewer’s daily life—I do believe that these visual (and aural) representations of national memories and emotions, hot button issues, and tastes and smells, both address and inspire cosmopolitan and national desires.

The most successful television dramas in South Korea in the new millennium are a skillful combination of familial affection and longing, icons of sex appeal, and emotional desirability in the figures of the lead characters. As I have argued in earlier chapters, aspirations to the lifestyles and sensibilities promoted in these dramas cannot be understood outside of the social shifts since the 1997 financial crisis and subsequent intensification of neoliberal logics in South Korea. I am especially interested in the appearance on the scene of a particular kind of character, the “creative youth gourmet.” In my interviews with women between 2010 and 2012

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the line early in PSY’s song, “A classy girl who knows how to enjoy the freedom of a cup of coffee.” The coffee in question in the Kangnam of PSY’s song is certainly not instant coffee (so-called *tabang coffee*), but the expensive espresso drink a girl like Hyun-A (the pop star featured in the music video) would enjoy. In addition to—and perhaps because of—being known as the district of *nouveau riche*, the “education fever” (translating into financial investment in expensive private tutoring and *hagwŏn* classes) is particularly pronounced in Kangnam, with the neighborhood of Daech’i-dong seen as the epicenter.

both “food today” and “youth today” came up over and over again in various iterations. Food came up often in discussion as a source of disagreement between children and parents, and the mothers of junior high school and high school aged children wondered about what kind of youth these kids would become in an era of seemingly limitless youth desire but also rising youth unemployment. The imaginative spaces of “food” and “youth” are sites of both great pleasure and great anxiety within families, and to trace these emotional investments I examine my interviewees’ narratives about food today and youth today in conjunction with recent so-called “gourmet dramas,” in which young heroes and heroines bursting with creativity master the arts of baking, espresso-making, and even *makgölli* (traditional rice liquor) distilling. These young “creative gourmets,” on screen and in real life, are instructive about the construction of “Korean taste,” both in terms of social distinction and viscerally, gustatorily. Taste becomes linked to earlier national fixations on moral consumption versus “excessive” consumption (Nelson 2000); “youth gourmets” are praised when their tastes are seen to benefit the nation, and blamed when their tastes are not appropriately national. Negotiations of labor around “taste,” in the face of ever-greater demands for flexibility and creative production, reveal the workings of capital at a particular moment in South Korea’s political economy’s trajectory, as well as resistance to this arrangement of capital and culture.

#### ON EATING A “MINOR” CUISINE

As food security and sustainability become pressing issues around the globe (leading to an emergent academic field of “food studies”), ethnographies of particular foods, particular cuisines, and social processes involving food have increased in recent years (Sutton 2010). Unsurprisingly,

though, considering Korean Studies’ relative size vis-à-vis Japan Studies or China (including Sinosphere) Studies, there have been few in-depth studies of Korean cuisine to date. Cwierka explores the history of both Japanese and Korean food, and Han (2011) discusses nationalism associated with “kimchi wars” between South Korea and its East Asian neighbors throughout the 2000s.<sup>3</sup> Antti Leppanen has also explored neighborhood *ttŏk* (rice cake) production in Seoul (Leppanen 2007, 2012). But the Korean culinary landscape, both in South Korea and outside of it, remains relatively under-described within East Asian food studies, and is certainly under-theorized.<sup>4</sup> (There are, however, countless blog posts devoted to Korean food, and recently a documentary series, *The Kimchi Chronicles*, produced by PBS). The importance of Korean cuisine and culinary practices to South Korean social life cannot be overstated; though the things Koreans eat are constantly in flux, many relish the opportunity to boast about Korean cuisine’s long history, every bit as long as China’s.<sup>5</sup> In recent decades of overall national prosperity meat consumption has increased drastically, while rice and kimchi consumption have fallen. An alarming (though somewhat misleading) report came out in early 2015 indicating that Koreans

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<sup>3</sup> As Han explains, there were two “kimchi scandals” in the 2000s that ignited nationalistic protest: the first was Japan’s copyright taken out over Japanese-style kimchi (“kimuchi”), and the second was centered around news reports that plain Nappa cabbage (*paech’u*) kimchi mass-produced in China (where much low-end restaurant kimchi comes from) was infested with harmful bacteria. (The news reports left out the fact that some cheap domestic factory-made kimchi also contained this bacteria).

<sup>4</sup> Sonia Ryang’s new book (2015) tackles the topic of “Korean taste” and authenticity at Korean restaurants in the U.S.

<sup>5</sup> The Korean foundation myth explains how the “Lord of Heaven” Hwanin sent his son Hwanūng, who longed to live on earth, to Mt. Paekdu (in present-day North Korea and the Liaoning Peninsula of China). Hwanūng told a tiger and a bear who longed to become human that they must stay in a cave for one hundred days, eating nothing but mugwort and garlic. The tiger gave up but the bear persevered, and became the woman Ungnyŏ, who then married Hwanūng. The child she bore, Tangun, became the founder of Kojosŏn, as recorded in the *Samguk Yusa* of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which cites China’s *Book of Wei*. Though the distinctive red pepper used in most varieties of kimchi was not introduced to Korea until the sixteenth century, mugwort (*ssuk*) and garlic feature prominently in this foundation myth of the proto-nation.

drink more coffee per week than they eat either kimchi or rice.<sup>6</sup> In spite of concerns over too much factory-farmed meat and sugar consumption (linked to rising obesity, as elsewhere), the “well-being” trend of the early 2000s has continued, and dovetailed into an organic foods movement. More nutritious options such as barley or multi-grain rice have surpassed plain white short-grain rice in household consumption, and many of my interviewees expressed an active interest in the revival of traditional cooking methods. There is a growing sense of pride in the relatively successful promotion of Korean food abroad, with *bibimbap* (mixed rice), *bulgogi* (marinated grilled beef) and *ttökbokki* (spicy rice cakes, a street food) the most heavily promoted—along with kimchi, naturally.<sup>7</sup> There is also a common sense of indignation, however, that Korean food is a “minor cuisine,” just as Korean is classified as a “minor language.” South Korea’s bustling food culture is perceived as mistranslated, or often (and even worse) left unnoticed, untranslated. A country exploding with restaurants—seven times more restaurants per 1,000 people than the United States, by 2008 statistics—is contained as jarred kimchi on international store shelves and lackluster, catch-all “Korean restaurants.”<sup>8</sup>

Seoul and its suburbs, and to a lesser extent large cities such as Pusan or Taejŏn, are mostly filled with Korean restaurants specializing in one kind of food or another, but contain a fair number of Western chains (from the higher-end TGIF to fast-food chains). Upper-middle

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/study-koreans-drink-more-coffee-they-eat-kimchi-1786252>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.seriousseats.com/2014/08/how-korean-cuisine-got-huge-in-america.html>

<sup>8</sup> In Korea, as in Japan, individual restaurants specialize in a few related items or even a single item. For example, a local Chŏnju specialty is *kongnamulguk* (bean sprout soup), and restaurants typically served this soup and one other item (*kongnamulbap*, or bean sprout rice), and that was it. Even in pubs, where more dishes were served, there was generally nowhere near the variety presented by American restaurant menus. Typically there were no menus, just a few items written on a board on the wall. Many Korean restaurants in the U.S. try to offer too much, in order to attract non-Korean clientele who are used to a wider menu. This cheapens the experience for many Koreans, as in Korea the only restaurants that serve such a large menu are *punsik* (“school food,” small fast-food restaurants selling basic Korean fare and often concentrated around schools to serve kids en route from school to *hagwŏn*).

class neighborhoods such as Sinsa, Kangnam or Pukch'on in Seoul have also sprouted high-end European restaurants, wine bars, sushi bars, and brunch places. Seoul is still not known to be as culinarily diverse as Tokyo or Hong Kong, but over the past decade culinary tours highlighting Seoul's multicultural transformation have started up through several agencies. While there is not exactly the equivalent of a Little Italy or Little India in terms of size or scale of neighborhoods, certain neighborhoods are known almost exclusively for their distinctive eateries: Söllaemaül is also known as the “French district,” and has a number of tucked-away French restaurants and a higher concentration of more “authentic” French bakeries and wine stores; Itaewön, the long-standing “foreign district” close to the American military base, now has a number of Indian, Southeast Asian, African and Middle Eastern restaurants; and the Dongdaemun neighborhood has a conspicuous street of Russian and Central Asian restaurants. Further afield, the suburb of Ansan south of Seoul has a large number of factory workers from South and Southeast Asia, and a correspondingly high number of simple, “authentic” foreign restaurants. Anthropologist Hyun Mee Kim has written about her quests as a university student to this suburb to seek out the exotic smell of *hyangch'ai* (*kosu* in the more standard Korean terminology), or cilantro, which she claims “90% of Koreans hate” (2005, 32).<sup>9</sup> Many expats I spoke to have been disappointed by the lack of real “foreign flavor” in these neighborhoods, outside of the restaurants themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> In this chapter of her monograph *Cultural Translation in the Global Era* (in Korean), Hyun Mee Kim maps out the various “international towns” of Seoul and the greater Seoul area. While these “towns” have shifted somewhat since her research was done more than a decade ago, many remain in place. Ansan has been called “the town without borders” (*kukkyöng ömnün maül*) for its uncharacteristic diversity. Toward Inch'ön (where most Chinese lived before being kicked out en masse in the 1960s) is *Hwagyo maül* (ethnic Chinese village), and clustered north of the city around Dongdaemun is what she terms a “Little Manila” area, a “Vietnamese residence” area, a “Nepalese street,” a “Russia/Central Asia village,” “Mongol tower,” the “African residence” in Haebangch'on (next to It'aewön), the general “Southeast Asian residence,” “German town,” and “Little Tokyo/Japanese village” in Ich'on. South of the river in Garibong-dong are ethnic Koreans from China (*Chosönjok*), in what is called “Yanbian town” (named after the Yanbian autonomous region in China from which many ethnic Korean Chinese come), the aforementioned “French village” in Banpo-dong, and a separate “Mongol village.”

Kim notes that the “Japanese village” in particular has almost no “Japanese flavor,” as any Japanese architecture or décor could be perceived by the Korean majority as neo-colonial encroachment.<sup>10</sup> While a more distinctive Chinatown would not ruffle feathers in quite the same way as a Japanese neighborhood, the Chinatown in Inch’ŏn frequently rates as one of the world’s most underwhelming, though a revitalization project is planned. Most ethnic Chinese left the area under extreme restriction of their economic activities during the Park Chung-hee era.<sup>11</sup> If an authentic-feeling “Japanese village” would provoke unease over past colonial oppression, a bustling Chinatown, for some Koreans, would bring to mind Korea’s long centuries of vassal status vis-à-vis China and even anxiety about China’s rising power. (A “German village” on the outskirts of a city in South Korea’s southeast, on the other hand, provokes no equivalent furor—though it is also disappointingly lacking in German meats or baked goods).

In addition to the growing availability of foreign food in Seoul, the capital city contains all manner of regional specialties, evidence of decades of migration from other parts of Korea to the Seoul area for work and education. And yet Koreans are avid travelers to other regions of Korea, with regional cuisine specialties topping the list for reasons to travel to this or that destination. Korean friends told me that “Seoul has everything you need,” but in the same breath would complain about the cost, small portions, or excess saltiness or sweetness of restaurant food in Seoul. As described by Michael Pettid in *Korean Cuisine* (2008), the base of a Korean meal is typically rice, with three, five, seven, nine, or twelve side dishes (*panchan*) served. In addition to these side dishes, which are typically vegetables of various kinds as well as grilled fish, a

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<sup>10</sup> See Sorensen (forthcoming) and Poole (forthcoming) on the different contemporary relationship to Japanese colonial architecture of Chŏlla residents of Mokp’o (South Chŏlla) and Kunsan (North Chŏlla).

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/02/world/asia/02korea.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/02/world/asia/02korea.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

*papsang* (meal table) often includes a meat dish and a soup or stew. Typically some of the vegetable dishes are varieties of kimchi, and many others are seasoned with the basic Korean condiments of *kanjang* (soy sauce), *toenjang* (miso/bean paste) and *koch’ujang* (red chili pepper paste). Recipes vary considerably in disparate regions of the peninsula, however, with certain foods known as specialties of certain regions. While the decade after the democratic transition (the 1990s) was marked by an intensification of civil society activities in general (Moon 2005), the late 1990s going into the 2000s saw a revitalization of regional culture and a real push for decentralization of resources, realized in some cases and unrealized in others.<sup>12</sup> Robert Oppenheim (2008) details the effects of Yu Hongjun’s travel guides in terms of domestic travel to the Silla capitol of Kyōngju as well as Kyōnju residents’ self-concept. In addition to series such as this on cultural heritage sites and regional historical landscapes, regional food guides have proliferated. While there is still a great deal of regional culinary pride, the Chōlla region has emerged as a culinary center of sorts, due to its concentration of arable land (being on plains rather than in a solely mountainous region as is much of the peninsula) and distinctive culinary history.<sup>13</sup> Pettid writes, “As Kaesōng can be said to have conservatively preserved the traditional

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<sup>12</sup> This topic is covered in the next chapter, chapter 5. In the late 1990s a plan took shape to relocate South Korea’s capitol to Taejōn, which is more central to the country geographically. The plan was never realized and instead some government ministries have been moved to an entirely new city, Sejong City, since 2012. In terms of regional cultural revitalization, some areas have been highly successful (Kwangju with its Biennale, Yōsu—at least temporarily—with its 2012 World Expo, and Pusan with its International Film Festival); mid-sized cities such as Chōnju have seen moderate success, due to festivals and tourism promotion; and other cities such as Kunsan and Mokp’o continue to struggle with cultivating a regional culture for local residents, as well as bringing in tourism.

<sup>13</sup> Boudewijn Walraven (2001) writes of a Chōnju man in the 1990s who spoke to him about “the impossibility for the inhabitants of that city to live in Kyōngsang Province, an hour’s drive away. ‘We can go there, but we cannot stay for more than a day. The food there doesn’t agree with us, that’s why’” (Walraven 2001, 95–96). Most of my interviewees and acquaintances in Chōnju complained mildly about food in Seoul (mainly about the cost, as the quality was there if one knew where to look), but complained bitterly about the food in Kyōngsang (especially Pusan, Taegu, Ulsan and P’ohang; the city of Andong got a bit of a pass as a fellow genteel, *yangban dosi*). My Chōnju friends described Kyōngsang food from these cities as overly salted and spicy due to immoderate use of

foods of the Koryŏ dynasty, the Chŏlla region has maintained the cuisine of the elites of the Chŏson dynasty. In fact, the quantity of side-dishes is often surprising to those not from the region” (2008,100). Friends who visited from outside of Chŏnju waxed poetic about all of the free side dishes (including red meat and seafood) provided every time another kettle was ordered at one of the city’s ubiquitous *makkŏllijib* (rice wine pubs). Chŏnju residents likewise complained about how stingy restaurants were with side dishes everywhere else but Chŏlla. Restaurant owners’ generosity in the region is discursively linked to the overall warmth and generosity of Chŏlla people: through food, Chŏlla is known as a place of *chŏng* (affection) in ways that other parts of the country are not.<sup>14</sup>

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*chŏtkal* (fermented seafood). Since Chŏnju (in north Chŏlla) is not on the coast less seafood is consumed in general, but when friends in Chŏnju ate seafood they preferred flavors from south Chŏlla, their sister province with more coastline (including cities such as Yŏsu and Mokp’o) or from north Chŏlla coastal cities such as Kusan or towns such as Puan. Otherwise, they preferred seafood delicacies from exotic Cheju Island. While I was living in Chŏnju close friends from Pusan (whom I had met in the U.S.) visited, and though they were in their early thirties, admitted that they had never been to the Chŏlla area even once. The bitter regional antagonism of their parents’ generation had given way to general indifference, tinged with condescension, about their western neighbors. However, when they visited they were impressed with the natural beauty right outside the city, and deeply impressed by the food, conceding that there was truth to widespread beliefs that Chŏlla food was the best in the country.

<sup>14</sup> Even this appreciation of the Chŏlla region’s culinary delights cannot undo decades of discrimination against the region, however. As political “punishment,” of sorts, for various uprisings throughout the twentieth century—often seen as having culminated in the protests that triggered the Kwangju massacre in May 1980—the region was left out of economic development. Characters with Chŏlla accents frequently appear as gangsters and other villains in film and television, or at the very least as scoundrels. While characters with thick Kyŏngsang accents (especially Pusan) also act as gangsters frequently, a disproportionately large number of film and television gangsters come from the South Chŏlla city of Mokp’o, a much smaller city with a smaller population than Pusan. Characters from the Kwangju area frequently play political dissidents, who may have good hearts but are too quick to violence. My interviewees in Chŏnju, which is in North Chŏlla province and closer to Seoul both physically and psychologically, tended to be politically left (though not all were), but still distanced themselves from Kwangju and South Chŏlla somewhat, pointing out that Chŏnju accents (*sat’uri*) are not nearly as thick as Kwangju accents. In fact, my interviewees pointed out that Pusan and other Kyŏngsang accents were far thicker than Chŏnju accents and more full of “regionalisms,” indicating that if anything, Kyŏngsang people are more separatist than Chŏnju people. I certainly noted an impulse to stand against the *chongbuk chwap’a* (“leftist lackeys of the North”) accusations that had become a refrain in online forums since the early 2010’s, and used with the most frequency by conservative “netizens” on the online portal *Ilbe* (Daily Best). This phrase, along with the more general *chwajom* (“leftist zombie”), are often attached to specifically derogatory words for Chŏlla residents (*hongŏ*, after the fermented skate eaten in the region; or *Chŏlladiŏn*, “Cholladian”).

Those who have visited Taiwan or Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia will note that South Korea’s “street food” culture is much less bustling than its restaurant culture, with only such basics as *ttökbokki* (spicy rice cakes) or *odaeng* (fish cakes on sticks, similar to *oden* in Japan) typically offered at street carts. There are also smaller carts with sweet foods: most commonly *pungö ppang* (fish bread; little dough fish made from molds and filled with red bean paste), *hodu kwaja* (walnut-shaped cakes made in little molds, and filled with red bean paste or sweet éclair cream), and *hottök* (pancakes filled with honey and/or brown sugar, chopped peanuts, and cinnamon). More recent, Western-influenced offerings include waffles and, in the savory category, corn dogs. Finally, small carts selling more solidly traditional snacks are still found, and sell large, flat, slightly sweet popped rice cakes (*ppongt’wigi*), roasted silkworm larvae (*pöndaegi*), and roasted chestnuts or roasted sweet potatoes in the winter. There *is* distinctive street food culture, and many Korean television dramas feature a couple ducking under the awnings of a street cart to escape pouring monsoon rain. But perhaps due to decades of authoritarian policing during which milling street crowds were not encouraged, restaurants are much more of a fixture in South Korean *oesik* (“eating out”) culture than street stalls. Small stalls with the characteristic red awnings and larger tents with plastic or aluminum chairs and tables that offer an expanded menu and also serve alcohol are both called *p’ojang mach’a* (covered carts). However, the ones that are a large tent with four plastic walls have an aura of permanence, even if they are easily assembled and disassembled. A retro-style restaurant chain with locations in several of Seoul’s university neighborhoods is a kind of permanent *p’ojang mach’a*, with plastic walls stretched over a metal frame and with space heaters throughout to counter the draft. Street stalls are a risky business in South Korea’s urban spaces, as obtaining permits is difficult

and illegal street stalls are frequently (and very visibly) targets of violence and destruction by thugs who are hired by local governments.<sup>15</sup> Restaurants, in contrast, establish their aura of permanency through official celebrations such as a grand opening event. In keeping with an overall decrease in middle-class South Koreans going to traditional markets (such as Tongdaemun in Seoul, or Nambu Sijang in Chŏnju), many Koreans prefer the temperature-controlled, cleaner environment of food courts in department store basements, an institution dating back to the Japanese colonial era.

Cafés are also spaces of leisure into which some of the street snack foods of old have been absorbed; in addition to espresso drinks, many cafes sell waffles and sweet toast (another street food staple), and in the summer months many serve *patpingsu* (shaved ice with condensed milk and red bean) and its variants. Several independent cafes I visited in Chŏnju had begun to serve “traditional” teas in addition to coffee offerings, and Starbucks Korea offered packaged rice cake snacks in addition to the standard Western pastries. In this way, cafes in Korea play lip service to Korean traditional foodways while offering the “third space” Starbucks espoused, in which patrons occupy the space in decidedly non-traditional ways. Jee Eun Regina Song notes that café space is differentially gendered in Korea, with women coming in groups to socialize but not men. Men whom Song interviewed said that going to a café like Starbucks with male friends or coworkers would be uncomfortable, as that was a frivolous activity women engaged in. Men, in contrast, should go to drinking establishments together. Women reported enjoying the café space because they neither had to put up with the cigarette smoke nor drunk men of pubs, and

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<sup>15</sup> For a filmic depiction of organized violence against street vendors, see the 2008 film *Ddongp'ari* (English title *Breathless*), directed by Yang Ik-june. News articles also describe the widespread phenomenon of hired thugs: <http://seoulsearching.net/2014/03/04/beyond-gangnams-style/> and <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/26/world/la-fg-south-korea-errand-20110626>. Jonson N. Porteux explores organized crime's role in state-building in South Korea in a 2013 dissertation.

there was no pressure on them to drink to excess or entertain men. (Another key point is that many cafes—though not Starbucks—have smoking rooms, and women who feel they are still judged for smoking in public as women can smoke at peace in these mostly female spaces). Both women and men also use Starbucks and similar high-end cafes as an office, preparing for exams, studying for courses, or bringing work from the office. Song writes: “The introduction of Starbucks represented a new form of subjectivity characteristic of neoliberalism. Popular narratives privileged the making of the entrepreneurial self not through corporate or institutional environments, but through seemingly non-political commercial spaces like cafes” (Song 2014, 434). The café in twenty-first century South Korea has become the ultimate space for the *flâneur*, a space for being seen as a social being, as a romantic being (as part of a couple on a date), and as a diligent being. While performing and internalizing these subjectivities, café customers also can engage nostalgically with “traditional” Korean food and drink—or at least “tradition-esque” (Killick 2001) variations such as the sweet potato or green tea latte—or in a more cosmopolitan way with cappuccinos and croissants.

And yet cafes are far from the only arena of negotiated subjectivity through taste in the contemporary South Korean urban landscape. In Chŏnju in particular, job opportunities for young people are limited due to an underdeveloped industrial sector dating back to the Chŏlla region’s exclusion from modern development during the Park Chung-hee era of the 1960s and 1970s. Nearly all young people seeking work in Chŏnju must either be satisfied with working in one of the city’s many restaurants, bars, or cafes; or leave for Seoul or another larger city. Some students I knew in the anthropology or folklore departments at Chonbuk National University in Chŏnju found work in the “culture industry” (code for organizers of festivals, non-profit work, or

community centers) but this was after more investment in a M.A. or even PhD. In addition to the many cafes, “traditional” pubs and bakeries represent spaces of subject-making through negotiations of taste and labor in Chŏnju. While I continue a discussion of Korean food and taste overall—particularly in my discussion of television dramas featuring the “creative gourmet”—in this chapter and the next I focus in on Chŏnju and its position in South Korea’s cultural landscape.

#### IMMAT (MOUTH TASTE) VS. SONMAT (HAND TASTE): APPETITES AND AFFECT IN CHŎNJU

I am not the first foreign anthropologist to joke that I should have just proposed to write on coffee culture in South Korea, as I spent so much time in cafes anyway. Listening to my recorded interviews transports me back to my field site instantaneously and fills me with nostalgia, not as much because of my interviewees’ voices as because of the music playing over the café’s sound system, coupled with the sounds of espresso makers running and staff calling to one another. About half of my interviewees preferred to meet me in cafes, and the other half in their homes. Among those interviewees I have written about already throughout the dissertation, I frequently met Soyoung at an independent but non-descript café in her neighborhood, and sometimes we walked to her house for continued conversation after the interview, if she thought that her mother-in-law wouldn’t be at home. The “café group” I met at the same local chain café nearly every week, but when I met just one of the three women individually I sometimes met them in their apartments instead (and I was at Minju’s and Minsook’s apartments each week to tutor Minju’s sons and Minsook and Insook’s daughters, respectively). I never met the woman I called “gym *ajumma*” in my field notes at her home, but always at cafes or restaurants; I always

met Bokhee at her place of employment, the house where she was a nanny (excepting one time at her apartment), and she was my one interviewee to say explicitly that she did not go to cafes and could not afford them. I likewise met Taehee, the mother of chapter 3’s dancing daughter, at her workplace, a bakery franchise. In this section I explore these spaces of “creative gourmet” emergence in Chŏnju, and the discourses that surround these twenty-something food service workers. For the discussion café space and baristas, I foreground voices that have not appeared in much detail in the previous chapters: Kang, who was helping her nephew get a new upscale café off the ground in the foothills of nearby Moak mountain; and the “gym *ajumma*,” who was training in one of Chŏnju’s several “barista academies.” I write more briefly about bakery spaces through Taehee’s franchise shop, and also take readers into *makköllijip* and “traditional” teahouses I encountered in the course of my research. As with previous chapters, which addressed social expectations of children and their mothers through the mother-child pair, this is not “anthropology of youth” in a true sense, as my interviewees were mothers in their 30s-50s and not youth themselves. However, by talking with mothers who are actively involved in navigating employment prospects with their children (or in some cases other family members), I contribute to a better understanding of the ways that youth have come to be regarded as “tasting beings” first and foremost, and to explore implications of this association.

