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Chosŏn Memories

Spectatorship, Ideology, and the Korean Folk Village

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AFTER VIEWING a newly opened display of folk materials at the turn of the century, the French journalist Ernest Allard had occasion to write,

I stood transfixed there, strongly interested, soon quite touched, especially when in passing by the scene I had in front of my eyes, my thought penetrated into the customs of this life of bygone days; because, alas, it appears that the vertiginous evolution of modern progress is making itself felt even . . . [in] those regions where the good old days seemed intent on lasting forever, demolishing in hurried strokes the ancient edifice of costumes and practices, as well as ideas (Allard quoted in Sandberg 1995, 335–336).

Although Allard's impressions stemmed from a visit to the Scandinavian exhibit at the Paris International Exposition in 1878, the remarks could just as easily have been made by a visitor to the Korean pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893; the Korean Folk Museum when it first opened in postcolonial Korea in 1946; its governmental successor, the Korean National Folklore Museum, when it opened in 1966, when it was relocated to the grounds of Kyŏngbok Palace in 1975, or to its new home in 1993; or Minsokch'on, the Korean Folk Village, on opening day in 1974 (Ha 1980; *Han'guk minsokch'on* 1982 and 1997; Kendall 1999; Kim Young-na 2001; Kungnip Minsok Pangmulgwan 1986a).¹ It probably would not have been written by a visitor to the Lotte World Folklore Museum when it opened in 1989, perched atop the largest department store/shopping mall/amusement park complex in Seoul.

The exhibit at the Parisian fair that inspired Allard to pen his review was designed by the Swedish ethnographer Artur Hazelius, whom many

credit with being the originator of the tableau display of folklife in which mimesis and an attendant will to authentic reproduction of the contours of everyday life are the underlying principles.² The visitor who views the tableau is invited, often by the accompanying signage, to imagine a story that animates the displayed scene. In the case of Korean folklore museums, these scenes illustrate how particular farming implements or traditional tools were used, freeze moments in time during the performance of rituals from popular religion, or capture small steps in the construction of hand-made crafts.³

The principles of the museum tableau are brought to their logical conclusion in the open-air museum. Here the cordoned-off display cases of indoor exhibition halls are replaced with entire buildings set on expansive parklike grounds. Actors engaged both in normal activities of daily living and in displays of remarkable individual ability in traditional arts are substituted for the ubiquitous mannequins of the tableau displays. Visitors to the open-air museum are not barred from entering the static story space of the tableau by a cordon or a glass, but rather they walk directly into that space, immersing themselves in a historical kinesthetic experience. This full immersion of the spectator into the historical narrative of the open-air museum heightens the sense of connection with the constructed past and, to a certain extent, intensifies the sense of authentic historical experience proposed by the museum. This “will to authenticity” is an important component of the underlying ideology of the folklore display.⁴

These elements of museum design philosophy surprisingly enough found their way to Pak Chŏng-hŭi’s Korea of the early 1970s by way of a rather circuitous path. The first public ethnographic display of things Korean was at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 (Dilling 1998; Hendry 2000, 54–60; Kim Young-na 2001). During the colonial period, Japanese scholars carried out a great deal of ethnographic and archaeological collection (Pai 2000 and 2001), and subsequent museum displays also included reconstructions of Korean rural life. But these displays were geared primarily toward non-Korean audiences, and they cleaved to the classical view of Korean society as backward, possibly only a few steps removed from primitive society (Hendry 2000, 59). The 1970s folk village, by contrast, developed largely on the path first established by Song Sŏk Ha in prewar Korea and was geared from the very beginning toward Korean visitors. It resulted from grafting the design philosophies of Hazelius’ Skansen in Sweden and Olsen’s Frilandsmuseum in Denmark onto the burgeoning folklore preservation movement that had lain dormant in Korea since the colonial period.⁵ When it opened in the town of Yongin south of Seoul, Minsokch’ŏn perched on the edge of the urban/rural divide. In subsequent years, as urbanization continued apace, Yongin has been effectively swallowed by the outskirts of greater Seoul, and the folk village has been joined by a more recent neigh-

bor, Everland, now the world's eighth-largest theme park, which opened in 1976 as "Yongin Farmland."