The dynamo in her mid-forties who I referred to in field notes just by her last name, “Kang”—due to her friends calling her “Kang *sŏnsaengnim*” (teacher) in a combination of playfulness and deference, in light of her recent return to school for graduate study—was one of the first people I met in Chŏnju. I did not meet her as often as some others due to her packed schedule, but she introduced me to the “café group” and sometimes joined our group interviews.

Roughly halfway through my time in Chŏnju, Kang launched an ambitious new project, on top of her study at Chonbuk University, her busy private tutoring schedule, and the parenting of two teenage children. A nephew of hers, her husband’s older brother’s (*ajubŏnim*) son, had finished university but had no employment prospects. Kang and her husband stepped up to help their relatives, investing a substantial sum of money in the construction and interior décor costs for the café her nephew would manage. (This was possible, she said, due to her husband’s stable big company (*tae kiŏp*) job and her management of the family finances). They decided to build the café at the foot of Moaksan, a mountain in the rural Wanju district extending south of Chŏnju. Her café group friends, whom she knew from their Catholic church—Minju, Minsook, and Insook—were concerned by the location, saying that the area would get substantial foot traffic in the spring and summer but would be deserted in winter and much of fall. When the café launched, Minsook in particular volunteered her time, as she was generally interested in culinary arts and otherwise unoccupied during that period. Kang took it upon herself to teach her nephew how to make espresso drinks, as she considered herself a coffee connoisseur. During our first interview at her apartment she had offered me coffee, and when I said I’d prefer tea, insisted on making me coffee anyway, as she “could make a really perfect cup of hand-drip coffee.” She was actually a tea connoisseur as well, having spent time in Taiwan, but was “in a coffee phase right now.” She also studied how to make small decorative shortbread-like cookies to sell along with drinks in the café. As the café started up it was staffed mainly by her friends stopping by to volunteer, but as time went on she oversaw the hiring of several other already-trained baristas in their twenties.

When I returned to Chŏnju for a short visit in 2013, I was surprised to learn that Minsook, who had spent many hours in 2012 as a volunteer at Kang’s café, had leveraged this informal

training into her own café management. She had chosen the franchise option, opening an Ediya Coffee near the gates of Gunsan National University in the relatively close port city of Kunsan (a 45-minute drive from Chǒnju). She said that, “Chonbuk University students probably wouldn’t go to this kind of a café—they’re too sophisticated—but students in Kunsan don’t have as many café options and this is the level of coffee they’re willing to pay for.” Minsook mentioned that the part of the job she enjoyed most was working with young people, mainly university students. “A few have been lazy, but most work extremely hard to put themselves through school, and despite being tired, provide good service.” When I learned of Minsook’s new undertaking, I wondered about the “gym *ajumma*,” who had been attending a “barista academy” when I left Chǒnju in 2012, but was unable to track her down to find out if this training had paid off.

I first met the “gym *ajumma*” at the fitness center I had joined in my neighborhood in southern Chǒnju, while she was working at the front desk. After a while she asked me about my research and then wanted to take part. By the time we finally arranged a meeting she had quit working at the gym, complaining that she was “just disgusted by gym members’ behavior.” Working at the front desk she said she observed all kinds of affairs between members, as well as being privy to miscellaneous gossip. She said she also began to resent the housewives in particular who spent all day every day at the gym, talking to friends, exercising minimally, and then sitting around in the baths. Didn’t they have anything more important to do? Although the “gym *ajumma*” identified as an active Protestant, she clarified that she was progressive in most respects, particularly in terms of women’s rights but also for issues such as sexuality. More than the affairs at the gym, she said, she could not stand idle people, since she had worked her way along in the world with little support from others. She was in her late forties, and had a son in

university and a daughter in high school; she had divorced when her children were still quite young due to her husband’s alcoholism, and had very little contact with her ex-husband. She had been working non-stop for years: at the gym, at restaurants as waitstaff, as an assistant at a hospital, and at her church for a while, but now that her son was in university (in Kwangju, on scholarship) and her daughter had a few years before university, she figured that now was the time to invest some savings to pursue something new: barista training. When I asked whether such a course was really necessary, she stressed the competitive nature of becoming a barista in a city such as Chŏnju. Along with all the recent university graduates in her course, she would have to be trained thoroughly to be competitive on this job market, first in the taste of coffee and then in the art of it, with the business side and customer service skills taught only later. The course, taught by the owners of the same successful coffee chain I frequented with the “café group” each week, was an investment of six months of full-time training followed by a two-month unpaid apprenticeship, at a cost of thousands of dollars. I was surprised by the cost and the time involved, as I had seen “coffee appreciation” courses offered at the café or as part of “lifelong learning” programs of universities or community centers for much less money, and which only met one or two evenings a week for a six or twelve-week period. She explained that this was a comprehensive program culminating in an advanced certification, which assisted with making business contacts and taught the finer points of “latte art.” On one of our interviews we drove together to look at the cherry blossoms on the road to Kŭmsansa, the temple on the other side of Moaksan from Kang’s café, and she suddenly stopped at a spacious café with a unique, vaguely kitschy interior (ala log cabin diners in the American West or the old-timey cafes decorated with wood statues found in the Japanese countryside). It was a bit quirkiest than Kang’s café, and the

“gym *ajumma*” said that it was exactly the kind of café she would like to run herself. In fact, she had heard rumors that it might be up for a change in management soon, and had started stopping by at regular intervals ever since.

Finally, I met interviewee Taehee, the owner of a bakery franchise, after having several interviews there with another acquaintance, who went by “Helen.” Taehee noticed us because Helen was the only of my interviewees who wanted to be interviewed primarily in English. (Taehee was not unused to hearing English, though, as her shop was located in a neighborhood filled with new English *hagwŏn* staffed with foreign English teachers). Helen had quite an exacting definition of good customer service, and initially had a negative impression of the bakery, as one of the young male employees had splashed coffee on her when serving her. She called the shop later to complain to the manager, who reversed her negative impression by apologizing profusely, asking her to come in, and giving her free drink and pastry coupons. Taehee was a bit younger than Kang, Minsook, or the gym *ajumma*, with one daughter in third grade and one in sixth grade of elementary school. Her husband installed window blinds for a living, and they lived in a modest *villa*-type apartment above the bakery. Since her bakery also served espresso, she had some limited barista training. Like Kang at the Moaksan café, Minsook at the Kunsan chain café, and the gym *ajumma* at the rural or suburban café of her dreams, Taehee managed a staff of young men and women in their twenties, necessarily temporary baristas and bakers. As women in middle age already tasked with preparing meals for their families and study snacks for their children—though Kang said in her self-deprecating way that she was a “bad mother” because she never had time to do these things and instead ordered delivery “all the time”—these women were assumed to have, and further cultivate, their *sonmat*

(literally, “hand taste”).<sup>16</sup> *Sonmat* can be translated as “taste” when attached to a verb (*sonmat ũl katta*, “possess *sonmat*”), or as “cooking skill” (*sonmat ũl naeda*). *Sonmat* is also connected to a kind of rusticity and authenticity in Korean cooking, and it is seen as desirable if “the taste of the hand is left behind [in the food]” (*sonmat ũl namnida*). A number of restaurants around South Korea, from humble fast-food *punsik* and *kimbap* shops to fancier restaurants, have names such as *Ŏmmaŭi son* (“Mom’s hands”) or *Ŏmmaŭi sonmat* (“Mom’s taste/cooking/the taste of mom’s hands”). There are parallels with the English expression long used in North American advertising, “Just like mom used to make,” but with a stronger connection to the actual taste and the human touch that goes into it.

In contrast to the *sonmat* that mothers should ideally possess, young people who aspire to be “creative gourmets” should cultivate *immat* (literally, “mouth taste”). *Immat* as a word is used much more regularly, as having or not having *immat* (*immat itta/opta*) means having or lacking an appetite, and one prepares food “according to one’s taste/to taste” (*immase ttara*). Other commonly used words related to “taste” are *migak* (the sense of taste) and simply *mat* (the taste of something one puts in one’s mouth). If something is delicious, it “has taste” (*masi itta*) and if it is disgusting it “lacks taste” (*mat ōpda*). The transliteration of the English word “taste” is also used (*t’eisŭtŭ*), with online usage dictionaries noting that it is particularly used for coffee and wine. Youth who are “cool” (*mŏtjida*, with *mŏt* meaning “aesthetic sense”) must taste (*masŭl boda*) widely, and use their immediate experience of taste (*immat*) to guide the development of their sense of taste (*migak*) in creative directions. In this conceptualization, taste becomes social

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<sup>16</sup> The desirability of “hand taste” is echoed in the expression *salmat namnida* (the “flesh taste” remains [in the food]). A drama of this title (also mentioned in chapter 1) was wisely titled “Life is Good” in the English subtitled version. In a user-edited Wikipedia-like page devoted to the drama (Enha Wiki Mirror), a user had humorously subtitled the drama title with “Taste likes flesh!” and another user had crossed this out.

action, in which the senses are connected to “memory, materiality, and local epistemologies” (Sutton 2010, 212).<sup>17</sup> Taste is also linked to morality, as Mintz explicates in his work on sugar, sweetness and power (Mintz 1983). I heed Sutton’s caution to avoid “Epicureanism” even as I explore the sensory contours of Korean foodviews, youth creativity and entrepreneurship as manifestations of *immat* (taste/appetite), and mothers’ self-development *and* family care as *sonmat* (taste/affect). Sutton writes, “In pursuing our interest in the sensual aspects of food, we should keep our multisensory apparatuses trained on what anthropology has in one way or another always been concerned with: everyday life and the multiple contexts in which the culturally shaped sensory properties and sensory experiences of food are invested with meaning, emotion, memory, and value” (Sutton 2010, 220). To accomplish this, I weave together my ethnographic experiences at cafes, bakeries, teahouses, pubs and restaurants (as well as community centers and other such places of “lifelong learning” where these culinary arts are learned and discussed) with my and others’ readings of three key television dramas featuring “creative gourmets” from the late 2000s and early 2010s.

#### “GOURMET DRAMAS” AND CREATIVE YOUTH

The “gourmet drama” is not a strictly Korean genre, but is also a popular genre in Japan. The *ryori* (Japanese)/*yori* (Korean) drama showcases idealized, cathartic, and aestheticized daily life through the lens of “cooking” (*ryori/yori*) and while there are certain parallels in Western fictional television shows set in restaurants, the food itself plays quite a different role in recent East Asian television drama. Even for television dramas that viewers complained about as not

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<sup>17</sup> Here Sutton refers to Nadia Seremetaki’s pioneering work in the anthropology of the senses, “The Senses Still” (1994).

highlighting the food enough—such as *Coffee Prince*, which I discuss below—the food plays a certain role in terms of memory. Although “gourmet dramas” have not been studied much in terms of their unique generic codes to date, Jiwon Ahn has written a short piece on this type of drama. She writes:

Ultimately, what is narrated through the story of food in gourmet dramas is the story of the nation itself, the sense of a common national culture and history, and of belonging shared between the show and its viewers through the sharing of a common palate and collective memory around certain food items. Whether the show features an Italian restaurant, French patisserie, or a late night snack joint, identification with the characters through their stories of cooking and eating allows viewers to be positioned as members of the same imagined community in which, say, *omurice* is meant to evoke similar childhood memories among national viewers.<sup>18</sup>

While it is easy to read Korean television dramas about a pasta restaurant, upscale café, or winery as straightforward cosmopolitan striving, what is left out of that interpretation is the complex history of both foreign food in Korea and Korean cuisine itself. Take *omurice* in the above example: a combination of “omelet” (*omu*) and “rice” (*raisu*), the dish is fried rice wrapped in a thin layer of omelet and topped with ketchup or Worcestershire sauce. It is classified as “Western-style cuisine” (*yoshoku* in Japanese and *yangsik* in Korean), and was introduced to Korea during the Japanese colonial period. In both Japan and South Korea it is coded as a “children’s food,” but in Japan it is more likely to be found at home or in family restaurants, whereas in Korea it is a staple of *punsik/kimbap* shops. The national memory a single food item invokes or is meant to invoke differs in the two national contexts, with both countries categorizing it as “Western” but with an added layer of history in South Korea’s case.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://flowtv.org/2010/03/gourmet-drama-a-tasty-case-of-narrating-the-nationjiwon-ahn-keene-state-college/>.

Of “gourmet dramas,” Ahn writes further, “While individually varied in terms of narrative detail, gourmet dramas tend to share the following three textual tropes: a thematic contrast between old and new values, with the former always reaffirmed; a narrative contrast between pre-modern/personal approaches and capitalist/industrialist approaches to food, cooking and service, with the former always rewarded; and both a visual and thematic emphasis on food preparation and eating as an essentially communicative act.” The dramas I am investigating as having tapped in to concerns over new youth subjectivities and creative potential adhere to the formula Ahn outlines, with the exception of the drama set in the café space, which valorizes the new. In the other two dramas discussed, the personal touch of one enthusiastic young baker or *makkōlli* maker undoes decades of harm done by industrialized automation in the industry. In all three dramas labor insecurity is depicted as being felt keenly by the young protagonists, either on the job itself, in the process of training, or in the family business as outside economic conditions act upon it. Young creatives with their limitless *immat* (mouth taste) are shown, but where are the middle-aged women with *sonmat* (hand taste)? They are all in the background, behind the scenes and supporting the young gourmets. (They have bigger roles in family dramas, as discussed in chapter 1 in the context of Kim Minje’s position as television cooking show celebrity in *Life is Beautiful*).

I suggest that the space of the Western-style café, which has a relatively short history in South Korea<sup>19</sup>, is presented as a quintessentially postmodern space on the small screen, and the

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<sup>19</sup> As opposed to the *tabang* dating back to the colonial period in Korea, which served both coffee (mainly of the instant variety) and alcoholic beverages. While *tabang* were popular gathering places for intellectuals early in the twentieth century and continued to be important spaces for musical performances and student dissident gatherings in the 1970s and 1980s, they have been displaced by international coffee shop chains such as Starbucks, as well as local Korean chains and increasing numbers of independent cafes. Now *tabang* have an unfashionable image, and have a reputation as dimly lit, smoky caverns in which shady business dealings transpire.

young characters who occupy these spaces find love and achieve their dreams with little or no family interference. (The café is the ultimate postmodern youth playground, but other foreign-influenced spaces such as the trendy Italian restaurant also qualify). In contrast, the family *makkölli* factory and family-like baking school featured in two recent popular dramas are thoroughly *modern* spaces, with family ever-present even if dysfunctional. In one immensely popular 2010 drama baking is equated with the development of the modern nation, and in another (less popular but highly anticipated) drama of the same year, the “traditional” (*makkölli*) is brought into the modern, bringing Korea to the world without forcing the world into Korea. In these spaces family love is more important than dream fulfillment or self-discovery. I return to the argument that “taste” is the key sensory and affective element through which youth in their twenties<sup>20</sup> are configured as the saviors of the nation (in a similar way as the teenage pop idol hopefuls of the previous chapter); alternatively, when tastes go bad, youth receive a disproportionate share of the blame. I map out a dual anthropology of food and millennial youth in South Korea, with three “creative gourmet” figures standing in parallel to the three categories of teenage possibility I explored in chapter 3. I link these baker kings, rice wine princesses, and coffee elite to shifting “foodviews” (Sutton 2010:216) and youth subjectivity in South Korea’s center (Seoul) and its peripheries.

*Coffee Prince* (*K’öp’i Pürinsŭ 1 Hojöm*, MBC, 2007), *King of Baking Kim Takgu* (*Cheppangwang Kim T’akgu*, KBS, 2010), and *Cinderella’s Sister* (*Sindelleraüi Önni*, KBS,

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<sup>20</sup> If South Korean teens who pursue K-pop save the nation through their promotion of Korean soft power, “creative youth gourmets” in their twenties serve effectively as translators of *immat*, cultural intermediaries who act as ambassadors to make Korea more cosmopolitan while spreading Korean food culture through the international connections possessed by their generation. Due to South Korea’s high rate of university attendance (around 80%), most of these potential saviors are university graduates, though the odd character out in television dramas will be only a high school graduate or even a high school dropout.

2010) were all aired on major (non-cable) broadcast stations (MBC and KBS) during the primetime weekday late evening timeslot. All fit loosely into the “trendy drama” miniseries category, which generally dictates a format of sixteen to twenty hour-long episodes. (*Kim T’akgu* was significantly longer than the norm, at thirty episodes, sharing traits with *taeha* (roman fleuve) drama that begin in an earlier decade than the present). As discussed in this dissertation’s introduction, “trendy dramas” are aimed at a somewhat younger demographic and stand in contrast to daily morning or early evening dramas aimed at housewives, retirees or families, which can much more legitimately be compared to American “soap operas.” “Trendy dramas” often eschew straight melodrama in favor of lighter comedic touches and somewhat more complicated plot points. *Coffee Prince* dealt with non-normative sexuality (albeit in a non-direct way, with an ultimately safely heteronormative final turn) and *Cinderella’s Sister* retold the classic fairy tale with some interesting gender commentary. Ironically, it was *Kim Takgu*, deemed a typical *makchang* drama<sup>21</sup> that achieved the highest viewer ratings of the three, breaking the fifty percent mark in an era when the diversified landscape of cable programming and online downloading makes this a rare feat indeed. I was not doing field research when *Coffee Prince* aired in 2007 (though I was in Seoul and did observe its popularity first-hand), and few of my interviewees in 2010 commented on *Cinderella’s Sister*, but *Kim Takgu* was a frequent point of fascination and frustration: it had a plot that many deemed over-the-top and predictable, but created “addicts” of all ages and walks of life.

An addictive quality linked to what Foucault (and later Nikolas Rose) have termed “technologies of the self” is found in both *Coffee Prince* and *Kim Takgu*, and lacking in

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<sup>21</sup> *Makchang* translates into “dead-end,” and is used to refer to television dramas that hit viewers with plot turns out of nowhere, introducing clichéd tropes of amnesia, birth secrets, fatal illnesses and comas.

*Cinderella's Sister*. Rose writes, “Contemporary individuals are incited to live as if making a *project* of themselves: they are to *work* on their emotional world, their domestic and conjugal arrangements, their relations with employment and their techniques of sexual pleasure, to develop a ‘style’ of living that will maximize the worth of their existence to themselves” (1996, 157). The baristas of *Coffee Prince* and “baking king” Kim Takgu all embrace a neoliberal ethos of self striving and self improvement, though for Takgu the familial context to self striving is highlighted more, as *Kim T’akgu’s* aspirations as a national (*kungmin*) drama—and not simply a “trendy drama” like *Coffee Prince*, however popular it was—meant that familial affect and conflict was a central driver of melodrama. Yoon Sökjün and other Korean media scholars (Kim Hwan’yo 2012) have noted that while some pre-1997 financial crisis television dramas certainly contained a focus on such neoliberal values and self sufficiency and self help, post-crisis dramas are far more likely to make these values central through the figure of the “creative youth gourmet” who cheerfully perseveres despite an abysmal job market. An ethic of ongoing self-development also infected historical dramas (*sagük*), as drama writers and producers of *sagük* since the early 2000s have emphasized the unrelenting optimism and perseverance of their heroines.<sup>22</sup> Viewers receive both emotional comfort and motivation from these striving characters; as Rose observes, mass media plays an important role in producing always “active citizens” (1996, 164). The lead character in *Cinderella's Sister*, Eun-jo, strives to become a *makkölli* craftswoman, but does not strive appropriately: her striving is out of fear rather than self development dreams, and she does not put on a cheerful face while she works toward her goals.

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<sup>22</sup> A cheerful and unrelenting pursuit of self-development is seen more commonly with heroines than with heroes, as pluckiness and spirited stubbornness are depicted as positive feminine traits. Eunwoo Joo (2011), in her discussion of the *sagük* about Chosön slave society, refers to Daejanggeum as the original “self-developing heroine” of historical dramas.

The meandering aimlessness of Eun-jo and other characters in the drama ultimately affected the program’s ratings, even as the show’s dedicated fans defended its unconventional mood.

In the next section I explore the café as leisure space in South Korea, looking both at the context of television drama and at expressions of taste and youth in the café spaces I frequented during fieldwork. I link the “cult of coffee” (Song 2012) to broader trends in “self development” in South Korean society, before ending with an examination of the particularities of Chŏnju café spaces.

#### SEX, COFFEE, AND ROCK N’ ROLL: THE CAFÉ AS A PERFORMANCE SPACE FOR SELF AND COUPLES

The first “gourmet drama” discussed here, *Coffee Prince*, is also the most heavily researched in cultural studies circles. The story takes place in the new café “Coffee Prince,” updated from a *tabang*-esque dump called “*Kŏp’i wangja*” (also meaning “Coffee Prince,” but rendered in Korean). The café only employs good-looking young men, and androgynous Eunchan is mistaken as male by the café’s playboy *chaebŏl* son manager,<sup>23</sup> and then decides to keep up appearances in order to keep her job. A pseudo-homosexual romance ensues until Eunchan’s true gender is finally revealed. Many viewers both in South Korea and abroad celebrated *Coffee Prince* as a step forward in terms of awareness about LGBTQ rights, even as others lamented that the drama didn’t go far enough. I would suggest that gender-bending is more important in the drama than pure issues of sexuality, as the act of gender-bending is a prerequisite for the alternative sociality that develops among the baristas at the café. Eunchan is a variation of the

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<sup>23</sup> While I have addressed the *chaebŏl* (literally “wealth clan”) in passing elsewhere in the dissertation, this recent article provides a summary of the *chaebŏl* and ongoing *chaebŏl*-society tensions:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/south-koreas-chaebol-problem/article24116084/>

“Candyrellas” of trendy dramas past<sup>24</sup>, and *Coffee Prince* takes the “brave woman” character one step further to “crumble the boundaries of ‘social gender’ by putting a charmingly androgynous cross-dressing woman in the space of abandoned masculinity” (Yoon 2007, 21). Unlike the other two dramas, *Kim Takgu* and *Cinderella’s Sister*, *Coffee Prince* does not link youth labor and family love with “national food” and “national spirit,” but instead shows a marginal space where a group of youth from broken or struggling families create an alternative family space to support one another.<sup>25</sup> The workers at “Coffee Prince” become cosmopolitan through their creative work with coffee, and in the “third space” of the café also form an alternative community. Work in the café is not to strengthen the nation through factory production or scientifically improve South Korea’s international competitiveness, but to aid the workers in neoliberal “self-development” (*chagi palchön*). To be sure, “self-development” is present in the other two dramas discussed here as well, but is more explicitly extended as an ideal in *Coffee Prince*.

Regina Song’s work on café culture (and specifically the rise of Starbucks in South Korea) illustrates how cafes symbolize both leisurely, romantic spaces and come to represent the productive self. While there are plenty of parallels with the “third place” identity of cafes in North America and Europe, the way that cafes have become understood as places of expertise is unique to the South Korean case.<sup>26</sup> Cafes in South Korea embody the “technologies of the self” ideal that Rose describes:

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<sup>24</sup> The aforementioned ideal of “pluckiness and spirited stubbornness” follows from an ideal heroine type known as “Candyrella,” a term coined in the South Korea media in 2004 to refer a heroine combining the optimistic personality of Candy (a Japanese manga heroine of the 1970s, also popular in South Korea through underground channels, despite a ban on Japanese cultural products) and the serendipitous life turn of Cinderella.

<sup>25</sup> A 2010 drama called *Coffee House*, about friendships and romances between workers at a café/book store/publishing house, also depicts the young adult children of less-than-cohesive families.

<sup>26</sup> Having grown up in the Seattle area during Starbucks’ prime years of expansion (the 1990s), I had many friends who were Starbucks baristas, and an immediate family member worked in a mid-level position in Starbucks

The allure of expertise lies in its promise to reconcile the tensions formed across the soul of the individual who is forced concurrently to inhabit different spheres. For the new experts of the psyche promise that modes of life that appear philosophically opposed—business success and personal growth, image management and authenticity—can be brought into alignment and achieve translatability through the ethics of the autonomous, choosing, psychological self (Rose 1996, 157).

Song describes advertising campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s that focused on the romance of coffee, which at the time meant instant coffee. Though coffee was famously first drunk by King Kojong at the turn of the twentieth century, and cafes existed for the elite during the Japanese colonial period, coffee only became a drink for the masses in the 1970s (as in the United States). Producers of television and print ads aimed to “romanticize” coffee in order to disassociate it from its role as a cheap drink to help stay awake on the factory production line, in the hopes that coffee would be associated with leisurely—and therefore more generous—consumption and domestic life. Song marks the introduction of Starbucks in South Korea in the late 1990s as a turning point: “[i]nstead of signaling a longing between heterosexual relationships, coffee narratives of the late 1990s and early 2000s instead offered ways of revitalizing the self in neoliberal South Korea” (Song 2012, 51). But the transition was not

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corporate office. So I was quite intimately familiar with the model of “expertise” Starbucks strived for in the U.S.: as Song described for South Korea, baristas and Starbucks office workers alike competed in periodic morale-boosting contests, and many pursued “coffee master” certification, which involved developing one’s own taste in coffee and then acting as a facilitator of tastings for the public. My family member commented on a few occasions that the training and team-building got a bit “cult-like,” above and beyond the general frustrations of corporate culture. Over time, however, the “cult-like” training became tempered by the widespread American perception that Starbucks was “just another fast-food business.” Starbucks’ mass expansion and popularity ultimately weakened its claims as a “special” company with an artisanal spirit, though it continues to find new ways to re-make this claim. The rigorous training, expectations of expertise and sacrifice, and self-investment of Starbucks workers that Song found in ethnographic research in South Korea certainly appears to exceed expectations at U.S. Starbucks by several degrees of intensity.

absolute, as cafes retained a romantic image while also becoming spaces of individual productivity, and increasingly, female friendship. Looking specifically at Starbucks work culture in South Korea, Song points out that “[w]hile hard work and team play are also essential components in the US Starbucks Company, Starbucks Korea makes teamwork integral to employment, hosting programs such as after-work drinking socials and parties, as well as company centered events and anniversary parties” (Song 2012, 99). Given the fact that South Korea holds the dubious distinction of having the longest work hours in the OECD this is not surprising.<sup>27</sup> Song also notes that “all employees [at Starbucks Korea] go through a rigorous training...that is four times the length and depth of the training process in the U.S.” (Song 2012, 106). There is a palpable parallel in the productive Starbucks customers who occupy the café space and the baristas who have expertise in making the space pleasant and productive. Many of the baristas Song interviewed reported that they were once satisfied customers and were then inspired to become baristas; this holds true among the women I interviewed in Chŏnju as well, who quite legitimately appreciated the café space as a new kind of space in South Korean society, and were sometimes moved to develop expertise in coffee-making for their own self-development or even to exercise their *sonmat* as a café professional.

Although most of my interviewees were avid consumers of coffee, and several of them dreamed of opening a café (and a few even realizing this dream), their desire to put their *sonmat* to good use in the public sphere did not necessarily translate into a belief that young people’s *immat* should be cultivated in the café. Song notes a generational gap in the perception of café work:

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<sup>27</sup> <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/12/s-koreans-put-in-most-hours/>.

[T]he older generation saw baristas within the context of bartenders and *regis*<sup>28</sup> and thus viewed the position as purely a service profession. But the younger generation, especially those in their twenties and thirties, saw the position as something beyond just another temporary service industry position: to them, a barista was not a fast food worker, a server, a host, not a “bartender.” The recent adoption of the word barista was as new and unique as the word *latte*, and it signaled a sense of professionalism representative of the works in culinary arts, as exemplified by a trained chef (Song 2012, 113).

My interviewees in their fifties tended to view barista work at least somewhat negatively, while those in their thirties were part of the demographic that sees café work as both “professional” and “artistic” work. Interviewees in their forties had the most varied opinions about cafes and café work, as they were both in a position to be competing with youth for jobs in cafes as they returned to the workforce after raising young children, and were actively thinking about employment prospects for their children approaching university age. Some women conceded that youth in their twenties had more sensitive *immat* by virtue of more globalized lifestyles within South Korea or even travel abroad—they knew what espresso was supposed to taste like. Others, like Kang, insisted that *immat* could be developed even among older people—as evidenced by her own excellent taste in coffee—and older women had the *sonmat* to match. Among those women with café dreams who yielded to youthful *immat* or at least recognized broader social recognition of youth as “tasting beings,” the hope was that they, as women with *sonmat* and aesthetic sense, could act as café managers to direct the young creative gourmets. In

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<sup>28</sup> As Song explains, the word *regi* is taken from the Japanese, which itself is an abbreviation of “register.” *Regi* is a front desk worker/server, but in Korean *tabang* it took on a less than wholesome meaning, indicating female employees who would sell affection (including sex) to customers.

terms of worries about their own children developing *immat* in a post-university or college barista position, there was general recognition that taste was fallible and trends changed quickly.

The drama *Coffee Prince* (full title: *The Flagship Store of Coffee Prince*) aired in 2007, roughly a decade after Starbucks and the transnational coffee trend reached South Korea. The opening episodes of the drama highlight the clash of old and new in café culture at the time: Han-gyöl, the young new owner of *Coffee Prince*, wants to turn the old *tabang* into an aesthetically pleasing space for customers to linger, setting it apart from all the hole-in-the-wall take-out coffee places around Seoul. In the late 2000s most high-end cafes in Seoul were in elite areas such as Kangnam, with university neighborhoods north of the river such as Sinch'on and Hongdae containing mainly tiny take-out coffee stores or transnational chain cafes. The depiction of the *Coffee Prince* café in the neighborhood of Hongdae (the abbreviated form of Hongik University, known for its arts programs) led to a boom in independent cafes in that neighborhood, which quickly spread around Seoul and then around the country.<sup>29</sup> Although some viewers complained that the drama did not actually depict enough scenes of coffee culture, fans of the show delighted in the impeccable appearance of the baristas and their manners and enthusiasm when serving customers, close-ups of “latte art,” the plotline involving the stylish Korean-Japanese waffle-making expert, and the crafty barista doodles that contributed to the unique décor of the store. Above all, fans fixated on the friendship between the baristas, with some viewing the blossoming love between Hangyul and cross-dressing Eun-chan as a subset of the intense friendships among café co-workers. Yoon Sökjin commented shortly after the

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<sup>29</sup> Ironically, the drama’s main shooting location, the *Coffee Prince* café that was remodeled for filming, gets poor reviews online, and the owner was embroiled in a scandal in the early 2010s involving illegal fees charged to Chinese and Japanese tourists for taking photos on the premises. The broadcasting network, MBC, attempted to solve this problem by sponsoring a new café with a similar atmosphere in a nearby neighborhood, next to a secondary filming location—the posh yet artful hilltop house of one of the lead characters.

drama’s airing that despite the freshness the drama brought to the “trendy drama” genre, a difficult reality for youth is also not far below the surface. When working-class Eun-chan’s “*chaeböl* royalty” boss (and love interest) yells at her to quit for some misstep, her eyes fill with tears and she replies, “Is work a game to you? You’re always telling me to quit.” A working-class acquaintance of Eun-chan’s (Hwang Minyöp) is also shown to be overjoyed in just getting a position at the café. Yoon writes, “While presenting the possibility of reviving the trendy drama genre, *Coffee Prince*, in its appropriate fusing of ‘youth’ and ‘coffee,’ depicts the dark reality of dreams and romance restricted by ‘youth unemployment’ and ‘employment insecurity’” (Yoon 2007, 23). At the end of the drama, Eun-chan decides to go abroad, to Italy, to add value to herself in two respects: as a barista who has truly developed transnational taste in coffee, and as a future daughter-in-law who follows through on her dreams with charm, pluckiness, and sacrifice.

*Coffee Prince*, along with earlier “gourmet drama” *My Name is Kim Samsoon* (2005) and several other culinary-themed dramas of the 2000s, is still what Lee (2012, 73) terms “melodrama focused” (*mello chungsim*), as opposed to a smaller number of dramas that combine a focus on a highlighted occupation and melodrama (*chigöp +mello*) or dramas that focus only on occupations (*chigöp chungsim*). Only one drama from the 2000s that Lee classified as “occupation focused” was in the “gourmet drama” category: SBS network’s *Sikkaek (Gourmet)* from 2008. The rest of the gourmet dramas are a combination of “melodrama” (which Lee seems to be using to mean “romance” in this case) and occupation-focused, or categorized as straight melodrama, as for *Coffee Prince*. Dramas that were occupation-focused and wholly or nearly wholly lacking a romantic plotline were dramas about hospitals, airports, broadcasting networks,

designers, and gangsters.<sup>30</sup> Jenny Wang Medina notes a particular concentration of culinary dramas (19), music-related dramas (13), and medical dramas (13), with the next highest category “sports dramas” (8) in the period 2003–12 (Medina 2015, 4). Tellingly, the culinary arts, K-pop (broadly defined), and medicine—particularly medical tourism for cosmetic surgery—were all strategic areas for “national branding” in the 2000s, and as mentioned in chapter 3, have been internalized by parents and children in the new post-1997 economy as possible futures. Depictions of sports stars on the small screen have also been matched by success by South Koreans in Olympics, Asian Games, and World Cups.<sup>31</sup> My interviewees were watching television dramas with their teenage and pre-teen children that told them to study hard as “revenge” but keep their options open (in *God of Study*), and dramas about the K-pop industry, or less glamorously the food industry, that presented these occupations as creative, romantic, and satisfying. Medina notes astutely that:

The fact that protagonists of many TV dramas in the early 2000s had tenuous work lives in the service sector addressed the problem of “unemployed” youth in South Korea by showing that the previous generation’s definition of employment as long-term service to one company had become too narrow, and that larger swaths of working and middle class young South Koreans were struggling to reap any benefits of the “miracle on the Han.” And while the belief in traditional education as a route for advancement persisted, maintaining continuity with 20<sup>th</sup> century narratives of aspirational mobility, the prohibitive costs of securing educational success through expensive cram schools or a foreign education made this route increasingly unattainable for the working class and a

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<sup>30</sup> Other than *Sikkaek* (Gourmet) only one two dramas that Lee (2012) categorizes as “occupation-focused” are about the creative arts: MBC’s *Beethoven Virus* (2008) and SBS’s *Style* (2009). But I question whether *Sikkaek* or *Beethoven Virus* are really “occupation-focused”: viewers’ emotional attachment to *Sikkaek* was due to the family-focused storyline rather than a romance, and *Beethoven Virus*, much like *Coffee Prince*, focused on the family-like space of the orchestra.

<sup>31</sup> Rachael Miyung Joo (2012) has written about Korean male and female sports stars being treated much like pop idols in South Korea, in some cases even becoming television celebrities through “CFs” (“commercial films,” know in North America simply as “commercials”) and product endorsement campaigns as well as appearances on reality and game shows.

cause for constant concern for the middle classes. The depiction of service industries in the media, however, puts forth an alternate narrative of professional success at the same time that it provides viewers with the knowledge to consume conspicuously, but also with distinction. Food service, health and wellness, design, tourism, hospitality, personal care, and a broad range of services have at least nominally been elevated to the status of “profession” with an attendant recognition of vocational training and certification as academic credentials (Medina 2015, 26).

The media’s depiction of the service sector, rife with instability though it is, as an alternative pathway to success and source of fulfillment, finds its target audience: youth entering the workforce and middle-aged women returning to the workforce who are typically well educated and who will approach service work with the same focus and drive as for academic study. As my interviewees and community members at field sites explained, this pattern is particularly pronounced in Chŏnju—a food city and a historic culture city, but decidedly *not* a city of industry.

While Western-style cafes were spreading around Seoul by the early to mid 2000s, non-chain cafes did not arrive in Chŏnju until the late 2000s. Chain cafes and restaurants have not generally done well in Chŏnju either, as there are already a higher number of *matjip* (well-reviewed restaurants, literally “delicious establishments”) than in most other cities of Chŏnju’s size. Several Western fast-food franchises have failed and closed, which several women told me was due to Chŏnju’s reputation as a “well-being” city with no place for trashy, mass-produced food. There was only one Starbucks store in Chŏnju during my fieldwork, with a few other transnational chains in the downtown area. At the time of the beginning of redevelopment of the historic *Hanok Maül* neighborhood for tourism in the late 1990s, most cafes that opened shop were more accurately teahouses that also gradually came to serve such items as hand-drip coffee,

but in the last few years spacious and high-end cafes have opened in the “traditional” district, and these conspicuous cafes along with a growing number of European restaurants (mainly “pasta restaurants”) have so overwhelmed the neighborhood that many Chŏnju residents complain about the short-sighted development. As property value increased in the *Hanok Maül*, more modest cafes and restaurants opened in developing residential neighborhoods to the north and the south in Chŏnju; one woman I interviewed a few times had recently opened a traditional-style teahouse on the first floor of her home, where she sold packaged tea and tea paraphernalia but would only serve guests tea in one small group at a time, explaining to them the various steps of the tea ceremony as she served them. Kang assisted her nephew in starting a café in the countryside, where land was cheap and plentiful, and where there would be no competition from other cafes for the hikers returning from day hikes on Moaksan. The “gym ajumma” likewise dreamed of making artistic coffee drinks at a café in the countryside. And Minsook opened an Ediya Coffee franchise<sup>32</sup> in Kunsan, where there were fewer café options for university students. My interviewees in their thirties, forties, and even fifties were accustomed to the performance of selves and demonstrations of their unique yet in-tune *immat* in café spaces, and Minsook and Kang spoke of an easy transition from consumer to “latte artist.” (Kang, who was a Seoul transplant from decades before, complained of the trek to and from the mountainside café, but even she conceded that her past was not as urban as one might imagine, as “when I was growing up there were literally cows grazing in the suburb of Seoul [Seongnam] where my family lived”). Minsook, in her soft-spoken and eloquent way, said that her life was tied up with the countryside

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<sup>32</sup> This blog post (<http://blog.korea.net/?p=22373>) analyzes the business strategies and particularities of Ediya Coffee franchise. Although Caffè Bene is expanding much more aggressively overseas, Ediya still (as of 2014) has more stores domestically.

now anyway, with all the trips she took there on weekends for fun or food harvesting, and so the drive through the Chōlla countryside between Chōnju and Kunsan was “nothing” to her. The “gym *ajumma*” had echoed these sentiments in an earlier interview, justifying her decision to quit her job and attend a barista academy as she eyed a café by Kūmsansa (Golden Mountain Temple) as a possible place of employment.

For youth entering the workplace after university or college, a café barista position is generally temporary. Lucky ones such as Kang’s nephew have family support to launch them immediately into a management and leadership role—though only time will tell whether this was a good investment. Youth are tasked with tasting widely and then translating these tastes for domestic consumption, but it is difficult to leverage this sensitive *immat* to trustworthy *sonmat*. As the tastes of boutique coffee (“hand-drip”) and espresso beverages become familiar to more Koreans, the value of an adventurous *immat* decreases.<sup>33</sup> Returning to Medina’s analysis of *Coffee Prince*, it is clear that expanded culinary options in turn expand food service work, but like the K-pop landscape discussed in the previous chapter, this new field also becomes colonized by South Korea’s valuing of “academic credentials” and certificates over direct experience or on-the-job training:

The parallel trajectory of adulthood and craft specialization in a fetishized service industry here suggests a broadening of possibilities for the Korean protagonists in these dramas to achieve cultural literacy and distinction. At the same time, the fetishization of

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<sup>33</sup> When I volunteered in the “guest house” for the 2010 Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF), my young fellow volunteers—mostly university students at Chonbuk University or Jeonju University, but some Chōnju natives who were studying elsewhere—had spent plenty of time at cafes, but almost none had worked as a barista. Since our primary duty was to make espresso drinks for international guests, we trained briefly with a “master” who had a fancy café downtown. The young man tasked with managing our team post-training was a returned volunteer who had already learned how to make coffee the previous year, and also studied at a highly-ranked university in Seoul. I was put “second-in-command,” since I would “know what foreign guests like.”

the knowledge surrounding the object of consumption places it back in the standard educational model of diligent study, rote memorization, intense competition, and academic certification (Medina 2015, 18).

Even Eun-chan, the drama’s hard-working heroine, cannot leverage her developed *immat* and newfound coffee knowledge into a desired *sonmat* without a sojourn to Italy. In contrast, at least in Chŏnju, the middle-aged women with coffee dreams could bolster an already demonstrated and trusted *sonmat* with credentials gained at coffee *hagwŏn*, which begin their curriculum with a development of taste and scent (*immat*; *hyanggi*). The text on the web page of Chonbuk Coffee Education Academy (*Chŏnbuk K’ŏp’i Kyoyuk Hagwŏn*) reads: “People who can sense the scent (*hyanggi*) of coffee, and a beautiful space to gather those people...and spending the time together with Chonbuk Coffee Education Academy.”<sup>34</sup> The café is a playground for both youth and middle-aged women with the leisure time to enjoy it, and the ideal configuration is still a middle-aged female manager with *sonmat* overseeing youth with cutting-edge *immat*, all of them trained in coffee appreciation and brewing methods. Indeed, *Coffee Prince* turned this ideal on its head by representing the café’s manager—before Han-kyŏl has matured enough to take it over and accepted the café as his calling—as a lazy middle-aged man (Mr. Hong) who had once been a “renowned barista.” The all-male homosocial space of this café attracts viewers with the unexpected, as while cafés may be owned by middle-aged men, there is often a middle-aged woman utilizing her *sonmat* and customer service skills as the “face” of the shop. In the next section I turn to *immat* and *sonmat*, gender and generation, in the space of the Korean bakery (*ppangjip*).

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.story-m.net/?c=3/18&uid=77>.

BAKING FOR THE NATION: ADAPTING *YANGSIK*

*Kim Takgu* aired on KBS2 from June to September 2010, following *Cinderella's Sister* (which aired March to June 2010). The drama tells the story of the head baker and CEO of Korea's first large-scale bread factory in the 1970s, who after two daughters had lost hope of having a son, following the premonitions of his fortune-telling mother. The CEO instead fathered an illegitimate son with his daughter's nursemaid, leading his wife to conceive a son with her husband's right-hand man in retaliation. The two boys were born within weeks of one another, with the illegitimate son (Kim Takgu) banished to a life of poverty with his single mother, and the other son (Majun) left in the dark about his true parentage. *Kim Takgu* chronicles the poor son's struggle to return to his father's household, highlighting his love affair with baking as an apprentice in a baking school. The other son grows up materially privileged but emotionally deprived, struggling to overcome the CEO's indifference towards him and forcing himself to learn baking to earn his father's love rather than out of any interest in the profession. The oft-criticized *makchang* elements of the drama involve the widely-viewed-as-dysfunctional families that make up South Korea's elite class—dysfunction that is pleurably consumed again and again in dramas about the *chaeböl* (Korea's business conglomerates, sometimes called Korea's “royalty”) and the unfortunate commoners that get involved in their corrupt and decadent lifestyles (particularly the women who marry into them).

Women I talked to about the drama in the context of their everyday lives—mainly in their 40s but some in their 30s or 50s—reported the familiar predicament of being sucked into a TV drama despite their best intentions, becoming “addicts” after watching a few episodes with their junior high school age children. The scenes viewed most pleurably involved the baking school,

and the most-commented-upon character was the rich household’s mother figure, a vengeful and scheming character whose pathetic lot in life still managed to elicit a certain degree of viewer sympathy. I began watching this hit drama in order to view a popular fictionalized account of *chaebŏl* family life, but was also drawn into the storyline involving the strict yet family-like space of the baking school, and montages involving “bread” at all stages of production.<sup>35</sup> Eventually both Takgu and his half-brother Majun end up as apprentices at the baking school, but their respective successes as bakers is dependent on their symbolic relationship to bread. Takgu grew up hungry in the countryside without knowledge of his illustrious father, and early episodes show him getting in trouble for stealing bread on several occasions. When he later learns of his father and spends a short time in the household, his desire to become a master baker is sparked by spying on his father engaged in the ritual of bread creation. Majun, in contrast, has never been hungry and for him bread only represents his father’s withheld affection—it is an obstacle and nothing more. This symbolic difference allows Takgu to succeed in a baking school contest to make “the world’s most filling bread,” a bun made of corn and barley. Takgu is credited with the invention of this unique bread, and it is apparently his rusticity and relative deprivation that allow him to dream up this “most filling” of breads, as corn and barley were historically key ingredients for a Korean countryside that had to supplement its white rice with less favored grains. (It should be noted here that the bread featured in *King of Baking Kim Takgu* is already “Korean” in a way that luxury goods like pasta, wine and coffee are not, having been introduced to Korea in a significantly earlier period).

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<sup>35</sup> “Bread” in South Korea is practically any flour-based product baked in an oven (or, in some cases, steamed). Cake and cookies can also be “bread,” and the vast majority of bread sold in Korean-style bakeries (whether national chains such as Paris Baguette or small, independent bakeries) is made with plain white flour. It is a common perception in South Korea that whereas rice is the Korean staple food, the staple food present with every meal in “the West” is “bread.”

Part of *Kim T’akgu’s* charm is in its setting in the 1970s and 1980s, which viewers in their 40s and 50s now remember as a time of hardship but also great promise for South Korea. The master baker/CEO father figure is a man “of taste” and talent, but also a heroic capitalist working to build up the nation. He is a world apart from the bourgeois *chaeböl* son of another “gourmet drama” set in the 2000s (2005’s *My Name is Kim Samsoon*), who runs an upscale French restaurant (complete with fancy French patisserie). Kim T’akgu’s father has the ability to create elaborate cakes, but his bread factory is for “the people.” Similarly, students of wealthy backgrounds in the baking school create European-style cakes even in the less cosmopolitan Korea of the 1970s, but Takgu alone makes bread with “Korean roots.” It is not simply “bread” that is fetishized in *Kim Takgu*, but specifically Korean bread. Kim Takgu and his father bake in the service of the nation, with the happy side result of finding true familial love.

Medina also analyzes *Kim Takgu* in her discussion of culinary television dramas, noting the odd melding of factory bread production and artisanal bread craftsmanship:

The contrast between *My Name is Kim Samsoon’s* fetishization of French culinary culture through pastry and the creation of a local history of bread-making in *Baker King* [*Kim Takgu*] shows a line of narrative development within the culinary drama genre from adoption and faithful reproduction to indigenization, but the romanticization of mass-produced foodstuffs and Korean bread did not content itself with an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of local practices and the recognition of future growth as in *Terroir’s* hopes for Korean wine culture, or *Daejanggeum’s* recovery of pre-modern ecological positivism. Instead, it expanded its backward gaze on local culinary culture to reconcile the lingering tension between authoritarian industrial development of the 1960s and 1970s and the folk populism of the democratization period in the 1980s and early 1990s through a lush family drama. . . . Baker King creates a nostalgic vision of the 1970s and 1980s that compresses authoritarian developmentalism and democratization into a family drama that folds these opposing periods of history into a mass-produced multi-grain bun (Medina 2015, 49–50).

The compression of industrial national baking and local bakeries is more than a narrative device in the drama *Kim Takgu*, as many “neighborhood bakeries” in South Korea today are subsidiaries of the *chaebol* SPC Group, the oldest “bakery and confectionery” company in South Korea. SPC began as Sangmidang upon Korea’s liberation from Japan in 1945, and became Samlip Company in 1959. Packaged individually wrapped Samlip cream-filled buns are still sold in convenience stores, along with the Shany brand, another subsidiary acquired in 1972. In terms of franchise stores, Paris Croissant began in 1986, and the somewhat lower-end Paris Baguette in 1988; Paris Baguette has expanded dramatically in the domestic market since its start, and expanded into China in 2004. It even opened a store in Paris in 2014, with the hopes of attracting Asian residents and tourists before gaining broader interest through word of mouth.<sup>36</sup> In addition to Samlip/Shany packaged bread products (the “S” in SPC) and Paris Croissant/Baguette (the “P”), the *chaebol* owns an assortment of related “Companies,” including BR Korea (Baskin Robbins and Dunkin’ Donuts Korea) and Café Pascucci, a popular, high-end Italian-esque café. Since the 2000s both Paris Baguette and Paris Croissant have also had in-store espresso bars. Competitors to SPC Group *ppangjip* include Crown Bakery (est. 1988), Bbang Goom Teo (“the bread baking place,” est. 1995), the high-end Artisee (est. 2004), and Tous Le Jours (est. 1997, and owned by the CJ Group, which is related to Samsung through family connections). The rags-to-riches national family bakery of *Kim Takgu* is an easy stand-in for SPC Group’s Samlip Bread, and the on-screen factory is located in North Ch’ungch’öng province, broadly representing the

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/donaldkirk/2014/07/23/mon-dieu-koreas-paris-baguette-is-now-a-real-french-cafe/>.

great swath of land (but not too far from Seoul) of Ch’ungch’ŏng and Kyŏnggi provinces where real-life industrial bakeries were (and are) located.