The intriguing spatial proximity between the folk village and the theme park is perhaps to be expected, since the outdoor museum and the theme park are closely linked to aspects of industrialization, urbanization, and—ultimately—modernity (MacCannell 1976; Sandberg 1995). Nelson Graburn points out that, in modern society, "the long-held distinction between theme parks and amusement parks on the one hand and museums and cultural centres on the other—between popular and the authoritative—is blurring fast" (1995, 167). Minsokch'on and Everland, located in what was once countryside, perhaps exemplify this blurring best. Now that the greater Everland resort complex includes the HoAm Art Hall, the blurring is essentially complete. Not surprisingly, the two parks are often included on itineraries of domestic and foreign day-trippers and are situated close enough together that even the least demanding tourist itinerary can include both of them in a single day. The visitor can then combine the spatial and temporal fantasies of the two parks—the theme park a seeming flight of fancy into distant worlds and pristine nature and the folk village a voyage into Korea's authentic past.

Most visitors arrive at Minsokch'on seeking a staged experience. Park designers have developed a clear narrative that transports the visitor both through visual and spatial arrangements into this constructed world. In this manner, the intentions of the visitor and those who run the park usually align. My interviews with dozens of folk village visitors over the past seventeen years confirm this: Comments about their experiences at the park at times approach a verbatim repetition of the visitor brochure. Indeed, some have even read to me from the brochure. The structured experiences offered by Minsokch'on and parks like it can accordingly play a significant role in shaping the visitor's understanding of historical and cultural processes. As Dean MacCannell notes in his early yet influential study of tourism in contemporary society, "the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society" (1976, 8). These reconstructions of the nonmodern world in turn validate the experiences of modern life at the same time as they present a scripted and abbreviated narrative of history that more often than not serves well the ideological agenda of the government or corporation behind the park. Of course, in Korea of the 1970s, there was often little ideological difference between the government and large corporations (Eckert 1991, 258). Nevertheless, the smooth flow of the constructed narrative presented in the space of the folk village is occasionally disrupted by an unexpected event—a mask maker takes off his topknot or a musical performance unintentionally invokes a political message. It is during these

usually brief interruptions that the contours of the park narrative are laid bare and its political nature emerges.

At Minsokch'on, the visitor is encouraged to wander back in time into a painstakingly reconstructed space—a reconstruction based on the park designers' and conservators' conceptions of folklife and history. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983/1991), proposes that the museum—and by extension, the open-air museum—is intimately linked to the processes of “imagining the nation.” He notes that “museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political” (178), and he suggests that “as with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being, imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of ‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity—product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century—engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’” (205). It is precisely this type of narrative of “identity”—a narrative that is deeply political since it is tied intimately to the official projections of the national narrative of origins, heritage, memory, and the past—that inspires cultural officers of the Pak regime to rediscover the colonial-era fascination with Korean archaeology and folklore. The ruptures that Anderson mentions need not be traced as far back as the eighteenth century for Korea; in fact, the ruptures of the last hundred years are more than adequate to have provoked this response (Kendall 1999).

Perhaps to better understand the motivations for building the folk village, it may be best to take a short detour through the development in Korea of folklore museums and folk villages and the attendant development of folklorists' conceptions of rural life, since the conception of the “folk” in Korean folkloristics is almost exclusively rural (Ch'oe In-hak 1995; Im 1991; In 1978; Kim Son-p'ung 1994; Kim Tong-uk et al. 1988). Roger Janelli (1988) notes that the study of folklore in Korea is nationalistic, by which should be understood that Korean folklorists focus primarily on the cultural expressions of Koreans; and historical, by which should be understood that Korean folklorists tend to consider the development of culture over time and to seek out the earliest examples of any given expression. In the following short narrative of the development of folklore studies in Korea, I want to highlight how the field developed into one emphasizing the unique cultural expressions of the Korean people, predicated on a master narrative of “5,000 years of Korean history.” Folklorists have, as the field developed, settled on situating these expressions of “Koreanness” historically in the late Chosŏn and placing them geographically in the countryside (Kim Son-p'ung 1994; Kim Tong-uk et al. 1988). In turn, this Korean answer to Alan Dundes' (1977) question, “Who are the folk?”—or perhaps better expressed in Korean, “Who are the *min*?”—explains to a great extent the formal features of Minsokch'on and the other Korean folk museums.