Filming locations for *Kim Takgu* were North Ch’ungch’ŏng, but illegitimate son Takgu grows up with his mother in a small town in Kyŏngsang; his Kyŏngsang accent marks him as an outsider when he arrives at his father’s mansion and the baking school. As the child of a single mother he frequently goes hungry, and gets in trouble for stealing bread from a neighborhood vendor. Through scenes of Takgu sniffing the aroma of baking bread in the air and stealing bread, viewers come to understand him as bread-obsessed, a quality that is at least partially attributed to being “in the blood.” Growing up at a time in which rice production was discouraged in favor of millet or barley, Takgu dreams of new bread inventions, melding need (barley, corn) with wants (the global world of “bread”). In many ways, the drama *Baker King Kim Takgu* represents the changing diets of South Koreans, valorizing “the local” while emphasizing that even local products or industries generally would not have become famous or profitable without the industrial production process. At the end of the drama Takgu becomes an artisanal baker at “Palbong *Ppangjip*,” which my interviewees were quick to connect to Chŏnju’s very own PNB Bakery, which had begun in 1951 as Pungnyŏn Chegwa (Confectionery). PNB has remained a local chain, and does not erase its colonial past: its founder made *senbei* (rice crackers) for Japanese residents of Chŏnju prior to liberation. The bakery still sells several varieties of *senbei* and choco-pies, the items that originally made them famous. PNB is a local chain with four locations in Chŏnju and one at Iksan train station, but still using industrial production and packing methods; most recently, the bakery proudly reported that new locations would be opened in the food courts of three Hyundai department stores in Seoul. Though Chŏnju is frequently

cited as a “food city,” this generally refers to “traditional” Korean food; many of my interviewees insisted that cafes and bakeries in Chŏnju were more than pulling their weight on a national level, and that food in Chŏnju was not simply good because of its rural proximity and traditions passed down from generations, but because particular care was taken with *all* types of food.

Antti Leppanen’s ethnographic research into rice-cake (*ttŏk*) making reveals a tension—but not opposition—between rice and bread, *ttŏkchip* and *ppangjip*. The story told involves the rise of “bread” as traditional rice-cake making was curtailed by rice rationing; next, bread enjoyed great popularity while rice-cakes languished; and now that the market has been cornered by large chains such as Paris Baguette, bakers at small independent *ppangjip* are moving to *ttŏkchip*, capitalizing on the “well-being” trend. Even chains like Paris Baguette and Tous Le Jours feature many pastries containing *ttŏk*, a kind of hybrid of the two. Bread is seen as decorative—much like espresso drinks with “latte art,” but with less of an essence in terms of scent (*hyanggi*)—but requiring more “skills” (*kisul*) of its maker than *ttŏk*.<sup>37</sup> Images of youth frosting cakes extravagantly and shaping exotic French pastries convey aesthetic taste and implied experiential taste (*immat*), whereas the *ttŏkchip* represents a rusticity that South Koreans are only very recently in the position to romanticize. The recent (re)invention of rice and rice-cakes as a “well-being” food is also aided by a global gluten-free movement. Leppanen demonstrates how perceptions of rice were quite different until just twenty-five years ago:

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted, however, that bread is certainly seen as nutritionally less valuable than rice, and is also often dismissed as “instant” (*insŭt’ant’ŭ*) in a way that rice would not be.

From the early 1960s until as late as 1991, consumption of rice as staple food or as raw material food manufacturing was restricted and regulated by various legal and administrative measures. Restrictions were validated with scientific and nutritional arguments on deficiencies of rice as well as with the economic necessity to save foreign currency. During the course of the 1960s, domestic production of rice could not meet the increasing demand, and the government wanted to avoid using foreign hard currencies to import rice. Instead, use of wheat flour, imported with favorable terms or received as aid, and domestically grown barley was promoted and in some cases mandated in “mixed grain and flour food” campaigns and policies [*honbunsik changnyŏ undong* or *chŏngch’aek*] (Leppanen 2012, 3).

My interviewees who were children in the 1960s and 1970s recalled that white short-grain rice was delicious, but campaigns emphasized its nutritional lack as well as economic wastefulness, and all of the women I interviewed reported getting sick of scant amounts of white rice overpowered by the taste and texture of barley in packed school lunches. Minju, my interviewee from Kwangju who reported hiding on her roof as a ten-year old during the 1980s Kwangju massacre, laughed that she could only enjoy barley-rice (*poribap*) now that enough time had passed. All three of the “café women” were surprised that their pre-teen and teenage children ate *poribap* and other mixed-grain rice without complaint, but surmised that it must be because they were much more used to the taste and texture of wheat and other “Western” grains. The children often preferred a simple piece of white toast with jam for breakfast, but their mothers tried to enforce hot breakfasts, expressing concerns that bread was just a kind of “instant” (*insŭt’ant’ŭ*) food without nutritional content and with potentially harmful additives. However, as Leppanen notes for his study, while mass-produced bread was a source of diffuse anxiety for the women I spoke with, it is not an “other” to rice in the same way that anthropologists such as Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) argue that it is for Japan. This is due to South Korea’s unique twentieth century relationship with rice production, consumption, and rationing.

The drama *Baker King Kim Takgu*, which boasted the highest ratings of any Korean television drama of 2010, can in many ways be seen as having successfully gauged the national affective landscape, comprehensively addressing lingering resentment of disruption of established foodways during industrialization, *chaebŏl* domination of bread, and anxiety about bread’s position in Korean cuisine. With this painful distortion of tastes laid to rest through family drama, several dramas since 2010 have picked up where *Kim Takgu* left off, carrying on the fascination with traditional Korean food that 2003’s *Daejanggeum* started, but taking it beyond the royal palace to family businesses, neighborhood shops, and farms.<sup>38</sup>

After Korean industrial bread and the “authentic French baking” of the likes of Paris Baguette, “bread” has diversified in certain corners of South Korea, with independent bakeries serving immigrant tastes (in the “French district” of Sŏllaemaül, for example) and the bread varieties of other Asian countries making inroads as well. While Leppanen notes that there are deeply rooted associations between the steam rising from a rice pot (or a rice-cake mold) and vitality, now that ovens have overtaken rice-cake molds in Korean kitchens, questions arise as to the endurance of categories of steamed and baked (Leppanen 2012), or going back to Claude Levi-Strauss (1969), “raw and cooked.” Historically speaking, rice on the Korean peninsula would have been the “raw” (nature) and the introduction of bread would have been “cooked” (culture), but this dichotomy ignores the baking of rice (to make *senbei*, as the Pungnyŏn Bakery did and does in Chŏnju) and the steaming of bread (as for the recently popular street stall food *tchimbbang*, “steamed bread,” often filled with sweet red bean). My interviewee Taehee worked

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<sup>38</sup> Some Korean dramas from the period 2010 to 2014 that highlight local food include: *Palhyo kajok* (Fermentation Family, 2011), *Kkotminam ramyŏn kage* (Flower Boy Ramen Shop, 2011), *Siksarŭl hapsida* (Let’s Eat, 2013), *Sindŭlŭi manch’an* (Feast of the Gods, 2012), *Pulhuŭi myŏngjak* (Immortal Classic, 2012), *Tallaetoen changguk* (Wild Chives and Soybean Soup, 2014), and *Chŏnsŏlŭi manyŏ* (Legendary Witch, 2014).

in a non-Korean, non-Western bakery chain, selling a Southeast Asian style of sweet bread that is baked and then fried with butter and condensed milk. She described her decision to open a franchise store of this particular chain as purely practical: seeing that stores in the chain had done well in the Seoul area, she opened a branch in the largely middle-class center of Chungwasan-dong hoping to attract customers who were tired of the same old Western and Korean café chains.

During my fieldwork Taehee’s shop was doing quite well, but she worked long hours and as she was within a year of opening the business, profit was slow to come. Her daughters could at least come do their homework in the shop and get her help when business was slow, as she did not send them to any academic *hagwŏn* (only dance *hagwŏn* for the younger daughter, as discussed in the previous chapter). Taehee marveled to me in an interview in the store one sleepy afternoon that although she had simply selected her franchise after logically considering her options, since opening the café she had become “not quite obsessed, but very drawn towards” Southeast Asia. She was particularly interested in Thailand as a destination, and while she was aware of the number of Koreans traveling to the Philippines and Singapore because of quality English instruction, she distanced herself from those Koreans (see Kang 2012). She claimed that she did not care about English, but only wanted a relaxing and humane place to raise her daughters, and believed that certain parts of Thailand would allow for that. She reported that her husband was on the same page, as he too was tired of the long hours of the window-blind installation business. I learned on my short visit back to Chŏnju in 2013 that Minju and her sons had moved to China for her husband’s work; I did not find out if Taehee has since realized her Thai dream.

Taehee appeared to have a good relationship with the employees she managed, who were all university students or recent graduates. She admitted that their job was not particularly difficult when it came to food preparation: the buns arrived prepackaged and only needed to be baked again immediately prior to being served, having been baked and fried once already. (Their labor for food preparation was roughly equivalent to what was required at a Paris Baguette, that is, limited to reheating and arranging on shelves). The employees all did have to take a basic barista course, and Taehee said that they also were all skilled at recommending to customers which beverage to pair with which variety of bun, a sign of the basic *immat* they had to demonstrate to be hired. As Taehee stated during several interviews her desire to visit and possibly move to Thailand, a few of the female student workers chimed in to agree that the experience of working in the bakery-café, selling and eating the bread made according to a Southeast Asian recipe, had given them a Southeast Asia travel desire as well. Taehee’s *sonmat* did not come into play the way Kang’s did at the Moaksan café, but rather as an extension to the attentive customer service that her young workers did not yet have the social experience to provide.

While it is no exaggeration to say that rice is the staple food of Korean cuisine—without rice (*pap*) there is in fact technically no meal—Leppanen and others have shown through analysis of discourses surrounding rice and bread that “bread” in South Korea is not quite the “other” it constitutes in Japanese society. Desire for bread, and the memories called forth when smelling or eating bread, lie somewhere between “staple” and “luxury,” due to South Korea’s industrialization trajectory and austerity measures introduced under Park Chung-hee that affected both everyday life and rituals such as weddings, funerals, and holidays. In his follow-up to The

Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau outlines the meaning of bread and wine in France: “Bread is the symbol of the hardships of life and work; it is the memory of a better standard of living acquired the hard way over the course of previous generations” (1998, 86). The parallel to bread in France may be thought of as rice in South Korea, but it is no less true for bread; bread is the symbol of a particular kind of hardship, hardship suffered under rapid industrialization. Learning how to make espresso drinks and exercising taste for coffee brings South Korea into a transnational network; adapting “bread” to match Korean history and aligning to Korean tastes brings the once-foreign to Korea and domesticates it thoroughly. In the final section of the chapter I examine taste, *makkölli*, and Chönju food culture, following *makkölli* as a Korean culinary object that is being re-invented for the world as evidence of South Korea’s rising global cache.

#### RE-INVENTING MAKKÖLLI: CHÖNJU IN SOUTH KOREA’S NEW “FOODIE” CULTURE

The third drama addressed in this chapter dealing with themes of dysfunctional family and culinary creation is *Cinderella’s Sister*, set in the present but in a fairy-tale like space away from the frenetic pace of Seoul. (The drama was filmed in rural Kyöngsang province, though just one of the actors uses Kyöngsang dialect). Unlike the (cross-dressing) female character in *Coffee Prince* or the male hero of *Kim Takgu*, the female lead character of *Cinderella’s Sister* is not depicted as “plucky” and strong, but rather irreversibly wounded by early family-inflicted trauma. Indeed, the hopelessness of the lead character (Eunjo) and general somber, meandering tone of the drama led much of its audience to give up on the program. The drama did not have nearly the

ratings of its successor *Kim Takgu*, but its depiction of a family *makgölli* business puts it in the category of “gourmet drama,” with a focus on youth creativity and national competitiveness.

*Makgölli*, a milky-white or off-white rice-based alcoholic beverage, was a popular drink until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when then-president Park Chung-hee effectively crushed the industry with rice rations (Yoo 2015, 5). Even before these regulations, however, *makkölli* brewers had difficulties under Japanese colonial rule, as the government had imposed alcohol tax ordinances. The drink continued to be consumed illicitly in the countryside in subsequent decades (by farmers with the means to produce it), but city folk switched to *soju*, a potent but cheap liquor, originally potato-based but eventually entirely synthetically produced in mass quantities. Of the *makkölli*-to-*soju* transition that began in earnest in the 1950s, Yoo writes:

Given such restrictions, brewers resorted to using artificial sweetening additives such as saccharine and aspartame as well as chemicals like ethyl alcohol and calcium carbide to speed up the fermenting process. As home brewing waned, cheap potato-based diluted *soju* began replacing this traditional drink, which can also be attributed to the large number of refugees from the north, who had settled in Seoul and other large cities after the war and preferred drinking strong distilled spirits (Yoo 2015, 6).

*Soju*, cheap and potent, was the drink of choice through the rapid industrialization years, but beer gained in popularity as it began to be imported, and then domestically produced, in the 1980s. Yoo points out that South Korea’s signing of the WTO agreement in 1999 ironically bolstered sales of humble *makkölli*, as the “open market policy...levied an equal ad valorem tax on all distilled spirits based on the degree of alcohol content” (2015:6). *Makkölli* was cheaper for the consumer with *soju* now bumped into a higher tax class, and even after *soju* producers lowered *soju*’s alcohol content, *makkölli* sales continued to rise. Since the late 2000s *makgölli*

has enjoyed a boom in popularity, lauded as a “Korean traditional” and even “well-being” product. It is a point of pride that *makgölli* is now exported to Japan as well, making something “traditionally Korean” a Korean Wave cultural product in its own right.

In *Kim T’akgu* bread becomes Korean and gives the people hope during a time of national growing pains, and in the runaway hit *Coffee Prince* young Koreans become cosmopolitan through their “espresso art,” but in *Cinderella’s Sister* there is no culinary “becoming” in the same sense, as Eunjo becomes a master distiller simply by finally giving in to family love (even if not blood family).<sup>39</sup> In a retelling of the Cinderella fairy tale, wounded teenager Eunjo comes to live in the spacious traditional house complex that houses the *makgölli* factory when her gold-digging and selfish mother marries the kind-hearted *makgölli* factory patriarch. Eunjo’s new family members immediately understand her deep psychological wounds, but Eunjo rejects the affections of her stepfather, and even more firmly rejects the attempts of friendship on the part of her childish stepsister. As she grows older she instead throws herself into learning the family business, approaching *makgölli* production in a wholly scientific and detached way. Scenes of a serious and white-coated Eunjo in the lab testing recipes, as well as scenes showing interactions with Japanese clients, could be interpreted as representing Korea’s recent “scientific” attempts to market Korean Wave products (including food). And yet, the drama’s young characters did not have to become cosmopolitan to understand this rustic drink—

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<sup>39</sup> Yoon Sökjin, a drama critic and mass media scholar, has written about a divide in terms of “blood ties” in depictions of family in dramas aimed towards older vs. younger audiences. He argues that older audiences tend to enjoy the hidden power of blood played out on screen, with reunions between long-lost parents and children. This is one explanation for how *Kim T’akgu* came to be popular with such a broad demographic: somewhat older audiences were moved by the fate that bound separated father and son (T’akgu) together, and younger audiences enjoyed the non-blood-related, youthful camaraderie of the baking school. *Cinderella’s Sister* was popular with a younger demographic, not only because of its young leads, but because blood relations were deemphasized. Yoon has found that young Koreans tend to attach affective power to the *shikgu*, or household (which has no requirement of blood relations), whereas older Koreans speak of the power of *kajok/kajöng*, or (blood) family.

unlike *Coffee Prince*'s Eunchan, who goes off to Italy for a barista training course—nor did they have to make the drink more appropriately national (as Kim Takgu did with his bread creations). *Makgölli*, like family love, was always there and waiting to be discovered. As with café drink menus or baking, however, there is room for creativity: Eunjo works to make the family *makkölli* recipe appealing for both domestic and international consumers.

*Cinderella's Sister* plays with the Cinderella fairy tale, taking its place in a long line of television and film adaptations of fairy tales, folk tales and myths, including recent “flipped” fairy tales. In this inverted version of Cinderella, the evil, opportunistic stepmother (Kang-sook) brings her daughter (Eunjo) into the spacious countryside home of Daesung, a widowed *makkölli* maker with his own bubbly daughter (Hyo-sun). A love triangle forms between troubled and cold stepsister Eunjo, the long-time apprentice Ki-hoon, and childlike Hyo-sun. The triangle is squared by Jungwoo, the adopted son of one of Eunjo's mothers' ex-lovers, who tracks Eunjo down when he comes of age to declare his love for her. In this version of the Cinderella story the stepsister is unjustly the object of two good men's affections, leaving Cinderella with none. Cinderella (Hyo-sun) is beautiful and good, but so childlike and naïve that she quickly begins to grate on viewers. The stepsisters eventually form a bond under the benevolent care of father Daesung, and his unconditional love even redeems evil stepmother Kang-sook, who takes her place after Daesung's death as the middle-aged woman with *sonmat*, running the family *makkölli* business while Eunjo continues to use her (scientifically-informed) *immat* to improve the product. Hyo-sun becomes the face of the company, literally—her image appears on the *makkölli* bottles, and she has a knack for doing business with Japanese buyers. Though the drama is a decidedly modern retelling, order is restored in a dysfunctional family through a return to filiality, though

in a less purely patriarchal manner than in the classic tale (Tangherlini 1994). Eunjo finally accepts Daesung’s love, Hyo-sun forgives Kang-sook for her transgressions, and Kang-sook finally learns how to be a wife and mother. In fairy tale classification terms, this version of Cinderella (or the Korean tale of *K’ongjwi* and *P’atjwi*, “soy bean and adzuki bean”) might be classified as “type one,” as opposed to the much more morbid “type two” categories of the tale that end not in redemption but rather in Cinderella’s (*K’ongjwi*’s) murder by *P’atjwi*, with *K’ongjwi* ghost then chopping *P’atjwi* up and serving her to her unknowing mother as revenge (Tangherlini 1994). Although *Cinderella’s Sister* threatens to tread into the morbid, employing subtle nods to generic conventions of horror, as found in filmic version of the *Changhwa* and *Hongnyŏn* tale<sup>40</sup>; and including otherworldly elements, as found in the tale of Princess Pari, the filial daughter who was murdered but continued to serve her parents from beyond the grave (Sorensen 1988), it is in the end a tale of familial and national re-invention. Lacking the plucky “Candyrella” of the *Coffee Prince* Café space or the fetishization of “Korean bread” of *Baker King Kim Takgu*, the rice liquor “princesses” of *Cinderella’s Sister* work only to re-invent their family as functional. In the final episode Eunjo laments in a voiceover: “In the end, do fairytales not suit me? The sweet, beautiful fairytale world...is that something I’m not allowed to have? I’m not trying to conquer space. I’m not trying to save the planet. Not even trying to save the country . . .”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 2003’s *A Tale of Two Sisters* retold this tale as horror, a tale of two good sisters who are terrorized by a stepmother. In the tale the older sister is framed by the stepmother before her wedding day, as the stepmother puts a dead and bloodied rat in the bed and claims that Changhwa has had a miscarriage, indicating that she has broken premarital chastity norms. The stepmother murders Changhwa and Hongryŏn commits suicide, and then the ghost sisters seek to have Changhwa good name restored posthumously.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.dramabeans.com/2010/06/cinderellas-sister-episode-20-final/>.

The irony in Eunjo’s words here is that *makkölli* is being repositioned precisely to save the country: the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO) has made explicit their mission of making Korean cuisine (*hansik*) the next crest of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*); now that dramas attract fewer Japanese fans than in the early 2000s, *Hansik* and *makkölli* are invested with hope (Yoo 2015, 10). While high-end coffee culture’s somewhat late arrival in Chönju has presented new possibilities for youth, as well as women such as my interviewees; and Chönju claims a unique yet nationally salient bread history through the likes of Pungnyön Bakery (PNB), with its *senbei* and choco-pies; *makkölli* culture in Chönju is already quite saturated and neither my core group of interviewees nor broader circle for fieldwork dreamed of opening a *makköllijip*. One possibility for this is gender norms and gender dynamics: at *makköllijip* I attended in Chönju the owner was always male, and usually in his forties or older, with far more all-male or mixed groups than the groups of female friends found in cafes. I suspected that *makköllijip* were—or at least had been, before the market became saturated with multiple *makköllich’on*, “*makkölli* towns,” also called *makköllikolmok* (*makkölli* alleys) or *makkölliköli* (*makkölli* streets)—a popular business venture for men who had reached the ever-earlier expected retirement age from big or mid-sized companies. One of my graduate student acquaintances, a man in his forties who had returned to school after time spent in the “culture industries,” opened a *makköllijip* in Samch’öndong, one of several “*makkölli* streets” in Chönju. At Chönju *makköllijip*, unlike the rest of the country, ordering a kettle of liquor gets you a “free” meal of abundant side dishes. Tourists praise the generous atmosphere of Chönju’s many *makköllijip*, but there is worry about how sustainable and transferable this success is: Yoo writes, “In 2010, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and International Organization of Standardization awarded Chönju City in North

Chōlla Province [authorization] to export their locally brewed *makkōlli* abroad. To some critics, what Chōnju City was doing was exporting something other than *makkōlli* to the United States,” due to *makkōlli*’s short shelf life and the degree of alteration required to mass-produce quality (i.e. not synthetic, pre-revival days) *makkōlli* (Yoo 2015, 12). And therein lies the question: although the title of “Jeonju, City of Gastronomy” bestowed by UNESCO is a point of pride, is it sustainable? Is there space in Chōnju for youth and others who want to carve a space for themselves through development and exercising of their *immat* and *sonmat*?

#### IT ALL TASTES THE SAME: REGIONAL VARIATION, FOOD SECURITY, AND CONSUMER SAFETY

What do these young “creative gourmets” tell us about the development of “Korean taste,” and how do youth such as these negotiate their labor in a neoliberal national and global environment? Both widely circulating public discourse and my interview data on the topic of youth consumption reveal keen ambivalence: on the one hand youth are blamed for the disintegration of “Korean taste” because of their “Westernized” eating habits from fast food to breakfast toast to expensive espresso drinks, but on the other hand, are heralded as saviors of the nation who can both promote the “Korean national brand” by making “traditional” Korean things more trendy and transforming Koreans into ever more savvy consumers of cosmopolitan goods. Scholars working on education in South Korea have noted the explosion of the private education industry (*hagwon* system) around the time of the economic crisis in the late 1990s, with areas of the most intense insecurity and uncertainty (for example, English) expanding the most rapidly, and with little state regulation. In the last few years cooking, baking and barista *hagwon* have followed this trend, popping up in urban centers all over the country to offer training for espresso-making,

baking, cake-decorating, wine-tasting, and “traditional Korean food” preparation. These food service jobs were seen as borderline by my interviewees, who often mentioned “children of friends” who finished university with no job prospects and so decided to start a café with family capital. However, as “Kang,” whose own nephew was in this predicament, noted: though the work was tedious and less than ideal, it was at least “creative work,” and therefore ideally suited to the youth of today. As in other more professional fields, underemployed youth workers can attend various culinary training courses to increase their marketability. Importantly, family businesses such as the traditional liquor factory and “bread” factory are depicted on screen as places of intense, unconditional familial love, but in real life family businesses have also been a coping mechanism against economic uncertainty, making the family café, bakery or restaurant a space of ambivalence.<sup>42</sup>

As “local autonomy” policies have brought certain gains, and regional tourism promotion has had real effects, Chŏnju is enjoying a moment in the sun as a “capital of gastronomy,” with tourists and locals alike flocking to *makkŏllijip*, *matjip* showcasing regional specialties that are difficult to find in Seoul, and spacious cafes with an atmosphere of *yŏyu* (space, leisure) that is in scarce supply in the cramped real estate of South Korea’s capitol. Yet there is awareness among youth and their mothers that apart from the related “culture industries” and the *hagwŏn* industry (discussed in chapter 3), these culinary spaces are the *only* spaces to exercise “taste” in a region lacking the industry of other South Korean regions. And despite proud descriptions of the care taken with food in Chŏnju, rumblings over food security, sustainability, and consumer safety that

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<sup>42</sup> Although ambivalence in the family culinary sphere is depicted with strong *makchang* elements in *Kim T’akgu*, and with moody melodrama in *Cinderella’s Sister*, a more give-and-take realism (albeit with characteristic “chatter”) is shown in the family cooking elements of Kim Su-hyŏn’s *Life is Beautiful*, discussed in chapter 1. See Kyŏng-sŏp Chang (2010) on Korean family business.

have swept the nation, flaring up in the 2008 imported beef protests but continually under the surface, are felt in Chŏnju as well.<sup>43</sup> As Lupton notes, “[d]ietary habits are used to establish and symbolize control over one’s body” (2005, 318), and this extends to one’s community. I have argued in this chapter that neoliberal economic and social conditions in South Korea generally and Chŏnju specifically have led to questions of whose “taste” to value: forward-looking youth or middle-aged women with embodied experiences of taste. In the next and final chapter, I extend demonstrations of generational and gendered “taste” to discussions of odor that permeate understandings of regions and regionalism in contemporary South Korea.

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<sup>43</sup> The 2008 global food crisis also led to spikes in food prices throughout South Korea, and this was repeated with a spike related to cabbage scarcity in fall 2010.

## Chapter 5: Something Stinks: South Korea’s Southwest and “Regional Sentiment”

Smell . . . denounces the abuse of power on the human body. Its construction within an aesthetic frame means the organization of sensory perception not in terms of beauty but of the power structures that underlie the phenomenological and perceptual experience on which the artwork draws. Because the olfactory is registering rather than a productive device; it does not itself shape symbolic, representational structures; but it infallibly reveals and highlights them.

Hans J. Rindisbacher  
“The Stench of Power”

I must go.  
Though living in a hard and miserable world,  
How can I forget the castor-bean flowers in the hills and the smell of wheat growing in  
the fields surrounding the village where I was born.  
I’ll never forget.  
Cherishing them deeply in my heart.

Kim Chi Ha  
*The Road to Seoul*

Thinking of ways to earn money other than farming, Mom brought a wooden malt-mold into the shed. She would take the whole wheat she harvested from the fields and crush it and mix it with water and put it in the mold and make malt. When the malt fermented, the entire house smelled of it. Nobody liked that smell, but Mom said it was the smell of money.

Kyung-Sook Shin  
*Please Look After Mom*

One winter weekday morning in 2010 I and ten women (plus one man) of middle age, broadly defined, blinked as our eyes were flooded with light after over an hour of darkness, smiled nervously around the room at one another, and together began to move from the film screening part of the room to the large square table that had been prepared for discussion on the other side

of the room. We settled into the chairs that were clearly designed for children rather than adults, balanced awkwardly, and gratefully accepted the packaged cookies and tiny paper cups of instant coffee that the “class leader” passed around. Some of the class members were still chuckling about the film we had just watched, Lee Joon-ik’s comedy *Hwangsanböl* (*Once Upon a Time on a Battlefield*, 2003). The film, which depicts a historic battle between the kingdoms of Paekche and Silla early in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, was a commercial flop at the time of its release, but in the years since had developed a cult following and eventually prompted a sequel (*P’yöngyangsöng*, or *Battlefield Heroes*, 2011). Director Lee’s sophomore film, *The King and the Clown* (*Wangüi namja*) drew much greater critical acclaim, both domestically and abroad. But our teacher of this community “Reading and Discussing Film” class, a soft-spoken independent film scriptwriter in her early thirties, pointed out that this film gradually became beloved because of its alternative reading of history, startling viewers out of ideas that history is somehow “fixed,” contained within high school textbooks, and off-limits to re-interpretation.

The re-interpretation of history has been of utmost importance in South Korea as a whole since its shift from decades of authoritarian rule to democracy in 1987, but is arguably even more important in “the provinces” (*chibang*) which have only been entrusted with their own local governance and active creation of modern regional identity since the introduction of “local self-autonomy” (*chibang chach’i*) policies in the late 1990s. The film *Hwangsanböl* followed on the heels of two immensely popular historical television dramas, *Höjun* (2000, MBC) and *Daejanggüm* (*Jewel in the Palace*, 2003, MBC). Though neither of these dramas (both produced by television director Lee Byönghun) could quite claim the title of “fusion historical drama” (*p’yujön sagük*)—a genre of drama or film set “in history” but without specific dates of events

given or actual historical figures, and often with flashy additions such as high-wire martial arts or a contemporary soundtrack—both privileged a more general historical mood over historical “facts.” The term “fusion *sagŭk*” was coined in the early 2000s, and was used most often in reference to the miniseries *Damo*, which featured a contemporary soundtrack, hi-wire martial arts, and a “historical mood” rather than historical accuracy. These early 2000s historical dramas signal a shift from *sagŭk* as education to entertainment, accessible even to those without much historical knowledge or interest. It bears mention that both *Hŏjun* and *Daejanggŭm* were set in the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), and largely in Seoul. Setting a *sagŭk* in earlier eras means fewer worries about accuracy (even of a general “mood,” as fewer records remain from earlier periods), but this very flexibility can create anxieties over whose voices to privilege, which storyline in the overall history to focus on, etc. *Hwangsanbŏl* neutralized this anxiety by making the decision to have everyone speak in modern-day regional accents, and highly stereotypical and exaggerated ones at that: the Paekche general Gyebaek speaks in an exaggerated Chŏlla province accent, and the Silla general Kim Yusin in an equally exaggerated Kyŏngsang province accent.<sup>1</sup> While the two kingdoms map quite well onto present-day southern Korean provinces, the parallel is certainly not exact; the accents, along with the stereotypes of Paekche/Chŏlla inhabitants as tough but boorish, and Silla/Kyŏngsangdo people as refined but weak, are intended to amuse modern viewers. The man in our film club commented with a wry smile, “That was pretty over-the-top (*makchang*), but at least both sides came out looking like idiots.”

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<sup>1</sup> Much as the characterization of a “Southern accent” in the United States, the identification of “a Chŏlla” or “a Kyŏngsang” accent is problematic; just as a Louisiana accent is not a Texas accent, there are multiple accents within both Chŏlla provinces (and this is true of rival Kyŏngsang as well). The particular accent of the Namwon area—with Namwon city being the setting for the famous historical fairy tale of *Ch’unhyang*—is noted as being both one of the “thickest” in the area and most pleasant to the ear.

In this final chapter of the dissertation I examine the impetus behind films such as *Hwangsanbōl* and the several recent television dramas set in “the provinces”: what images of the nation and the region are they promoting, and how do provincial residents read them? How might shifting local identities and national imaginaries herald new alternatives for places that have been marginalized vis-à-vis the nation? When I was conducting this fieldwork on family life in northern Chōlla province (the city of Chōnju) from 2010 to 2012, the representation of Chōlla residents came up often as a topic of discussion. For images of Chōlla residents, more than any other region of South Korea, are forever colored by many of South Korea’s most infamous tragedies of modern history—the Tonghak movement of 1894, the Yōsu rebellion of 1948, the Kwangju massacre of 1980—and inevitable conservative backlashes.<sup>2</sup> While I argued in the previous chapter that Chōnju youth and their mothers are carving out a niche for themselves as cultivators of a particular kind of “taste,” in this chapter I use “smell” (*naemse*) as a conceptual framework for understanding discrimination against the region, connecting to resentment (*han*) and “space” (psychological and physical, *yōyu*) as constituting a dual identity of Chōnju residents, and the Chōlla region’s slippery position within the national family. I argue that Chōnju’s recently nationally recognized “good taste” does not prevent the region from

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<sup>2</sup> The Tonghak (“Eastern learning”) movement/rebellion of 1894 was centered in North Chōlla province, and began as a movement of angry peasants protesting unjust taxation and forced labor; it ended with the Chosōn government requesting 2,700 troops from Qing, which violated agreements between Chosōn and Japan and led directly to the Sino-Japanese War. The Yōsu rebellion of October 1948 followed closely from the Cheju uprising of spring 1948: soldiers in Yōsu had refused to go to Cheju and suppress rebels there. The Cheju rebels had been rebelling against the American forces in Korea and newly-established Syngman Rhee government. Finally, the Kwangju uprising (also called “Kwangju massacre”) in May 1980 was an iteration of pro-democracy demonstrations all over the country, but was suppressed far more brutally than protests in Seoul, which has been linked to anti-Chōlla sentiment. The fact that the brutality happened far from the broadcasting center of Seoul in an era when mass media could be easily manipulated also meant that Koreans in other regions were in the dark about what had happened in Kwangju, and widespread national reflection on the incident and commemoration was not possible until the late 1990s. There has been a disturbing online movement in the late 2000s and early 2010s—especially disturbing to people from Chōlla—to dismiss Kwangju protestors of 1980 as communist sympathizers and to deny the brutality of the occasion.

having an “odor” that puts it in tension with the national body, and use the region as a case study for understanding the overall trajectory of regionalism and decentralization efforts in contemporary South Korea. While the first chapter opened up both the landscape of visual culture and “sight” as a metaphor for extended family care and surveillance, the following chapters took readers through touch, sound, and taste in their deployment as familial affective fortification against state injunctions. This final chapter reaches back to the visual culture focus of the first chapter while extending to possibilities for new understandings presented by that most fleeting yet primal sense, the sense of smell. In this chapter smell operates a bit more loosely than the senses at work in the previous chapters, as it was not invoked directly by my interviewees as a way of talking back to state pressures; rather, it came up metaphorically to reference Chŏnju residents’ suspicions about corruption, to discuss experiences of discrimination both historically and in the present, and finally, to assert a positive identity for the region.

Throughout the chapter I move to link four areas that are not generally connected: South Korean regionalism (*chiyŏkjuŭi*) and the more amorphous “regional sentiment” (*chiyŏkgamjŏng*); “ruralization” (Krause 2013); theories of media reception; and filmic affect (Choe 2009). My intention is to clear a path for more nuanced understandings of subjectivity and citizenship, bringing the themes of previous chapters forward to situate familial affect and “sensory talk” in the broader affective contours of the nation-state as national family. I hope that in so doing, possibilities of alternatives to centralized, urban modernity might be opened up through attention to affective citizenship not only in regionally polarized, hyper-visually-mediated South Korea, but in other locales as well. Though “regionalism” might appear to be the most tangible concept among those named above, it is increasingly slippery in South Korea, as

some citizens identify it as a major obstacle to national unity, while others state categorically that it is no longer an issue. Wang-Bae Kim states that regionalism “has led to unequal distribution of resources in politics and economic development” and “. . . affects one’s job opportunities and promotions, marriage prospects, social relations, and other aspects of daily life” (Kim, W 2013, 29). Kim differentiates between discriminatory regionalism, which he notes has been called a “ruinous national disease” (*mang’gukbyōng*), and “locality,” which encompasses regional pride. The women I interviewed in Chōnju frequently pointed out the Chōlla region’s history of being left out of national development, and the subsequent displacement of Chōlla residents at an even greater rate than the rest of country during industrialization (1960s–1980s) as they left in search of work. At the same time, those women from other regions who had either relocated to Chōnju because of marriage to men from Chōnju, or who had returned to the region after a period away, were quick to note that some Chōnju residents did have something of a lingering “persecution complex” (*pihaeūsik*) even after the beginning of an era of local government autonomy. I connect the affective landscape of Chōnju to the diffuse notion of “regional sentiment,” drawing on Choe’s concept of filmic affect to illuminate the shifting imaginary of regions in the South Korean national body. Finally, I apply Krause’s framework of “ruralization” to reveal new configurations between center and periphery at the national level, and *chibang tosi* (provincial city) and *sigol* (countryside) at the regional level.

REGIONALISM (CHİYŎKJUŬI) AS A NATIONAL PROBLEM  
 “REGIONAL SENTIMENT” (CHİYŎKGAMJŎNG) AS A CHŎLLA PROBLEM

The workings of regionalism (*chiyŏkjuŭi*) in modern South Korea are something of a mystery to outsiders, as South Korea is not only a relatively small country in terms of land mass—unlike neighboring China, for example, which understandably has greater cultural diversity connected to great geographical diversity—but also ranks among the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world, at least until very recently. Korea’s topography provides some clues: though South Korea has fewer imposing mountain ranges than North Korea, it is still a highly mountainous country, meaning that before the development of modern transportation networks and mass media, towns and villages in close geographical proximity were isolated from one another by difficult terrain. Koreans are fond of the expression *san nŏmŏ san*, “over the mountains are mountains,” a metaphor for one hardship after another in Korean history, but also referring to the mountains’ power to prevent easy exchange (Sorensen 1988). Beyond topography, much of the present-day hostility between the Kyŏngsang region (Pusan, Ulsan, Daegu) and Chŏlla region (Chŏnju, Kwangju) can be traced to cults of personality and their aftermath during the authoritarian decades. After liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, many in Chŏlla were vehemently against first president Syngman Rhee’s land reform efforts, as it disproportionately affected landholders in Chŏlla who had managed to grab onto some land in the wake of Japanese exit from the Korean peninsula. (According to Hahm, there were more Japanese colonial residents in the Chŏlla region than in any other region other than Seoul, as the Japanese had moved in to exploit the fertile land there and ship goods to Manchuria via the port cities of Mokp’o and Kunsan). Sallie Yea, in her historical treatment of the region, reports that “[i]n

North Chōlla, a remarkable 95 percent of the total farm households were tenants” [prior to liberation]). Former president Park Chung-hee, who came to power through a coup in the power vacuum following Syngman Rhee’s exile in 1960, actively turned residents of his native Kyōngsang province (also known as Yōngnam) against opposition presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung in Chōlla in advance of the 1971 presidential elections. Park won the election but the results were too close for comfort, so his regime had Kim Dae-jung kidnapped and incarcerated. (Kim Dae-jung would finally be elected president in 1998, becoming South Korea’s only president from the Chōlla region to date). This led to a prolonged sense of injustice among Chōlla residents, who also noted the political favors granted to Kyōngsang politicians by virtue of entrenched networks with a significant percentage of people from the region. (The primacy of hometown, school and workplace networks are also frequently pointed to as an evil of South Korean society). Former president Park Chung-hee successfully painted Chōlla as a region of dangerous dissidents in the national imaginary, sometimes evoking the ancient Paekche-Silla rivalry to portray Paekche (Chōlla) as a land of rebellious losers, and Silla (Kyōngsang) as a righteous kingdom that successfully unified the peninsula. Yea, a geographer, writes of the “imagined geography” of Chōlla as dominated by “dissident politics, (in)famous political figures, and, to a lesser extent, popular culture and art” (2000:71). After delineating the pre-national history of the Chōlla region, Yea moves on to examine Chōlla’s twentieth century identity, hinting at a reasonable question in the subtext: Are people in Chōlla “dissidents” because of history, or has history in the Chōlla region unfolded the way it has because of people’s dissent?

While there has been a relatively large volume of research on political regionalism and historical discrimination against the Chōlla region (as well as Cheju Island, though this is a

different complex history), there has been very little written about the widely acknowledged “regional sentiment” (*chiyŏkgamjŏng*) and its effects on national and regional identifications. Most of my interviewees linked political discrimination with lasting economic discrimination in the region, complaining that there were no efforts on the national level to establish industry in Chŏlla and create jobs. Many I talked to justified their *chiyŏkgamjŏng*, pointing to real injustices, but sometimes in the same breath lamented the regressive “victim mentality” (*p’ihaeŭisik*) of their family, friends, and neighbors. While overcoming “regionalism” and instituting true decentralization has been seen as a national problem, with responsibility falling to the central government to implement top-down reform, dealing appropriately with “regional sentiment” has been discussed as something for residents of Kyŏngsang and Chŏnju to work out, and perhaps to harness for cultural movements borne of local pride rather than pesky political resistance. “Regionalism” has been used by political scientists or policymakers to refer to voting patterns and political values; Lee (2009) discusses political cleavages based on region in the 2004 presidential election, and hypothesizes that one way to diminish regionalism is to require political candidates to state platforms clearly rather than implicitly or explicitly encourage voters to cast votes based on regional affinity. However, Lee concludes that regionalism is “deep” enough that it is difficult to dissolve, given that “the ideological identification of Koreans is closer to ideological feelings rooted in mutually exclusive emotions, rather than in belief systems that can connect ideological spectrums with specific issues” (2009:672). Urban planners have insisted that the issue of regionalism is primarily one of space, which can then be remedied by decentralization measures (such as moving certain branches of government to a new city, Sejong city). “Regional sentiment,” however, is by its very nature more difficult to approach.

Bae-Gyoon Park, a critical human geographer, does not reach back to pre-twentieth century, or even early twentieth century, history to explain the particularly strong tension between Kyōngsang and Chōlla provinces. Park puts the blame solidly on governments: “Since the emergence of the southeast-southwest territorial cleavage in the 1970s, regionalist politics has had a great influence on South Korean politics. Regional discourses have significantly influenced the ways in which South Koreans represent and interpret the political and economic realities of their regions or localities” (2008:50). Park points to two moments in recent decades in which decentralization took priority: the first with the introduction of the Local Autonomy system (*chibang chach’i*), and the second with the actual implementation of local elections—rather than central appointment—for regional mayors and governors. “Regional sentiment,” however, is not directly linked to policy shifts to decentralization but to attachment to certain regional ideologies, attachments that are reinforced by public figures. An outpouring of emotion greeted the election of Chōlla native Kim Dae-jung to the presidency in 1998, though his detractors attacked his “Sunshine Policy” to North Korea and his (still fundamentally neo-liberal) welfare measures. While the next president, Roh Moo-hyun, was a Kyōngsang native, he shared Kim Dae-jung’s orientation towards North Korea and pushed de-centralization as a major government goal. President Roh had solid Uri Party (liberal) credentials, having been a young lawyer partially responsible for getting Kim Dae-jung out of jail. His detractors were many, and impeachment was a real possibility early in his presidency in 2004. His plan to move the capital to a brand new city, Sejong city, was widely scorned, and scandals followed him even after his exit from the Blue House in 2008. (He committed suicide in 2009). Roh’s successor, President Yi Myung-bak (2008–2013), made moves to downscale the Sejong city project to make the new

city simply a hub of education, science and business, but its development into an administrative center went forward. (President Roh had already downgraded the project from a new capital to an administrative center, bending to public pressure). The selection of the Gongju-Nonsan area of Ch’ungch’ōng province for the new city is strategic, as it is not the greater Seoul area (meaning that it qualifies as “decentralization”), it is central geographically, and it is neither in Kyōngsang nor Chōlla, but in the more neutral space of Ch’ungch’ōng. Ch’ungch’ōng has no “odor,” and is the one area of the country that tends to vote for candidates based on issues rather than region or hometown connections (Lee 2009).

If “regionalism” can be mediated by government efforts, “regional sentiment,” by virtue of its connection to emotions, must be addressed by the people experiencing the emotions. The Korean concept of *han* features prominently in cultural psychology literature, and while it is mental and emotional state generalizable to the Korean experience, not all are affected by *han* equally. (I discuss some theories related to *han* in chapter 1). *Han* is a deep emotional state of combined resentment and sorrow, as well as a passive desire for vengeance or justice. Korean cultural psychologists and *minjung* scholars have referred to Korea’s history of invasion, colonization, and occupation as contributing to a feeling of anger and helplessness that can develop into *han*. There is an additional gender component of *han*, as women who have suffered silently under a rigid and naturalized patriarchy report overwhelming *han* and related mental disorders such as *hwabyōng* (literally “fire disease,” in which one is consumed by a burning rage as a result of one’s circumstances, to the point of having physical symptoms emerge). Women I spoke to who were in their thirties or younger identified *han* as a mental condition as largely affecting their mothers’ and grandmothers’ generation rather than themselves. My interviewees

in their forties to early fifties still used *han* in a metaphorical sense, saying that their *han* had taken root (*hani maechida*) in response to an everyday conflict, or that they were able to “release their *han*” (*hanŭl p’umda*), meaning that they achieved a dream or followed their own desire. (This age group often used expressions related to *han* in a joking tone in regards to themselves, though they would use it with seriousness when discussing the hardships of an older generation of women). My few interviewees in their late fifties and women outside of the formal interviewee group in their sixties were more inclined to discuss their own lives as *han*-laden. My interviewee in the most precarious economic situation frequently used *han* to refer to her own life and her husband’s life, but relieved her *han* through prayer and participation in her evangelical community. *Han* operates intersectionally, as in addition to the gender, class, and generational aspects mentioned, it is associated with the Chŏlla area more than any other region. Chŏlla, as a key player in the *minjung* movement of the 1970s and 1980s, brought its own brand of cultural arts, broadly defined—namely, the *p’ansori* song genre and the hereditary shamanism of the region.<sup>3</sup> Now, in the twenty-first century, the Chŏlla provinces highlight the past injustices and painful history of the region through newly built museums and newly established cultural festivals. Some would call this educating, while others criticize what they see as a capitalization on and fetishization of trauma. Beyond this, though, there is a movement to draw out the positive

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<sup>3</sup> Much of the first wave of Western anthropology of Korea was on shamanism and its gender implications (see Kendall 1985). Korean shamans (*mudang*) of the south were hereditary (*sessŭmu*), whereas shamans of the north and central (Seoul) region were called by a spirit and inducted via ceremony (*kangsinmu*). Both types of shamans are afflicted by *han*, but the different circumstances of their practice lead to different expressions of *han*. Shamans who were possessed by a spirit and then answered the call to become a shaman have *han* because this was not a profession of their choosing, and is moreover a low-status occupation. Hereditary shamans have a less explosive and more simmering *han*, the result of historical trauma passed from one generation to the next. Shamanism reached a low point in the 1990s, with fewer people requesting that shamans perform *kŭt* (ceremonies) to solve their problems (and with a subsequent drop in academic research on Korean shamanism). However, Laurel Kendall has recently returned to new iterations of shamanism post-financial crisis, and David Kim explores shamanism and fortune telling more generally in Korean cyber-space.

effects of uneven national development on the region, registering Chŏnju as a “slow city” with UNESCO and developing cultural spaces and nature spaces. I turn now to an investigation of the dual identity expressed by Chŏnju residents—that of resentment (*han*) and “space” or “ease” (*yŏyu*).

On the one hand living in Chŏnju is a barrier to the “Korean dream” that has become so strongly associated with life in Seoul, but on the other hand it provides *yŏyu* (a difficult-to-translate word meaning temporal and spatial ease) that Seoul cannot offer. This sense of space is viscerally felt, at least physically, by driving or busing down to Chŏnju from the Seoul metropolitan area, on the Honam Expressway. Highways stretch out for as many lanes as in the capitol, but it is as if most of the cars, exhaust and noise have been scooped away. (Unless it is the time of the *Chusŏk* or *Sŏllal* holidays, during which Koreans return to their hometowns). This feeling of spaciousness continues throughout the city of Chŏnju proper, in all but the most dense blocks of the city center or university district. Billboards announce the traveler’s entrance to North Chŏlla province—“the hometown of 50 million Koreans” [50 million being the rough population of South Korea in the first decades of the twenty-first century]—and then the arrival at Chŏnju city limits, with billboards declaring “the most Korean [*Hangukjŏkin*] of Korean cities.” But what makes it the “most Korean”? The Chŏllas—North and South—together make up South Korea’s “breadbasket,” providing agricultural products for the rest of the country while everyone else left the farms behind and plunged into the industrial era. In Chŏnju portions are large, prices low, produce fresh, and pubs serving rice wine liquor (*makkŏllijip*) keep plates of food coming at no charge as long as liquor orders continue. Though a decade ago the “heartland” was associated with larger towns in North Chŏlla such as Chŏngŭp or Chinan, Chŏnju has been

growing rapidly as it absorbs migrants from the surrounding area, and in turn absorbs diverse though subtle cultural differences from those areas. Unlike historically working-class Kwangju to the south, Chŏnju’s *han* is first and foremost a “rural” *han*, and its *yŏyu* is likewise a result of an incorporation of the rural into the urban.

Kwangju, in South Chŏlla, is the largest city in the southwest region (with South and North collectively referred to as Honam in earlier times). It received international attention—though not nearly enough, some would say—for the infamous “Kwangju massacre” in the spring of 1980, when the government turned troops on students and city residents protesting for democratic reform. Since the shift to civil society throughout the 1990s the local government has focused on making the city a bastion of arts and democracy through the Kwangju Biennale and other international festivals. Smaller cities in South Chŏlla, such as Mokp’o and Yŏsu, have been less successful in attracting international attention and funds, but continue to search for their niche. Unlike their neighbors to the south, North Chŏlla lacks as strong a link to the democracy movement of the 1980s, though residents are still branded as “communists” by a recently emboldened conservative media contingent. The accusation has some basis in history, as communist guerrillas remained in the hills of the region’s Chiri mountains even after the bitter civil war that divided north and south in the 1950s; however, as Hamhee Hahn and other ethnographers of Chŏlla have found, a communist orientation could hardly be said to have truly extended to the general population, in prior decades or the present.<sup>4</sup> Although there has been

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<sup>4</sup> There were certainly “communist guerillas” hiding in the hills, some of who turned up after the Korean War had ended. There were also citizens who rebelled, as in the Yŏsu (also called Yŏsu-Sunch’on) rebellion, along ideological lines, and establishing people’s communes to address social inequality was a part of these protests. While the ideological nature of many Chŏlla residents’ activity should not be ignored, dismissing their activity as “communist” is too facile. Hahn and other *minjung saenghwalsa* scholars have worked to remedy damaging characterizations of citizens as pro-Japanese (*ch’inilp’a*), pro-North (*ch’inbuk* or more recently, *chongbuk*), or

more ethnographic focus on South Chölla (Shin and Hwang 2003, Yea 2000), Abelmann (1996) began her ethnographic work on the Koch’ang Tenant Farmers Movement in North Chölla, and more recently Prendergast (2005) has written about the elderly in Puan county, North Chölla. Although Abelmann conducted her early fieldwork at a much different moment, when *minjung* ideology<sup>5</sup> was still a position of possibility (albeit in uneven decline and increasingly less possible after the end of the Cold War), she writes of the Chönbuk University professors who were part of a local cultural scholarly journal called *Nammin* (Southern People), “committed to a celebration of North Chölla’s dissident history and culture” (1996, 11). North Chölla *minjung* activists emphasized their taking up of the *cultural* aspect of the democratization movement, as they lacked even the industrialized centers and factories of southern Kwangju (and the factories of Kwangju were and are nothing compared to the industry in Korea’s southeast). In contrast, the Koch’ang farmers of Abelmann’s early work lacked middle-class cache and agitated for land rights, which did not gain them much sympathy (and indeed sometimes got them active antipathy) in a South Korea rapidly turning outward, away from its agricultural roots.