Folklore study in Korea made its first great strides paradoxically during

the colonial period (In 1978; Janelli 1988). Although the early Japanese policy was one of cultural erasure, as the colonial period wore on, policies changed so that the study of Korean culture and history were encouraged, albeit with an implicit goal on the part of the colonial authorities to emphasize not only a long connection between the cultures of Japan and Korea, but also to show the cultural reliance of Korea on Japan. An indirect result of these changing policies was the emergence of cultural nationalism—*munhwa minjokjuui*—a trend described well by Michael Robinson (1988). As Robinson has noted, with cultural nationalism came an increased focus on Korean history and culture by Korean scholars. Roger Janelli (1988) situates the beginnings of folklore as a field of scholarly inquiry in Korea during this period, a view echoed by Ch'oe In Hak (1995, 20). Supporting the views of In Kwŏn-han (1978), Ch'oe further links the emergence of folkloristics—*minsokhak*—to the end of the *silhak* (practical learning) period, opining that two of the last *silhak* scholars, Yi Nŭng-hwa and Ch'oe Nam-sŏn, were also the first modern folklorists in Korea (20–21).

Yi and Ch'oe, however, were not alone in their folkloric endeavors during the colonial period. Most overviews of the history of Korean folkloristics mention two other prominent scholars—Son Chin-t'ae and Song Sŏk-ha—who stand out, albeit for significantly different reasons. Son saw the study of folklore as closely related to the study of the life and hard times of the disenfranchised masses and hypothesized an early, neocommunist state situated on the Korean Peninsula (Janelli 1988). The Marxist slant of his scholarship prefigures the emergence of the *minjungjuui* discourse that informs Korean folkloristics during the middle to late 1980s. Song Sŏk-ha was perhaps the most contemporaneously minded of these early Korean folklorists, undertaking a great deal of fieldwork himself (Chang 1991; Kungnip Minsok Pangmulgwan 1996). He is perhaps best known for founding the first Korean folklore museum, the Kungnip Minjok Pangmulgwan in 1946. Rather than using his studies of folklore solely as a form of resistance to the Japanese colonial presence as most cultural nationalists did, Song also took a page from the book of the European Romantic nationalists. Like his Swedish counterpart Hazelius, Song's conception of the folk was firmly rooted in the peasantry, and his later museum expressed nostalgia for what he perceived to be a vanishing rural culture. The period that Song envisioned as the location of Korea's national cultural origins did not hearken back to the mythical times that Ch'oe Nam-sŏn and Yi Nŭng-hwa attempted to recuperate in their mythological studies but rather to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Song was a preservationist, a position inspired by European folklorists from the nineteenth century like Hazelius, who felt that industrialization and modernization threatened the rural lifestyle that provided the cultural context for the folk expressions of national spirit (Chang 1991; Song Sŏk-ha 1934a).

Song's connection to Europe and European cultural display was by no means as vicarious as one might initially suspect. After his college years in Japan, he spent a great deal of time and energy working for the internationalization of Korean folklore, and he tried to develop close contacts with European folklorists and folklore societies (Chang 1991). During the mid-1930s, one of his closest international contacts was the Swedish adventurer and zoologist Sten Bergman, to whom he eventually gave copies of his films of mask dance drama to show in Sweden. Bergman had been sent to Korea by the Swedish Natural History Museum to collect specimens of birds and animals and by the Swedish Ethnographical Museum to collect aspects of Korean folk culture. In his book, *Bergman (1937, 221–222)* recounts a somewhat surprising event in which one of his Japanese hosts has taken a photograph of Bergman's children at Skansen: "Just about this time a very curious thing happened. My children, during my absence from Sweden, were taken one day to Skansen. . . . They were wearing Swedish national costumes and for this reason had caught the eye of a Japanese visitor there. He had asked them permission to take a photograph of them and with characteristic Japanese courtesy had promised to send them a copy. . . . The Japanese added his address, which turned out to be at Keijo (Seoul)." Bergman goes on to visit the Japanese family and receives a copy of the photograph. This odd coincidence brings Skansen that much closer to Korea and into the immediate realm of Song, who at the time was developing his ideas for the Korean folk museum.