I entered the field at a very different moment, when more than a decade of local self-autonomy policies had left provincial residents disillusioned, as the policies have not resulted in broader decentralization of resources. The same professors who had embraced the *minjung* cultural movement (along with younger ones who have joined their ranks) continue to do local culture research, faithfully attending village festivals and establishing a research center for the

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“red” (*ppalgaengi*). While ideological convictions are an important facet of people’s identity, nuanced study of history will put these convictions and related decisions (to “collaborate” with the Japanese, to flee North, etc.) in historical context. Chölla residents were not naïve victims of history, but nor should they be punished excessively for looking out for their own self-interest or their family’s well-being in chaotic and unpredictable times.

<sup>5</sup> See Namhee Lee’s *The making of minjung* (2007) and Sohl Lee’s *Being political popular* (2012) for approachable research on the *minjung* movement.

“People Without History” (*Minjung Saenghwal Yǒnguwon*) at Chǒnbuk University. These “people without history” were mainly defined as the rural elderly, but could include farmers of all ages or even the growing numbers of migrant brides from Southeast Asia and neighboring countries. Since the core faculty and staff of the research institute were anthropologists, there was a focus on historical anthropology and the linking of generations. But along with this linking work was a promotion of the active incorporation of marginalized voices into the regional (and by extension, national) narrative, from families with previously covered-up North Korean connections to marriage migrants. Chǒnju’s position in the nation was also actively considered, both as a place of exile for *yangban* officials during the late Chosǒn dynasty and into the Japanese colonial period, and as a stubborn stronghold of communist guerilla activity after the Korean War. Moreover, as I learned about these histories and followed instructions by academics and “culture industry workers” alike to learn “exactly what kind of city” Chǒnju was, I was compelled to look beyond the city to the North Chǒlla countryside. Chǒnju is one of the few provincial cities in South Korea that is experiencing continuous, significant population growth, as residents from smaller towns and villages move into Chǒnju for work or education. Moreover, even though rural-to-urban migration continues in North Chǒlla, the countryside may be a sign of things to come in South Korea as a whole. Far from being merely a conservative backwater to the urban area’s liberal tendencies, the Chǒlla countryside reflects a new multiethnic Korea, with some 40% of schoolchildren of mixed Korean and other Asian parentage in some areas.<sup>6</sup> And as food security and environmental sustainability begin to work their way into the national consciousness, we also see more programs promoting urban-to-rural migration to Chǒlla, for the

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<sup>6</sup> See Kim 2009, Rhee 2014.

purpose of going “back to the land” (*kwinong*).<sup>7</sup> My interviewees identified Chŏnju as presenting more opportunities for *yŏyu* than Seoul (or even larger secondary cities such as Pusan, Taegu, or Taejŏn), but the countryside as presenting still more of this physical and psychological “space.” The relationship between a sense of *yŏyu* (positive) and a sense of *han* (negative) is uneasy, however, as the “space” is only possible because of the region’s stunted development, which is imbued with *han*. The sense of *yŏyu* is threatened at every turn, on all sides: by belated and overzealous urban development, by an inherently competitive education system with no outlet (as access to universities in Seoul is far from automatic), by a shortage of white-collar jobs, and by competing claims of cultural workers themselves. At stake is not only who has the rights to the city, but who has the rights to its surrounding rural area through which the city produces itself.

Another fuel for “regional sentiment” comes not from conflict between the Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla regions themselves, but from widely circulating derogatory language used to talk about people from Chŏlla: *Chŏlladian*, but more frequently in conjunction with terms such as “leftist zombie” (*chwajom*).<sup>8</sup> (While *Kyŏngsangdian* has also appeared on message boards, used to denigrate people from Kyŏngsang for their thick regional accents and lack of cosmopolitanism, they are rarely accused of being “leftist zombies” or “North Korea apologists” (*chongbuk*) the way Chŏlla residents are). Another term which appeared in online forums and message boards to

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<sup>7</sup> The National Office of the Back-to-the-Land Movement promotes ecological values and a self-reliant life: [www.refarm.org](http://www.refarm.org). While the largest numbers of urban-to-rural migrants are in Kyŏnggi province (the province nearest Seoul), and the next largest group are in Kyŏngsang, the numbers for the Chŏlla region are not insignificant considering the lower population of the region overall.

<sup>8</sup> The term *chwajom* is used heavily on the website “Ilbe,” an abbreviation of “Ilgan besŭtŭ” (Daily Best). Although the website began as a humor site, it is unregulated and has come under criticism for its right-leaning politics, and for posts or comments that cross the line into hate speech. Even conservative politicians, academics, and public figures have expressed concern that Ilbe is fascist.

refer to Chōlla residents was *Hongǒ* (fermented skate served raw, a dish that originated in the region). The term has become a shorthand pejorative for people from the region, marking them as pungent and with a strong odor that tingles the nostrils. *Hongǒ* is indeed an acquired taste, somewhat like Scandinavian lutefisk in the extreme delight or disgust it inspires. Unlike *chōtkal* (meaning “salted seafood” but most typically small pickled shrimp or fish guts), which is a seasoning added to multiple varieties of *kimchi* in both Chōlla and Kyōngsang—but not often in the Seoul area—*hongǒ* originated specifically in Chōlla. The use of *hongǒ* as a demeaning term seems odd given that a vast majority of Korean food is strong-smelling, seasoned liberally with chili and garlic. In Korea there is not generally the ideal of “removing a fishy odor” as there is in Japanese cuisine, whether for cooked or raw fish. But unlike *kimchi* made with salty and pungent *chōtkal*, which is discussed as a matter of personal taste, *hongǒ* is more often discussed as unassimilable, outside of the mainstream national cuisine. If bodies that belong to the nation are constituted by what is put into the body—as is clearly seen in the Korean case through the slogan *sint’o buli*, discussed in chapter 4—eating *hongǒ* does not add Koreanness. Refusing categorically to eat *kimchi*, however, does not reflect well on one’s Koreanness, despite the fact that *kimchi* consumption overall has decreased over the last few decades. Two recent scandals erupted with *kimchi* at the center: first, a daycare teacher hit a four-year old child for refusing to finish her *kimchi* (which was then caught on CCTV); in the second case, an elementary school teacher mocked a mixed-race girl (with a white Canadian father and Korean mother) when she heard from the girl’s classmates that she did not eat *kimchi* at lunch time. In both cases online comments denounced the verbal and physical abuse—which many acknowledged would likely have occurred without *kimchi* as the impetus—but many comments also focused on the cruelty of

forcing *kimchi* on an unwilling eater.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy though, that in both cases commenters defended categories of people who do not fit neatly into the national body: children, who are still insufficiently socialized and who have developing tastebuds; and not-purely-Koreans, who cannot be expected to possess purely Korean tastebuds.<sup>10</sup> Notably, only a few commenters amongst hundreds of (presumably fully Korean) adults admitted to “not being able to” or “strongly preferring not to” eat *kimchi* themselves. With *kimchi*, a historically informed national pride is at stake, as during the Japanese colonial period the Japanese colonizers sometimes referred to *kusai Chosenjin* (“stinky Koreans”) on the basis of Koreans’ perceived chili and garlic smell, and this derogatory phrase referring to Koreans continued after the colonial era to taint Japan-Korea relations and the self-concept of ethnic Koreans in Japan (*zainichi*). Koreans are keenly aware of their national odor, using breath fresheners that claim to neutralize kimchi odors specifically. And yet there is also a sense of pride over this taste and smell that kicks in in the case of perceived attacks from outsiders. For example, early in the 2014 U.S. film *Birdman*, a character is buying flowers in a Korean-owned floral shop and remarks that “they all smell like fucking kimchi,” a comment which set the Korean internet ablaze. One cannot imagine a national call to arms over similar slights related to Chöllla’s *hongŏ*.

For all of smell’s primal qualities, there are not nearly the variety of expressions or idioms related to smell (*hugak/naemse*) as for the other senses: *migak/mat* (taste), *sigak/bonŭn*

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<sup>9</sup> For a condensed summary of these two incidents and online comments, see:

<http://www.koreabang.com/2015/stories/teacher-blamed-student-for-not-eating-kimchi.html>, and

<http://www.koreabang.com/2015/features/4-year-old-spits-out-kimchi-gets-slapped-by-teacher.html>

<sup>10</sup> Kyung-soo Chun (2008) and Young-gyung Paik (2011) have both found through interviews with Korean public school teachers and others that children with Korean mothers (and non-Korean fathers) are held to higher standards, socially and academically, than children with non-Korean mothers and Korean fathers. It is often assumed that mothers will be the parent who helps children with homework and study, and thus that children with Korean mothers will not need extra help. Children with non-Korean mothers may be viewed as less Korean, due to strong feelings about one’s “mother language,” “mother culture,” and early socialization through the mother.

*kõt* (sight), *ch’õnggak/sori* (sound), or *ch’okgak/manjinũn köt* (touch). The word *naemse* is used literally to refer to a smell (*kimchi*, *hongõ*) or more metaphorically to refer to a sense about a thing or a situation: the expression *naemse nanda* (something smells/stinks) could translate as “I have a bad/weird feeling about this” or “something’s fishy here.” Both these usages of smell apply for Chõnju: though servings are generous and the Chõlla region’s status as a “heartland” means that food might be “just like mom used to make,” certain foods from the region (*hongõ*, *kimchi* made using *chõtkal*) stink. As for the expression *naemse nanda* (“something stinks”/“something’s fishy”), this applies to Chõlla resident’s sense of injustice over unequal distribution of resources or access to these resources in their region, and to the “smell” of corruption in national and regional politics. Added to these uses of *naemse* is an important rural-urban dimension: while Chõnju is a modern city, albeit not as gleaming and constantly changing as megacities such as Seoul, since it is not-Seoul it is always associated with *sigol*, the countryside. Nearly all of my interviewees at one point or another bristled at being associated with *sigol naemse*, complaining that when Seoulites should say *chibang* (the provinces) or *chibang tosi* (provincial city), they refer to everything outside of Seoul as *sigol*. The nation is configured in dominant narratives as Seoul/not-Seoul, with Seoul as the urban center and not-Seoul, in all its diversity, as *sigol*. This configuration effectively erases the significant cultural and historical contributions to the nation of cities like Chõnju, and glorifies the hyper-urbanism of Seoul above all else. This imbalance can be felt in such nationalist movements as the Dokdo territorial dispute<sup>11</sup>, in which urbanites defend the honor of the nation as a whole through

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<sup>11</sup> Dokdo (or Takeshima in Japanese) is a groups of rocky islets between Japan and South Korea, about 2 hours by ferry from South Korea’s island of Ullõngdo, which is itself 3 hours from South Korea’s east coast (boats leave from P’ohang). The South Korean media devotes much more attention to the territorial dispute than the Japanese

attention to a small part; in contrast, issues that directly affect people living in the provinces (such as the environmental degradation resulting from the construction of a controversial concrete seawall, Saemanggŭm, along the North Chŏlla coast) are too often seen as purely regional problems. After decades of migration to Seoul and the erasure of regional accents, tastes, and smells, there is limited tolerance left for regional diversity. The persisting Cold War ideology that manifests in a left-right rift assigns divergent values to the sounds, tastes, and smells that set the stage for South Korean democracy in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. The smell of teargas on the elite campus of Yonsei University in Seoul in the 1980s and 1990s is somehow elevated above the smell of teargas filling the streets of Kwangju in South Chŏlla in May 1980.<sup>12</sup> The smell of blood in Seoul signifies national sacrifice, and the smell of blood in the provinces signifies regional dissent.

#### WATCHING SELVES ON SCREEN AT THE CHŎNJU FILM CLUB: FILMIC AFFECT

The “Reading and Discussing Film” class I described in the opening of this chapter was one of three formal field sites I attended regularly for participant-observation. This film class I attended weekly was in Inhudong library, just far enough from the center of the city and to the east to feel on the edge between suburban and rural. Many Korean neighborhoods (*dong*) are numbered, and

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media does, though Japan’s Shimane prefecture does make periodic claims to the islets. There are a few South Korean citizens on the island and a few dozen police officers. While the islets do contain natural resources, including fish and natural gas, it is widely recognized that Dokdo is important as a national symbol above all else. Japan’s claims to Dokdo are denounced as a revival of Japan’s colonizing and imperialist tendencies.

<sup>12</sup> In 1987 a Yonsei student (Lee Han Yŏl) participating in a campus pro-democracy demonstration died of injuries from an exploding teargas canister, and in the weeks that followed his image adorned protest banners, further fueling the movement. Mobilization around the student’s death was crucial in bringing about true democratic reform that year. In contrast, student lives lost in the Kwangju uprising seven years prior were less valued, as they were not students at an elite university but simply provincial university students in South Korea’s least developed province.

while the neighborhood of Inhu 2 was in an area of greater urban density, Inhu 1, where the library is located, is up against the sprawling neighborhoods of Ua (Uadong 1, 2, and 3). Of all the sites I visited during fieldwork the Inhu library was most difficult to get to, and so I nearly always found myself hopping a cab to get there on Tuesday mornings. After passing through the rather gritty urban core of Dagadong, Kosadong, and Kyodong, the taxi would more often than not end up the only vehicle on a wide road out of town, and after passing a shabby-looking home furnishings store we would make an abrupt left turn up a steep road lined with trees. The library’s periodicals room near the entrance was usually filled with retirees reading newspapers on weekday mornings, and all the study rooms throughout the library were filled with students or recent graduates preparing for university or employment exams. Our film class was held in a cavernous room on the third floor, difficult to heat in the winter and difficult to cool in the summer. The film club initially ran for six months, but due to overwhelming interest was renewed for a second six-month session.

Similar to the community center Japanese class I attended, the unspoken rule was that this was a space for women—in the Japanese class the women collectively drove the older man out by snidely commenting every time he asked a detailed grammar question; in the film club a few men showed up one or two times at the invitation of regular female attendees, but only one man, a middle-aged *hagwŏn* math teacher who worked evenings, persisted in coming to class. I had learned of the film class after being introduced to the teacher when she was working at the Public Media Center (*Simin Midiŏ Sentŏ*), where I was observing a month-long class teaching migrant women (*iju yŏsŏng*) how to make short documentaries about their lives. While I do not include that class for immigrants as a key field site in this dissertation, it was through that class

early in my fieldwork that I first observed discussions of media space and public space in Chŏnju. I learned that women in particular who were not working, sharing childcare with family members, or working limited hours often followed several popular *simin daehak* (“citizens’ university,” indicating lifelong learning) teachers around to classes in the city’s various libraries, community centers, department store cultural centers, and dedicated non-profit organizations (such as the Public Media Center). Many of the film class members were fans of the teacher, attending her various talks on “reading film” around town, at universities and the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF). Some of the film class members enjoyed engaging with the films critically, while others would duck out early in the discussion period after the weekly screening, sometimes stating their impressions of the film briefly before doing so. The male member of the class tended to connect the films to current political issues—and he was on the more conservative end of the spectrum—which annoyed other members.

I was struck by the classroom dynamics that settled over the film class space within the first few sessions, and what the film class meant to many of the members. For some, particularly young mothers with family responsibilities, the class was their one “luxury” each week, a time away from children and space to discuss with like-minded adults. For others, most commonly the older women who had more free time, the class was one of many they attended each week. While several of the older women said modestly that “they didn’t do much” or “did this and that,” with a little prodding they would reveal a busy schedule of community center classes, exercise and health regimens, harvesting expeditions with friends, and cultural tours around Chŏnju or further afield. Younger and older women alike would nod their heads in agreement as the teacher reiterated media’s importance for understanding society—both South Korean society

and “global” society—and ultimately, ourselves. Over the course of a year we watched Korean films, Hollywood films, U.S. indie films, Japanese and Chinese films, and a few other foreign films—mostly fictional films, but a few documentaries as well. I was surprised that foreign films so often seemed to provide so much opportunity for reflection, as class members talked through scenarios that would not occur in Korean society and discussed social and cultural differences. A great deal of comparison occurred in discussions of the handful of Japanese films we watched, with a young woman marveling that, “They’re so close to us, yet they react to things so differently.” I, as the group’s sole foreign participant, was often asked to clarify something in a U.S. film, particularly social context or an unexpected reaction from one of the characters. Explaining humor was often quite difficult, though I would be prodded to explain after a film in which I kept laughing while everyone else stayed silent. A Korean film we watched rather early in the course, director Bong Joon-ho’s biting satire *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000), provoked an uncomfortable conversation when I asked not quite sensitively enough about the theme of bribery in the film. In the film—Bong’s first feature-length film, predating megahit *The Host* and sci-fi thriller *Snowpiercer*—a humanities professor whose wife is expecting their first baby is driven mad by a neighbor’s barking dog, setting out to kill it in part as a distraction from the pending decision he must make: whether or not to pay his department chair a hefty bribe in order to get tenure. When class members were going around the room after the film and stating opinions, I asked whether the scenario in the film was really so common in Korean academia. My question led to much shifting in chairs and embarrassed glances around the room, but the intrepid teacher took the opportunity to extend the conversation to the broader issue of national and local corruption. In addition to teaching about film the teacher considered herself a social

activist of sorts, and encouraged the class to reflect on the shame my question provoked.

“Besides,” she reframed, “it’s not as if other countries don’t struggle with corruption too, right?” (I quickly agreed). In contrast to Bong’s dark comedy, Lee’s *Hwangsanböl* inspired an especially lively class discussion on regionalism, local policies and politics, and national identity.

All of Lee Joon-ik’s films deal with the topics of nostalgia and history, whether in broad strokes or personal portraits. Lee’s second film after *Hwangsanböl*, *Wangŭi Namja* (The King and the Clown, 2005) was also a *sagŭk* (historical film), though it treated its subject matter a great deal more seriously. His next two films—*Radio Star* in 2006 and *The Happy Life* in 2007—were about washed-up or unrealized musicians reliving their golden days. His 2008 success, *Nimŭn mŏn kose* (with the English title *Sunny*) addressed South Korea’s painful modern history from the perspective of a woman traveling to Vietnam to locate her husband, who was fighting in the Vietnam War.<sup>13</sup> At the time of our discussion on *Hwangsanböl*, Lee’s seventh film, *Battlefield Heroes* (*Pyŏngyangsŏng*, 2011, intended as a sequel to *Hwangsanböl*) was in production, and he had recently released his sixth film, *Blades of Blood* (2010). (Since my fieldwork concluded, Lee had won awards with his 2013 melodrama on the difficult topic of child kidnapping and rape, *Wish* (*Sowŏn*); and is coming out with yet another *sagŭk*, this time on the historical figure of the mad prince Sado, in 2015). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, one focus of the discussion of *Hwangsanböl* was the use of dialect (*sat’uri*), namely director Lee’s

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<sup>13</sup> South Korea fought on the side of the United States in the Vietnam War, sending the second-largest number of troops after the U.S. itself. In return for military support, the United States provided monetary aid for rebuilding the nation still affected by the Korean War, as well as industrializing. The United States also gave construction contracts in both Southeast Asia and the Middle East to Korean companies. South Korean soldiers in Vietnam developed a reputation for indiscriminate cruelty, and left behind a generation of fatherless children (referred to as “Kosians,” Korean-Asians). South Korea has only recently begun to grapple with its involvement in the Vietnam War, and while South Korean activists have pushed for government apologies and outreach activities in Vietnam, a rally for commemorating the Vietnam War scheduled for April 2015 in Seoul was cancelled due to political pressure and protests from some veteran’s groups.

choice to have historical characters of Paekche and Silla speak using exaggerated Chõlla and Kyõngsang dialects. The use of modern dialect combined with a contemporary soundtrack gave the film a strong “fusion” sensibility, de-stabilizing “authenticity” while de-emphasizing an accurate “historical mood.” Some members of the class let out whoops of laughter and wore scandalized expressions at the film’s depiction of the *hwarang*, the Silla kingdom’s legion of beautiful but skilled and elite warriors (literally “flower troops”). The *hwarang* have been lauded in Korean history textbooks as evidence of Silla’s superior culture, and received particular praise from former president Park Chung-hee; more recently, the *hwarang* have been a touchstone in Korean popular culture—however tenuous the link is—as predecessors to the metrosexual “flower boy” (*kkotminam*) trend in fashion and sensibility, and even touted by LGBTQ groups as symbols of an era in which sexuality was more fluid than in twenty-first century South Korea. However, in the film they are represented as the pre-modern equivalent of frat boys, born into privilege and only fighting in their fathers’ war reluctantly. The teacher told us that she had previously worked as a middle school ethics (*todõk*) teacher, a job she did not last long in because of the conservative angle of ethics curriculum—she laughed that her days had been numbered as soon as she started cautioning her students to question depictions of historical groups such as the *hwarang* in both their textbooks and the media (television dramas, film, documentaries). In the remainder of this section, I relate our discussion of region and nation in *Hwangsanbõl* to discussions of other films we viewed in the class, as well as considering the film within the context of the productive power of historical television and films more generally. I conclude the section with a discussion of dramas and films set in the present-day in the provinces, and the “filmic affect” guiding the reception of both historical and modern-day films

and dramas. Filmic affect does not only circulate in association with the visual, but is produced by the interplay of moods and emotions provoked by smells, tastes, and sounds invoked through the visual.

The first film we saw in the “Reading and Discussing Film” class was the U.S. indie film *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), under the category “Me and Family” on the syllabus. In this early session there was tension between the majority of women in the group and the one man, as he interrupted a few rounds around the table sharing stories about mismatched parents and other dysfunctional family relationships with his own detailed analysis of the film and its symbols. The following week’s film, Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda’s 2008 film *Still Walking* (*Aruitemo aruitemo*), inspired several class members to agree that while the Western family in *Little Miss Sunshine* was refreshing to watch, this depiction of a Japanese family hit closer to home, despite some notable differences. A woman with two young children in the group noted that much remained hidden between family members, and most felt that one hundred percent honesty between family members was not ideal (and might indeed result in an “explosion,” one woman said, pondering what would happen if she spoke her mind either to her mother or mother-in-law). Another woman observed that much seems to be hidden in silence within Japanese families, whereas much seems to be hidden in chatter and noise in Korean families.

After the “Me and Family” section was the “Me and Society” section of the class, featuring, among others, the French film *Delicatessen* (1991), Hollywood film *The Crucible* (1996), and South African sci-fi film *District 9* (2009). These films inspired discussions about environmental and human-made catastrophe and alienation, religious and ideological persecution (extending to a discussion of right and left ideology in modern Korean history), and

discrimination against minorities and problems with re-development. The conversation after distinctive sci-fi thriller *District 9* was particularly free-flowing, with the teacher opening the discussion by focusing on the “alien ghettos” in the film and their connection to urban re-development as injustice on a local level: a few days before there had been a local news report on the construction of a giant parking lot for tourists to Chŏnju’s Nambu market, which necessitated tearing down an area of humble houses, whose elderly residents most likely could not afford property elsewhere. The teacher remarked that *District 9* had been released in theatres in Korea the same weekend as the “Yongsan incident,” in which residents in the Yongsan neighborhood in Seoul protested the “re-development” of their low-income apartments, only to be suppressed with such brutal police force that several protesters died of their injuries. The final section of the course focused on “Me and Media,” and included a documentary on anti-corporate activism (*The Yes Men*, 2003). In the documentary a comedy-activist duo impersonate WTO members, wreaking havoc, and this seemed highly applicable on the date of our screening—one week after watching *Hwangsanbŏl*—given that the G20 Summit was to be held in Seoul over the next few days. The teacher brought up a news report related to the Summit featured on OhMyNews.com, a citizen journalism website: a waste treatment plant that dealt with food waste from kimchi stew (*kimchi chigae*) and miso stew (*ch’ōnggukjang*) was ordered to shut down for the duration of the Summit, so that visiting dignitaries would not have to smell those strong Korean smells. (Here a woman in the class exclaimed, “Don’t people in other countries also *eat food?!*”). The G20 Summit brought up the near-constant emphasis in South Korea on globalization (*segzehwa*), but at the expense of developing human relationships (*ingan kwangei*) and subjectivity/identity (*chōngch’esōng*). The teacher urged class members to reflect on national tragedies such as the

Yongsan protest suppression but also to connect to local issues such as the Nambu market re-development, not losing sight of *chiyŏk munje* (regional problems) even as the *chung’ang midio* (central media) fails to report them. The conversation brought us back to the previous week’s discussion on *Hwangsanbŏl*, and to the final scene in which the defeated general of Paekche returns to his mother’s home in the Chŏlla countryside. The film’s final scenes shift dramatically from a slapstick tone to a melodramatic reflection on the devastation of war, in an example of what Julian Stringer (2006) has called South Korean cinema’s propensity for “genre bending.” I noted the almost mandatory inclusion of a scene in which the general of Tang (China) says contemptuously to Kim Yusin of Silla, “Who do you people of such a small country think you are?” South Koreans have frequently referred to their country as a “shrimp among whales,” positioned as it is between China, Japan, and Russia; however, in our discussion in a library in Chŏnju this afternoon, the focus shifted: In such a small country, no one region should be considered superior to any other.

After our conversation on corruption, citizen activism, and Korean smells, we all went out for lunch at a restaurant that served both fermented kimchi dishes (kimchi fermented for an especially long time, *mugŭn kimchi*) and the particularly potent version of miso stew (*chŏnggukjang*). As our bowl of *chŏnggukjang* was placed in the center of our table, one of the women murmured with pride, “Ah, smells like feet” (*pal naemse*).

Stylistically, *Hwangsanbŏl* owes much to television drama *sagŭk* that came out shortly before its release in October 2003. *Hŏjun*, which aired on MBC in 1999-2000 and was directed by Lee Byung-hoon—who would later direct Korean Wave hit *Daejanggŭm* in 2003-2004—has been called a turning point in Korean historical dramas, signaling an end to dry retelling of court

chronicles in favor of a more appealing “historical mood.” The “fusion *sagŭk*” *Damo* (July–September 2003) also utilized an intentionally jarring contemporary soundtrack, and its heavy use of martial arts and special effects influenced period dramas in the coming years. In terms of the film’s use of regional dialect, it is not a coincidence that the first few years of the 2000s saw the first films to depict North Koreans (complete with North Korean accents) sympathetically, due in no small part to then-president Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine Policy toward North Korea and a general thawing of North-South relations. Overall, the 2000s saw the first real national attention to grievances over regionalism, as well as regional pride borne of cultural revitalization of the provinces. By the mid-2000s an increasing number of historical dramas and films were set in the less-documented eras before Chosŏn (1392-1910), including *Jumong* (2006), about the mythical founder of Koguryŏ and *Queen Seondeok* (2009), which was based on the real figure of a 6<sup>th</sup> century Silla queen, but otherwise largely fictionalized. While the late Chosŏn period in particular reveals the roots of Seoul-focused centralization still in place in South Korea today, earlier periods of history were centered in kingdoms elsewhere on the peninsula, from Kyŏngsang (Silla), Chŏlla/Ch’ungch’ŏng (Paekche), and Koguryŏ (North Korea/Manchuria) to kingdoms of Kaya or Palhae in nebulous pre-history. Byung Woo Sohn writes of *Queen Seondeok* that “A lack of historical materials translates into a near boundless imaginative space and a great reduction in the onus which the writer must carry with regards to the script he/she produces . . . active use can be made of historical materials whose authenticity has been called into question such as the *Hwarang segi* (Annals of Hwarang)” (2011:67). Sohn also calls up Lowenthal’s (1985) statement that “the past is a foreign country,” writing, “The fictionalization, or so-called tasks of filling in, omitting, and modifying conducted to dramatize history, creates a

sense of foreignness amongst viewers as far as the past is concerned.” *Sagŭk* such as *Hwangsanbŏl* create both an exotic sense of foreignness *and* a sense of familiarity, and illustrate well the productive power of historical dramas and film to re-imagine the past in order to re-invent the present.

In addition to historical dramas, the combination of drama tourism and investment by local governments for purposes of revitalization has led to an upswing in television dramas set in the present-day filmed in the provinces. *Sagŭk* that take place in Chosŏn, or *daeha* drama (modern history) dramas about the 1920s through 1980s also increasingly feature a scene or two that take place away from the greater Seoul area. The idyllic family space of Cheju Island was discussed in chapter 1, and Cheju featured in another drama (*Tamra, the Island*, 2009) as an opposite of the rigid, hierarchical society of Chosŏn, an island “where every hybridity is accommodated and any hierarchical power is deconstructed as well as where exotic scenery, food, and climate are celebrated . . .” (Hwang 2011, 50). (Notably, Cheju Island was grouped into the same administrative region as Chŏlla—then called Honam—early in the twentieth century). Youjeong Oh has recently written about the use of cities in Korean television dramas, suggesting that one can hardly imagine television dramas without cities. Oh divides drama sponsorship into two categories: “‘urban production,’ that is, by constructing huge outdoor sets that will be used as major filming venues and then developed into tourist attractions” and “‘urban representation,’ that is by strategically showing off city locales in TV dramas in return for cash grants from the city in question, a process I call ‘city placement’” (2014:2). For the second category of sponsorship, “urban representation,” sometimes the placement is obvious and sometimes the featured city’s role in production is only revealed to viewers through the credits

that roll at the end of each drama episode. During my fieldwork 2010-2012, there were dramas filmed through both kinds of sponsorship in Chŏnju and other area of Chŏlla: local media reports focused on two dramas, in large part because of the minor controversies they caused.

*Sungkyunkwan Scandal* (2010), a fusion *sagŭk* with a gender-bending plot point targeting the youth demographic, was partially filmed in Chŏnju’s main tourist attraction, the *Hanok Maŭl* (traditional village). While the drama was filming, middle school students flocked to the *Hanok Maŭl* hoping to get a glimpse of the stars, and furtively defaced walls and buildings in the village by carving or writing messages of love. The city saw this as an embarrassment and urged parents to control their star-struck children. The *taeha* drama *Giant*, which also filmed and aired in 2010, used a local Chŏnju middle school to film its early scenes—the school was selected because it looked more like a middle school from the 1970s than any school the production crew could find in the Seoul area.<sup>14</sup> Although filming lasted only a few weeks and took place at night—under bright floodlights—in order to minimize disruption to the school community, there were still reports of garbage left around or rearranged school grounds, an annoyance that mixed with some degree of local embarrassment over being selected for having a school that looked “backwards.” In terms of “urban production” through large outdoor sets, recent dramas have been filmed on *sagŭk* sets in neighboring South Chŏlla’s cities of Naju and Damyang.

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<sup>14</sup> It is not only looking the part of a 1970s school that got the Chŏnju school selected, though, as there are plenty of schools around South Korea that would fit the description. The local government gives financial incentives for filming in North Chŏlla, and there is a comprehensive filming complex on the outskirts of Chŏnju. Some of these financial incentives are linked to the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF)—director Hong Sang-soo filmed *Lost in the Mountains* in Chŏnju with the understanding that it would get top billing at the following year’s festival. Chŏnju along with some cities in South Chŏlla advertise that they can convincingly represent pre-modern times, the colonial period, and decades from the 1950s through 1980s, a sort of one stop shop. The 2008 television drama “Love and Ambition” was set in “Seoul in the 1980s” by filming in South Chŏlla’s Sunch’ŏn. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2008/11/144\\_30922.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2008/11/144_30922.html),

Of the emotional meaning of places in dramas, Oh writes,

The entanglement of emotions and places in dramas stimulates the audience’s empathy, thereby effectively motivating them to visit the places that have been televised . . .

Through its interweaving with the spectacles, characters, dialogue and intense displays of emotion (e.g. tension, love and longing) of dramas, however, the televised space becomes not merely a themed place, but an emotionally laden place that compels viewers to pay a visit. In visiting the place depicted in a drama, visitors accept it not merely as a “fantasy space” but as an “affective site” in which they continue to feel empathy toward both the drama and the place (Oh 2014, 3).

Here Oh draws on Youngmin Choe’s work on “filmic affect,” a notion I will expand further in the next section. But despite viewers’ deep attachments to places in dramas, the neoliberal conditions of Korean television drama production lead to uneven investments in particular sets or cities. Oh elaborates, “In conditions where more than 50 drama series come and go in a year, spatial and financial sponsors are multiple and temporary. As a result, production practices have given rise to scattered and temporary drama production camps in smaller cities in South Korea” (2014:4). Smaller cities—which may be quite bustling metropolises, in fact, but nothing when compared to Seoul—rely on television dramas to promote themselves as tourist destinations. Since the 2000s local city governments have continued to gamble on ‘city placement’ in television dramas, with local players hoping that the drama is popular enough to draw tourists in the first place; for dramas filmed on expensive sets, the hope is that tourism is sustained long enough past the drama’s last episode to justify the great expense. Oh identifies for the South Korean *chibang* (provinces) “historical contexts of political economy where uneven development created marginal cities with a desperate desire to promote themselves.” However, she also acknowledges that “the underdeveloped status of regional cities has presented opportunities for those cities to assume new identities in the popular imagination” (Oh 2014, 13). Chŏnju is less of

a blank slate than some smaller cities in the region, making it harder to remake its image within the national body. But in an era in which nostalgia is packaged for consumption, Chŏnju has been capitalizing not only on its revitalized *Hanok Maül* district, but on “traditional” markets, neighborhoods near (but not of) the downtown core with a 1970s or 1980 “feel,” and temples and monuments on mountains on the outskirts of the city. Local cultural festivals, all of which began in the late 1990s or early 2000s, increasingly promote Chŏnju as a “slow city” and a city that is “good to walk.” The Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF), which is the most objectively successful of the region’s local festivals, plays up the *Hanok Maül*’s “slow city” status and the “traditional” atmosphere of Chŏnju as ideal for festival-goers. Simultaneously, the festival planning board has emphasized the city and region’s adventurous and independent streak, a regional character that has engendered a film festival of independent, avant-garde fictional films and documentaries.<sup>15</sup> My classmates in the film class, even if they had never attended JIFF in its twelve years, were aware of this aspect of promotion of the city, and were influenced by circulation of affect through film.

Film scholar Youngmin Choe, in an article about the “film tourism” of visitors to locations of melodrama director Hur Jin-ho’s films, analyzes affect as a pre-personal emotion that permeates particular times and places, in spite of the myriad individual emotions that may co-exist. Filmic images, steeped in time and place, carry different affective dimensions depending on factors such as genre, soundtrack, and quotations of other films. Choe sees filmic

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<sup>15</sup> The organizers of JIFF have consciously tried to set the festival apart from South Korea’s largest film festival, PIFF (the Pusan International Film Festival), which shows more mainstream films and subsequently attracts much more star power, both in terms of domestic and international stars. See Soojeong Ahn (2012) for a discussion of PIFF. Film and television scholar Yun Mi Hwang writes in a blog post about the character of JIFF (which she attended in 2012), but ends with a paragraph giving an update about the contentious re-organization of festival staff in 2012: <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/festival-reports/cinema-time-regained-the-13th-jeonju-international-film-festival/>.

tourists as being driven by the “hope of affect,” hoping to connect with the lives lived in the films (2009:114). She differentiates between *kamjǒng*, the word meaning “feeling” as part of the word *chiyǒkgamjǒng* (“regional sentiment”); and *kamdong* (“emotion” or “affect,” with a distinct impression of movement). *Kamjǒng* is static or even negative, while *kamdong* is potentially productive. If *kamdong* is affect to *kamjǒng*’s sentiment, then following Massumi’s conceptualizations we can think of *kamdong* as transmission, with the ability to affect as it is affected. If we could replace *chiyǒkgamjǒng* with *chiyǒkgamdong*, the “structures of feeling” inspired by visiting on-location filmic sites, or even simply watching ancient kings of rival kingdoms speak in exaggerated contemporary accents on screen, might herald an era of decentralization in more than name only. Melodrama, known as *shimpa* in Korea and present in most South Korean film and television<sup>16</sup>, is (along with horror and pornography) what Linda Williams calls a “body genre,” and “entails the sensation of being able to move or be moved, by acting upon, or impinging upon, another body an intense emotion” (Williams 2009a, 12). Although it is not her main focus, Choe also explores what I am calling *chiyǒkgamdong* in her study of “boredom and distraction” in Hong Sang-su’s travel films. Choe observes that “boredom is not the lack of emotional content, but rather, represents the range of emotional possibilities within a transitional neoliberal context” (Williams 2009b, 3). While Hur Jin-ho’s films are pure melodrama (albeit restrained melodrama, not in the soap opera mode the term invokes), and iconic filmmaker Im Kwon-taek’s films are national melodrama<sup>17</sup>, in Hong Sang-su’s New Wave-influenced films melodrama appears only briefly and sporadically, against a backdrop of

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<sup>16</sup> Abelmann and McHugh have written about the predominance of melodrama in Korean film and television, and the teacher of the film class also mentioned the history of *shimpa* (*shinpa* in Japanese) in Korea, beginning with stage plays early in the twentieth century.

<sup>17</sup> Im Kwon-taek’s 2009 film, *Hanji*, was filmed in the alleys and traditional paper shops of Chǒnju’s *Hanok Maül*.

angst and meandering. In Hong’s 2009 short film *Lost in the Mountains* (*Chöpchöpsanjung*), which was funded by the Jeonju Film Commission and filmed in Chönju, characters fight, drink, and go out to eat local specialties. In this film as in Hong’s others, “emotions adhere to women, food, and formal features of the film, gaining material presence that is otherwise obscured if we oversubscribe to the ostensible emotional vacuity that seems to define each film’s milieu” (2009b:26). In *Lost in the Mountains*’ final scene, quarrelling couples glare at one another across a *k’ongnamulguk* (bean sprout soup, a Chölla specialty) restaurant. Imagined tastes and smells combine with boredom and hurt to create an affective field for viewers.

Notably, in Choe’s discussion of boredom as a mood in Hong’s film, there is brief mention of a character’s travel for *kwinong*, the back-to-the-land movement that the South Korean government revived post-1997 financial crisis. “Farming was seen simultaneously as a viable measure to absorb the shock of massive unemployment while reversing the rural-to-urban drain that had depleted the countryside of young people over decades, thereby reinvigorating it with more youthful segments of the population . . . .The nature of *kwinong* as a countermeasure against unemployment in the late 1990s is a major departure from its ideological origins of *kwinong* as a ‘social democratization movement’ (*sahoe minjuhwa undong*)” (2009b:23). Whereas in China (PRC) a large percentage of a certain generation of urban youth—known as *zhiqing*—in the 1950s through 1970s were “sent down” to the countryside, South Korean educated youth in the 1970s infiltrated the factories to raise the consciousness of workers and lead labor strikes. However, by the 1980s when the *minjung* cultural movement was in full swing, a not insignificant number of youth went to the countryside to engage in communal living, glorifying farmers as the true *minjung* (“the people”). As Choe notes, *kwinong* was revived for

practical economic reasons in the late 1990s, as a way of dealing with the social problem of thousands of newly-unemployed after massive layoffs following the financial crisis. Now, in the 2010s, pragmatic and idealistic reasons combine in the growing *kwinong* movement, with new college graduates or young families going to the countryside to deal with poor job prospects in some cases, or simply to live a “more humane life” in other cases. In the final section of this chapter, I consider possibilities for “ruralization” of South Korea in the context of national and regional development, focusing on possibilities for Chōlla families.

#### “RURALIZATION” AS AN ANTIDOTE TO SOUTH KOREAN HYPER-DEVELOPMENT

Chōnju is somewhat unique among Korean cities in having mountains on all four sides, and this is echoed in the four city gates that elevated Chōnju’s status to that of a proper Chosōn city with *p’ungsu* (feng shui) in balance. Pilwon Han notes that while the “administrative city” as a walled city was an ideal in both pre-modern China and Korea, not many Korean cities adhered to the ideal (2013:56). Only one of these city gates remains since the devastation of Japanese colonization and the Korean War—P’ungnamun, to the south. Buildings associated with Confucianism—such as the *hyanggyo*, or school of Confucian learning, up a steep hill from the *Hanok Maül* district—can be found around town, in keeping with Chōnju’s distinction as the ancestral home (*pon’gwan*) of the Chōson dynasty founder Yi Sōngkye (ruling name Taejo, 1392-1398). Near P’ungnamun, the southern gate, is the *Hanok Maül*, Chōnju’s main tourist attraction. Unlike similar “traditional villages” in Seoul’s Bukch’on neighborhood, or in tourism mainstay cities Kyōnju and Andong, the *hanok* (traditional houses) in Chōnju are larger and constructed for urban living. Most houses are only about one hundred years old, having been

constructed not in the later years of the Chosŏn dynasty, but in the first decade of the Japanese colonial period. The *yangban* living in the city center—many of whom had been exiled from the capitol, according to Hanhee Hahm—noticed the differences in living standards between Japanese residents in the city and Koreans, and set about constructing a village of high-class, luxurious, traditional-style Korean houses out of a sense of national pride. The houses are “living,” meaning that they are inhabited by Chŏnju residents, with only a few designated for small-scale museums or tourist experiences (such as a *hanok*-stay, a variation of the “temple-stay” program). The “living” aspect of the traditional neighborhood is one factor the local government pointed to when they applied for, and subsequently received, UNESCO “slow city” status. Chŏnju can hold this “slow city” label over more tourist-friendly Kyŏngju and Andong (both in Kyŏngsang province), as it is the only South Korean city to make the “slow city” list. The other “slow cities” are all much smaller towns or islands.

In spite of the city gates that once kept outsiders out, Chŏnju in the twentieth century and beyond has had a close relationship with nearby smaller cities and towns, as well as rural districts. In contrast to mega-cities Seoul or Pusan, which expand ever outward to yield new suburbs and satellite cities, right outside of Chŏnju neighborhoods are gardens and farmland. While Chŏnju is certainly growing, there is the distinct sense that the countryside is chomping at the edges of the city. Chŏnju is in the middle of the province, with the rural Wanju district to the north. To the east is the town of Chinan, famous for red ginseng prized in traditional medicine; and to the northeast is the rural district of Muju, which boasts the province’s only ski resorts and an annual “firefly festival.” To the southwest is the rural district of Changsu, and the city of Namwŏn—a significant historical entity in its own right, containing the famed Kwanghallu of

the story of Ch’unhyang—is to the far southeast. Directly south of Chŏnju is the town of Imsil, which boasts a cheese factory established by a visiting Belgian missionary, who began a farmer’s dairy cooperative in the 1950s. Farther south is Sunch’ang, known for its fermented sauces (*jang*, including miso and soy sauce). To the northwest of Chŏnju is Iksan, an important Japanese settlement during the colonial period and the home of Korean Wŏn Buddhism. Southwest of Iksan is Kunsan, the second biggest city in the province and a vibrant port city during the Japanese colonial period. Directly west of Chŏnju is the small city of Kimje, and below Kimje is Chŏngŭp, frequently touted as the heartland of Korea, and the setting of novelist Kyung-sook Shin’s recent bestseller, *Please Look After Mom*.<sup>18</sup> To the slight northwest of Chŏngŭp is Puan, on the coast; Goch’ang, to the far southwest, is the home of a Chŏson dynasty fortress. Unlike many other provincial cities in South Korea, Chŏnju has continued to grow in population, and Hanhee Hahm pointed out to me that rural migrants tend to move to the Chŏnju neighborhood most proximate to the town or smaller city they are moving from. People from Suncha’ng, Imsil, and Namwon are concentrated in southern Chŏnju neighborhoods such as Pyŏnghwadong or Samch’ŏndong; migrants from Changsu, Chinan and Muju move to eastern neighborhoods of Uadong and Inhudong; people from Iksan or the rural Wanju district move to northern residential neighborhoods of Hosŏngdong and Songch’ondong; and people from Kunsan, Kimje and Buan move to western neighborhoods such as P’albukdong. Many rural-to-urban migrants are middle-

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<sup>18</sup> Kyung-sook Shin is a female novelist and short story writer who has been active for some time in South Korea, and there was a lot of excitement when her novel *Please Look After Mom* (alternate title: *Please Take Care of Mom*; Korean title *Ŏmmarŭl put’ak’ae*) was added to Oprah’s book list in spring 2011 (translation by Chiyoung Kim), bringing her to international audiences. The current home of the titular character is Jŏngŭp in North Chŏlla, which was where the adult children grew up during South Korea’s industrialization decades before they moved to Seoul for school and work. Abelmann and Shin, in a 2012 article about the breakout popularity of the novel, identify the book’s appeal as being linked to “cosmopolitan striving” and not the “traditional family values” or “motherly appeal” mentioned repeatedly in the South Korean media.

aged people moving for the sake of children coming of age, or elderly who are joining grown children in Chŏnju. But the opposite is also happening: young families and families with older children who want an exit from competitive city life are contemplating urban-to-rural moves “back” to the countryside.

The transformation of South Korean cities in the twentieth century—from the Japanese colonial transformation early in the century to the destruction of the Korean War and then to post-war re-development—has been chronicled in ethnography and fiction alike. A particularly haunting chronicle is found in writer Cho Se-hŭi’s *The Dwarf*, which describes the destruction of shantytowns to make way for high rise apartments and skyscrapers, new symbols of power with concrete effects of displacement and alienation. More recently, young writers (Kim Aeran, Kim Kyung-uk, and Yi Young-hoon) have reflected on the continued emphasis on urban development despite South Korea’s entry into developed nation status, exploring topics of environmental catastrophe, displacement, and inhumanity caused by overdevelopment. But while the transformation of cities has been extensively documented, the transformation of villages and the countryside has mainly been assumed to be limited to the mass exodus of rural populations during rapid industrialization. The countryside is referred to as having been “emptied” of valuable citizens, leaving only the lonely elderly. Statistically and anecdotally, this view is not untrue; census data clearly shows more young people leaving the non-urban areas than arriving, and a visit will confirm that young people in towns and villages are more often than not migrant brides who have been brought in to solve the de-population problem. However, Krause urges us to rethink the nature of cities, the countryside, population and migration: “. . . [A]s we see people move into cities, why do we assume only the people to change? Conversely, if we see

people who live in cities visit the countryside, why do we expect only the countryside to change? If the city really is endless . . . it is also the countryside. If the whole world is urbanizing, it *must* also be ruralizing” (Krause 2013, 234). Cities change people, but people clearly also change cities; people change the countryside—usually for the negative, or so the story of environmental degradation goes—but the countryside also changes people. Openness to being changed by the countryside goes against decades of developmentalist discourse, and understanding the potential power of an urban-to-rural movement in South Korea requires an understanding of the Saemaül Undong in the national, and nationalist, imaginary.

The Saemaül Undong (New Village Movement) was implemented in 1971, the same year that president Park Chung-hee mandated his repressive Yusin constitution. Nemeth critiques the Saemaül Undong as a “planned genocide” of traditional farming culture in South Korea: “Initial success in the rural sector, in large part due to this forced compliance, later inspired lofty goals for expanding Saemaül Undong into the cities. However, by the early 1980s the movement had become so bogged down in a morass of corruption that it was disbanded” (Nemeth 2008, 92). Farmers were organized into collectives charged with “modernizing” their villages, from their own living quarters to commercial crops. Scorched-earth policies were the norm, and the dramatic change from older ways ultimately forced many farmers into wage work, necessitating urban migration in many cases. The most visible legacy of the Saemaül Undong was the replacement of thatched-roofs with brightly colored plastic or corrugated metal roofs, which can still be seen outside of cities throughout the nation. The replacement of traditional roofs was mandated despite farmers’ protests that the new roofs did not properly insulate houses. Nemeth expresses his concerns that “Saemaül Undong has been persistently acclaimed over the decades

by almost all South Korean scholars—and most North American scholars—for contributing to an ‘economic miracle’ and dramatic benefits [to] the rural sector rendered in landscapes of plastic and cement.” It is telling that South Koreans on both side of the political divide—both those who continue to praise Park Chung-hee and those who condemn him as a brutal dictator—have evaluated the Saemaül Undong positively, taking for granted the need for South Korea to scrap its rural past as completely as possible.

While Nemeth notes that the movement was disbanded by the 1980s, even before democratization, it should be added that the movement was re-shaped as a “civil society movement” in 1998, and I still observed Saemaül Undong offices in Chŏnju and the North Chŏlla countryside in 2010-2012. This de-centralization of the movement was in keeping with a broader shift to “civil society” in the 1990s, with citizens’ groups (often organized along gender lines) taking up causes that citizens had formerly been disallowed to champion under authoritarian governments. In this new mode of public engagement, citizens/nationals (*kungmin*) became citizens/city residents (*simin*), a transition that some lauded as positive due to its inherently less hostile position vis-à-vis the state (as opposed to the *minjung* mode of engagement), and others have criticized for its tendency to dovetail into neoliberal governance.<sup>19</sup> The Saemaül Undong’s website, which has an English as well as Korean version, details the organization’s shift to an outward-looking orientation, with a goal of assisting developing countries in rural reform, including working with the Ministry of Unification to stand by to aid North Korea, should the opportunity arise. With ongoing projects in China, Russia, Vietnam, Mongolia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, East Timor, and Congo, the implication is that it is now South

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<sup>19</sup> See Charles K. Armstrong ed., *Korean society: Civil Society, Democracy, and the State*.

Korea’s turn to assist developing countries in their development efforts.<sup>20</sup> The domestic agenda listed on the Saemaül Undong’s website has an unsurprisingly conservative bent: goals include teaching manners to children and youth, promoting patriotism, campaigns to raise the birthrate, and “operating a Korea adjustment program called ‘I Love Korea’ in ten places nationwide for foreign wives living in Korea.”<sup>21</sup> Even the programming intended to alleviate social inequality has a distinct “self-help” quality as it is described, which echoes the early days of the movement and its emphasis on self-sufficiency over communal support. Fieldwork to investigate the various players still active in the almost-forgotten Saemaül Undong, and their goals and commitments, would be necessary to determine the movement’s ongoing role in the rural landscape in an era of growing environmental concerns and slowly but steadily growing *kwinong* (back to the land) migration.

Elsewhere in her “ruralization” essay, Krause reminds us that cities are always wrapped up in concerns about modernity: freedom, the public sphere, cosmopolitanism and the anomie famously detailed by Emile Durkheim, anonymity, crime, and poverty. However, while studies of the urban are important and cities have been sites of important social experiments, Krause also reminds us that “[t]he rural is not just a site of variation but has always also been a site of conscious political intervention: the colonization of land by peasants has a long history as part of political projects” (Durkheim 2013, 240). Certain parts of the South Korean countryside have greater diversity than certain cities or neighborhoods: the lonely elderly and their “old bachelor” sons are joined by female marriage migrants from China and Southeast Asian countries, as well

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<sup>20</sup> Ju Hui Judy Han has addressed this mentality and its implications in her essay “‘If You Don’t Work You Don’t Eat’: Evangelizing Development in Africa.”

<sup>21</sup> [http://english.saemaul.com/domestic\\_act.asp](http://english.saemaul.com/domestic_act.asp).

as returnees (a move contemplated by my interviewee Soyoung, who grew up in the smaller city of Namwon and was considering “returning” to the countryside with her young children) and city folk dropping everything and migrating for *kwinong*. While there is nothing inherently revolutionary about this new rural diversity, those who are reconsidering the rural in their lives—from the Public Media Center employees who tell young migrant brides in the countryside to video record their everyday, to the organizers of *kwinong* programs—cannot but recognize the political potential in these encounters. Although concerns about urban sprawl, suburbanization, or “rurbanization” (“the spread of cities beyond their boundaries”) are legitimate (Krause 2013, 241), in cities such as Chŏnju we also see the rural moving into the city. Cities like Chŏnju are places to watch as “de-centralization” and “local autonomy” policies move into their third decade: far from mega-cities and existing in symbiosis with the countryside, “such small cities [of fewer than half a million inhabitants] account for 55 percent of the urban population in the more developed regions and for 50.2 percent of the urban population in the less developed regions” (Krause 2013, 242). Half of South Korea’s residents are living in small cities, and many of these are living, or contemplating living, in a space between the urban and the rural. The historical *han* of the Chŏlla region remains, but a kind of *yŏyu* (space) opens up at the margins (*yŏji*).

#### CONCLUSION

In *Writings on Cities*, Lefebvre conceives of the countryside as having been colonized by the city, a process that has ironically contradicted the “right to the city,” which he further defines as a “right to urban life.” Lefebvre writes, “. . . [T]he *right to nature* entered into social practice

thanks to *leisure*, having made its way through protestations becoming commonplace against noise, fatigue, the concentrationary universe of cities (as cities are rotting and exploding)” (Lefebvre 1996,157–58). Fatigued urbanites’ vacations and weekend excursions to the countryside has, in Lefebvre’s view, both destroyed the traditional, simple pleasures of the countryside and made a revolution in urban life less thinkable. Krause, as we have seen, would counter this: “While it may be true that there has not been a rural for a long time, it is also true that we have never been urban in the way that urbanists imagined us to be” (Krause 2013, 235). Lefebvre calls for the “invention of new urban forms,” perhaps “polycentric cities, differentiated and renovated centralities, even mobile centralities”; anything other than the “traditional city (separated from the countryside to better dominate it) . . . [or] the Megalopolis without form or fabric . . . ” (Lefebvre 1996, 120). Early in South Korea’s industrialization the “right to the city” became “the right to The City,” with Seoul indisputably claiming that title. Cities that had been central to the Japanese empire (Kunsan, Mokp’o) became backwaters tainted by Japanese “collaboration”; cities that were key in South Korea’s transition to democracy (Kwangju, Yösu) were dismissed as “red.” Amidst continued frustration over failed decentralization, residents of provincial cities such as Chönju are attempting a positive “regional sentiment,” one that invites the countryside (*sigol*) back in. The re-incorporation of the rural is understandably tentative, as it works against decades of feverish urbanization and efforts to make the countryside more like the city (through the Saemaül Undong). My Chönju interviewees and research participants spoke of returning to the countryside *both* dreamily and concretely; one interviewee in her forties sold her apartment unit and built a house with a garden in one of Chönju’s far-flung neighborhoods to the north; other informants visited country farms every weekend or established cafes at the foot of

mountains (as detailed in chapter 4). As Chŏnju activists—such as the film club teacher, or the scholars and culture industry workers who still talk about the *minjung*—work to make Chŏnju into a city that is both closer to the *sigol* and truly urban in the sense of Lefebvre’s “right to urban life,” an “ethics of enlightened underdevelopment” may be emerging.<sup>22</sup>

As a region that remained agricultural as the rest of the country built factories and office buildings, *yŏyu* (space) in Chŏnju and the greater Chŏlla region has sprouted even as *han* (resentment) has fermented. Even as Chŏnju promotes itself as a modern “slow city” by virtue of its *Hanok Maül*, and savors its new status as a “gustatory capitol,”<sup>23</sup> it has proved difficult to disassociate itself from its odor of backwardness and dissent. Yet as South Korea enters a moment of reflection over the costs of industrialization and globalization, and worry over environmental degradation grows, “ruralized” spaces may have a chance to claim “most Korean” status, odors and all.

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<sup>22</sup> In the same essay quoted earlier in the chapter, Nemeth writes about an earlier Neo-Confucian “enlightened underdevelopment,” which he views positively when compared to the hyper-development the South Korean planners and politicians have pursued: “Enlightened underdevelopment thinking presents a direct challenge to economic growth ideology to the extent that it provides a critique of the pursuit of those ‘wants’ disguised as ‘needs’ that drive change.” (Nemeth 2008, 85–86).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-cities-network/gastronomy/jeonju/>.

## EPILOGUE

This dissertation research was carried out in 2010-2012, and apart from bits of information here and there collected on a short follow-up visit in 2013, most of the stories told and media discussed is from 2010-2012. In 2015, from the vantage point of this dissertation’s final edits, many things continue to stay the same as during the fieldwork period: the same kinds of television dramas air, concerns over children’s emotional development and the natural environment grow, the K-pop industry expands, and Korean tastes develop. When I left South Korea, conservative Lee Myung-bak was president, and in 2013 another conservative president took office, Korea’s first female president Park Geun-hye. When I visited in summer 2013, little had changed since 2012 in terms of national mood, but in 2014 an event occurred that shook South Korean society to its core. On April 16, 2014 a commercial ferry, the *Sewol*, capsized off the coast of South Chölla province, en route to Cheju Island. Due to slow coast guard response and the crew’s orders for passengers not to evacuate, three hundred and four passengers drowned. The survival of one hundred and seventy-two passengers is attributed to their evacuating despite orders, or being rescued by commercial and fishing vessels in the vicinity. Among the survivors are the majority of the crew, who abandoned the ship shortly after making the announcement for passengers to remain in place. Among the dead are some two hundred and fifty high school students from Danwon High School in Ansan, a Seoul suburb. The students were on their way to a junior year field trip to Cheju, a common trip for students to take as a “last hurrah” before buckling down to study for the university entrance exam. In the days following the disaster social media was flooded with images of texts and “selfies” that students had sent to parents as their chambers were filling with water, the boat’s dramatic tilt to one side preventing their escape.

Heroic tales soon emerged of classmates lifting one another to safety, and one of the students who perished was in fact the first person on board to call the national emergency phone number to report the incident.

The cause of the *Sewol*'s capsizing was a sharp turn executed by an inexperienced crew member, with recovery from the turn made impossible due to the fact that the ship was overloaded with more than three times the limit of cargo. Moreover, the cargo was not properly secured, and fears that shifting cargo would kill or injure passengers may have contributed to the decision not to evacuate passengers at a critical moment. It soon emerged that the company, Chonghaejin Marine, had made unauthorized renovations to the ship, adding passenger cabins that made the vessel more top-heavy. The company had also ignored several warnings by the ship's regular captain, off-duty at the time of the accident, that the boat was not fit for travel. The substitute captain on the day of the accident was experienced, but as he was past retirement age, was only on a one-year contract and paid just 2.7 million *wŏn* a month (roughly \$2,435 USD). In fact, two-thirds of the crew that day were irregular contract, part-time, low-wage workers. Surviving crew members reported receiving no emergency evacuation training, or any safety training whatsoever, and since an evacuation drill had never been conducted, lifeboats had never been checked and only one out of forty-seven actually inflated. The public's shock at the incompetence and greed that put conditions for the accident in place (Chonghaejin's mismanagement) collided with disbelief over poor decisions made in the moment (the crew's abandoning ship) and outrage over poor government response (the coast guard's immediate response as well as President Park's delayed reaction). For South Koreans watching the events unfold, there were too many parallels to the Sampoong Department Store collapse of June 1995.

That incident was also caused by structural overloading and repeated dismissals by corporate executives of concerns over dangers. The department store, already structurally unsound due to being built on a landfill, collapsed in a matter of seconds and claimed five hundred and two lives. With its oft-cited “compressed development,” South Korea has felt dramatically different from one decade to the next: with the political upheaval of the 1980s settled, South Koreans got down to the business of building a democratic civil society and putting regulations in place; the residual corruption and poor enforcement of regulations of the 1990s finally put to rest, South Korea could come into its own as a global economy. Yet the *Sewol* sinking shattered hopes that South Korea had reached a level of development that ensured basic safety for its citizens. With unfettered neoliberal economics, corruption among South Korea’s *chaebŏl* elite had only grown, and now horrific accidents are caused by exhausted, precarious laborers with dreams of upward mobility, rather than day laborers who follow orders to construct structurally unsound buildings. The common denominator between the labor underclass of the 1980s and the precariat of the 2010s is the *chaebŏl* at the top: South Korea has achieved a certain level of economic development, but there is widespread agreement that moral development has stagnated.

Fear and grief over public safety since 2014 have shifted the affective landscape of South Korea, at least for the time being. In the weeks after the tragedy, many of my Korean friends talked seriously on social media about emigrating, as many felt that they could no longer trust that South Korea was a safe place to raise their children. For months after the incident, festivals and other celebratory events were cancelled in keeping with national mourning, and most school field trips were cancelled that year. An additional dimension of outrage was added by circulating discourse on the class identity of Danwon High School’s perished junior class: Ansan, in its

“multiculturalism” (as a city with high numbers of laborers from South and Southeast Asia, and China), is not a desirable suburb, and Danwon High School is in a working class neighborhood. Many voiced their opinions online that if the drowned schoolchildren on the *Sewol* that day had been upper-class children of Gangnam families, for example, the government response would have been faster and more satisfactory in all respects. The infectious affect of grief has led to a flight response: when a fairly minor subway accident occurred in Seoul in early May 2014, passengers ignored announcements to stay seated and instead jumped out onto the tracks, with most of the (minor) injuries stemming from people jumping out of the cars. The grief has also carried on as a continued fight in the form of protests in downtown Seoul since the accident, with citizens joining with the grieving families to demand a full-scale independent investigation of the incident. The protests are inarguably a sensory experience, as grieving families marched in a funeral procession from the scene of the accident near Jindo to the presidential Blue House, touching their foreheads to the ground in a Buddhist mourning ritual. The powerful sensory protest of a hunger strike by grieving parents was countered viciously in opposing sensory terms, as members of the conservative online portal site Ilbe staged a binge eating contest in front of hunger strikers, while complaining that Sewol protestors were demanding too much from the government. Most recently, on the anniversary of the tragedy in April 2015, massive protests in Seoul were met with violence, with riot police turning water cannons containing a high concentration of tear gas on protestors, while isolating grieving families from other protestors. To reframe the Sewol protests within sensory experience, the grieving parents attempted to use the senses (through a hunger strike and a grueling march) in extreme ways to strategize for

justice, but were met with sensory overloading (water cannons, tear gas) and sensory deprivation (isolation on the cold street without food or amenities) in turns.

I have written in this dissertation about the ways that women used the senses to strategize for their families’ (and especially children’s) well-being and success, as well as their own self-development. Yet under neoliberal social conditions even the senses, so fundamental to human experience, are most effectively used *as* strategy by those with command over resources. If the senses are what allow affect to circulate, the senses of some have more affective value than the senses of others. While appropriately middle-class sensory strategizing—involving watching television dramas, taking babies to sensory development classes, sending children to K-pop and traditional dance classes or allowing them fan pursuits, or going to barista school—is allowable under neoliberal self-improvement logics, political expressions of the senses such as hunger strikes and the march of “three steps, one bow” are threatening to the national affective body. In December 2013, a few months prior to the Sewol tragedy, another protest had gained ground around the country, led by university and high-school students. Just as at other protests, students used social media to coordinate meeting places and organize, but the medium of the protest was decidedly low-tech: students filled public spaces with large hand-written posters detailing their personal stories of struggling with academic burnout, dehumanization and alienation in society, and unemployment, and often connected their own problems with broader social issues, such as an ongoing railroad strike and the election scandal surrounding President Park. Most of the hand-written posters were titled *Annyŏng haji mot hamnida* (I’m Not Okay) or the question *Annyŏngdŭl, hashimnikka?* (How are you all doing?). After the Sewol tragedy this earlier short-lived social movement took on even more poignancy in hindsight, as while the students grappled

with whether the costs of all their striving had been worth it, the Danwon High School students did not even make it to *kosam* (final year of high school), the anticipated and dreaded period of the most intense striving. While the senses can be deployed strategically to open up spaces of possibility for family relationships, children and youth trajectories, and women’s self-development, events such as the Sewol disaster threaten to render such sensory strategizing senseless. This dissertation is ultimately about attempts to carve out spaces of alternative well-being within the vacillating sensory overwhelming and sensory depriving late capitalist society, but now may be the time for a revival of the mass mobilization of the earlier *minjung* era, through startlingly simple placards, and candlelight vigils of four thousand four hundred and forty seven participants forming the image of a boat—as occurred on April 17, 2015, breaking the world record for largest visual image by torchlight in what was termed “The Saddest Challenge in the World.” Senses that have been limited to individual spaces of striving may overwhelm their confines, fueling and being further fueled by affective shift.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Yea, Sallie. “Maps of Resistance and Geographies of Dissent in the Chölla Region of South Korea.” *Korean Studies* 24 (2000): 69–93.

## Curriculum Vitae **Bonnie R. Tilland**

### EDUCATION

- 2015 Ph.D., Sociocultural Anthropology, University of Washington.  
Dissertation: *Hateful and Heart-Warming Bonds: The Senses as Strategy in the South Korean Family*
- 2013 Feminist Studies Certificate, University of Washington.
- 2009 M.A., Sociocultural Anthropology, University of Washington.
- 2006 M.A., International Studies (Korea), University of Washington.
- 2002 B.A., East Asian Languages and Cultures (Chinese language and literature focus), Lawrence University.

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

Media studies, new kinship studies and gender, citizenship, transnational East Asia, South Korea

### PUBLICATIONS

- (2016) “Family is Beautiful: the Affective Weight of Mothers-in-law in Family Talk in South Korea.” Accepted by *The Journal of Korean Studies* for Vol. 21 No. 1.
- 2012 Book Review Essay: “Ethnography in South Korea in the New Millennium, 2000-2011.” In *The Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 2 (Fall 2012).

### WORKS IN PROGRESS

“Transgressive Academic All-Stars and Conventional Teen Idols: School-Age South Koreans and Hapkumo (School Parents) Navigating the System.” Revised and resubmitted to University of Michigan Press peer-reviewed edited volume in Perspectives on Contemporary Korea series.

“The Film Festival in Translation: Interpreting Layers of Meaning at the Jeonju International Film Festival.” In preparation for submission to *Anthropological Quarterly*.

### BOOK REVIEWS

- 2014 Review of *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, edited by Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe, *Acta Koreana*, Vol. 12, No. 2: 715-720.

- 2014      Review of *Tending to the “Flower of Capitalism”*: *Consuming, Producing, and Censoring Advertising in South Korea of the ‘00s*, by Olga Fedorenko, Dissertation Reviews ([www.dissertationreviews.org](http://www.dissertationreviews.org)), January 17, 2014.

## GRANTS, HONORS AND AWARDS

- 2013      AAS-SSRC Dissertation Workshop: Family, Gender, and Generation. March 18-20, San Diego.
- 2012-2013      Korea Foundation Fellowship for Graduate Studies, University of Washington.
- 2011      NEAC/Korea Foundation Grant for travel to the Association for Asian Studies annual conference.
- 2010      SSRC/Korea Foundation Korea Studies Dissertation Workshop, Monterey, CA.
- 2010-2011      Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Fellowship, for doctoral fieldwork in Chŏnju, Korea.
- 2009-2010      Blakemore Freeman Fellowship for Advanced Asian Language Study, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea, and for private Korean tutoring in Chŏnju, Korea.
- 2008-2009      Korea Foundation Fellowship for Graduate Studies, University of Washington.
- 2008      Department of Anthropology Pilot Research Award, Chŏnju, Korea.
- 2008      Pre-Doctoral Fellow, Simpson Center for the Humanities Interdisciplinary Dissertation Prospectus Workshop: New Directions in American Studies, University of Washington.
- 2007-2008      Korea Foundation Fellowship for Graduate Studies, University of Washington.
- 2007      Cultural Immersion Travel Grant, Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Washington, for summer language study in Korea (Sogang University).
- 2006-2007      Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (FLAS) for Korean, University of Washington.
- 2005-2006      FLAS Korean, University of Washington.
- 2004-2005      FLAS Korean, University of Washington.
- 2005      Korea Society Language Scholarship, for summer language study in Korea (Sogang University).
- 2004      FLAS Fellowship for summer study of intensive beginning Korean, University of Washington.

## CONFERENCES

- 2015      “Serializing National and Regional Citizenship in ‘Local’ South Korean Television Dramas.” “Serialization in Asia” conference, University of Washington, May 22-23.
- 2014      “Between Family and Fandom: Negotiations of Young Koreans’ Prosumption Activity.” On panel titled “Making and Unmaking the Nation Through South Korean Popular Music.” American Anthropological Association Meeting, Dec. 3-7. (Panel Organizer)

- 2014 “The Film Festival in Translation: Youth as Interpreters of Layers of Meaning at the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF).” On panel titled “Mediations of Place-based Youth Identities.” Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference, March 19-23.
- 2014 “Falling Birthrate as National Crisis in South Korea.” On panel titled “Family, Gender and Generation Across Asia, Part II: Generation Gaps, New Lifestyles, and Families Navigating Tradition and Modernity.” (Part two of double session) Association for Asian Studies Conference, March 27-March 30. (Panel Organizer)
- 2013 “ ‘Regional Sentiment’ and Viewing Publics in South Korea’s Southwest.” On panel titled “Mediated (Counter-)Publics and Emergent Regionalist Imaginaries in East and Southeast Asia.” American Anthropological Association Meeting, Nov. 20-24. (Panel Organizer)
- 2012 “Family is Beautiful: Reflections on Changes in Family Life and Values in a South Korean Provincial City.” American Anthropological Association Meeting, November 14-18. (Chair of Panel of Individual Papers)
- 2012 “Transgressive Academic All-Stars and Conventional Teen Idols: An Ethnography of School-Age South Koreans ‘Gaming the System.’” Perspectives on Contemporary Korea Conference Series 2 (Transgression as a Secular Value: Korea in Transition?), University of Michigan, October 26.
- 2011 “Family is Beautiful: Reflections on Changes in Family Life and Values in a South Korean Provincial City” (preliminary version). Society for East Asian Anthropology Conference (“Material Asia: Objects, Technologies, and Rethinking Success”), August 1-5.
- 2011 “Baker Kings, Rice Wine Princesses, and the Coffee Elite: Food Nationalism and Youth Creativity in Korean ‘Gourmet’ TV Dramas.” Association for Asian Studies Conference, March 31-April 3.
- 2009 “Care for a Little Identity Anxiety with Your Coffee? Intimate Public Spaces in the South Korean Television Drama ‘Coffee Prince.’” 5<sup>th</sup> Worldwide Consortium of Korean Studies Centers Workshop, “Korea Coping With Globalization,” July 7-10.
- 2008 “No Time for Melodrama: Transnational Romance and Global Longing in East Asian Cinemas.” China Undisciplined Conference, UCLA Center for Chinese Studies, May 30-31.

2005 “Discourses of the Not-Yet-Appeared: Culture Reunification and Decolonization in South Korea.” Western Regional Association for Asian Studies Conference, October 11-13.

### **INVITED TALKS**

2014 “Formulas for Success: The Global Appeal of Korean TV Dramas.”  
“Understanding Korea” Workshop, University of Washington. Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>.

2014 “Cursing at the Screen, Yet Can’t Look Away: Watching Korean TV Dramas.”  
“Love, Loss and Longing” lecture series, Seattle Art Museum’s Gardner Center for Asian Art and Ideas. March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

2010-2012 Dissertation research, Chŏnju, South Korea. March 2010-February 2012.

2008 Dissertation pilot research, Chŏnju, South Korea. July-September.

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

2014 Instructor, “Mapping the Nation Through Korean Cultural Production.” Asian Languages and Literature Department, University of Washington, fall quarter.

2014 Instructor, “Comparative Study of Death.” Anthropology/International Studies Departments, University of Washington, summer quarter.

2014 Instructor, “The Family in Korean Literature and Film.” Asian Languages and Literature Department, University of Washington, spring quarter.

2014 Teaching Assistant, “Anthropology Through Visual Media.” Anthropology Department, University of Washington, winter quarter.

2013 Instructor, “Special Topics in Literature and Culture of Asia: Korean Television Dramas.” Asian Languages and Literature Department, University of Washington, fall quarter.

2013 Instructor, “Comparative Study of Death.” Anthropology/International Studies Departments, University of Washington, summer quarter (Evening Degree Program).

2013 Instructor, “Suicide and the Anthropology of Death.” Break-away directed readings group composed of Evening Degree students, summer quarter.

2012 Instructor, “Modern Korean Society.” Anthropology/International Studies Departments, University of Washington, fall quarter (Evening Degree program).

### **RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE**

2012-2014 Graduate Peer Writing Tutor, Odegaard Writing and Research Center, University of Washington.

2004-2006 English Conversation Teacher/Activity Leader/Resident Advisor, University of Washington Short-Term ESL Programs, summer/winter 2004 and summer 2006, Seattle, WA.

2003-2004 ESL Program Assistant/Chinese and Japanese Interpreter, Northbrook/Glenview School District #30, Wescott Elementary and Maple Middle Schools, Northbrook, IL.

2002-2003 Assistant Language Teacher (English), Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, Ibusuki Board of Education, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan.

### **UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

2013-2014 Committee Member, Curriculum Committee, Anthropology Department, University of Washington.

2012-2013 Committee Member, Undergraduate Outreach Committee, Anthropology Department, University of Washington.

2008-2009 Organizer of Visual Praxis Collective (VPC), interdisciplinary graduate student group, University of Washington (grant-writer for \$5000 grant from Simpson Center for the Humanities).

2006-2009 Committee Member, Graduate Resources Committee, Anthropology Department, University of Washington.

2005-2006 Committee Member, Jackson School of International Studies Graduate Council, University of Washington.

### **SERVICE TO PROFESSION**

2013-2015 Korean Studies Field Editor, Dissertation Reviews ([dissertationreviews.org](http://dissertationreviews.org)).

2013 Korean Literature Translation Workshop, Seoul National University, June 3-7.

2008 The Academy of Korean Studies Summer Program for International Students and Scholars, Seongnam, South Korea, June-July.

2007 Kyujanggak Institute Korean Studies Graduate Workshop, Seoul National University, South Korea, June-July.

## **LANGUAGES**

**Korean:** advanced

(Graduate coursework; study in language programs at Sogang University, Seoul National University, and Chonbuk University)

**Chinese:** advanced-intermediate reading and listening; intermediate speaking and writing (Undergraduate and graduate coursework; advanced language study on Associated Colleges in China program, Beijing, PRC, 2000)

**Japanese:** intermediate

(Study during Japan Exchange and Teaching Program; graduate reading groups)

**English:** native

## **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Anthropological Association

Association of Asian Studies

Society for Cultural Anthropology

Society for East Asian Anthropology

Society for Cinema and Media Studies