At the same time, Song's close colleague and cofounder of the folklore society, Jōng In-sōp, traveled in 1936 to Copenhagen where he not only attended the congress of the Comité International Permanent des Linguistes but also visited various museums, probably including Olsen's Fri-landsmuseum (Yun Hŭng-no 1991). Of course, I do not wish to suggest that Song's sole inspiration for creating his museum came from these Scandinavian contacts but rather to underscore that the museum design philosophies of Song and his later counterparts were not solely based on Japanese models; they rather included a clear appreciation of developments in Europe—in particular Scandinavia. Of course, as Hendry (2000, 7) notes, many of the early Japanese ethnographic displays had these same Scandinavian models as one of their sources of inspiration. Korean folklorists in the 1960s clearly took Song's lead, positing the Korean folk as a rural populace and historically situating them in the late Chosŏn. In this manner, the rural population of that period came to be interpreted as the historical and geographic locus of the unique Korean national spirit and became the focus of their folklore displays.

Because of Song's rural nostalgia, his 1946 folklore museum became a repository for items that were related to the vanishing agrarian lifestyle

(Kungnip Minsok Pangmulgwan 1996). This museumification of nineteenth-century rural culture was started already in 1893 when, at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, the Koreans exhibited “a seven-room house in traditional style, and a display of apparel, eating utensils, [and] furniture” (Dilling 1998; Kim Young-na 2001). Song’s museum offered the opportunity to imagine a story of rural life through the presentation of artifacts of folklife in idealized yet typical situations. In viewing the items displayed at the museum, which were often arranged in tableaux as was the 1893 exhibition, urban spectators could recover a lost dimension of Koreanness—or more accurately, late Chosŏnness—that was the wellspring of their collective identity, regardless of whether they had ever had those rural experiences. This early museum thus became a site for the recovery of lost memories that never were, and in this sense it began the process for the predominantly urban visitors of the folklore museum of imagining a Korean identity that was closely linked to an agrarian past and situated both chronologically and geographically outside the realm of their own experiences.

Korean folklore endeavors came to a screeching halt with the advent of World War II and did not begin to revive until the late 1950s (Ch’oe 1995, 21–22). In the early 1950s, during Yi Sŭng-man’s reign, the government launched widescale literacy and antisuperstition campaigns. While these policies were intended to help modernize the country, the results for folk tradition—and, by extension, folklorists—were catastrophic. Shamans were driven underground with an attendant decrease in customers, people abandoned aspects of their ritual life that provided a strong connection to both family and community, and folk belief was seen as something that should be eradicated. Ironically, at least in the realm of folklore, the differences between the early Japanese policies of cultural erasure and the antisuperstition campaigns of Yi Sŭng-man are, in retrospect, somewhat difficult to discern.

After the abbreviated administration of Yun Po-sŏn, Pak Chŏng-hŭi assumed power and, with a heavy hand, vowed to move Korea into a position of global industrial prominence. Among the most influential of his policies in the rural areas were the National Reconstruction Movement for rural development begun in 1961 and the New Village Movement (Saemaŭl Undong) launched in early 1971. Whereas the antisuperstition campaigns of Yi Sŭng-man had been aimed at aspects of day-to-day life, these new rural initiatives set their sights not only on the “backward mindset” of the rural populace but also on the physical representations of rural culture. As Ch’oe In-Hak notes, one of the government’s main goals in the 1960s and 1970s was the physical modernization of the countryside—straw roofs were replaced by zinc ones, dirt roads were paved with asphalt, mud walls were replaced with cement blocks. Even *changsŭng*, poles that housed guardian

spirits and stood watch over the entrance to the villages, were uprooted and destroyed (Ch'oe 1995, 24). By the early 1970s, these once ubiquitous *changsŭng* had all but disappeared from the landscape.

But a funny thing happened as Pak's modernizing agenda entered its second decade. While the regime was hell-bent on industrializing the country, they also had a vested interest in presenting a unified narrative of national identity that would help legitimize their authority. Although the government's intended representation of Korea was certainly supposed to be one of a forward-looking country, it also wanted to project a sense of a Korea that had a long, impressive, and distinct history, whose people expressed themselves in unique and noteworthy ways, and that was unified under a strong central authority. The rural development initiatives had been remarkably successful not only in modernizing the Korean countryside but also in wiping out significant aspects of rural culture—a culture that had been linked by Korean folklorists such as Yi, Ch'oe, Son, Jōng, and Song, as well as their modern counterparts to the spirit of the nation. As a result, numerous cultural initiatives were intensified in the 1970s to collect and preserve aspects of Korean culture that were threatened by the Korean state itself, thus echoing Song Sōk-ha's preservationist admonition from the 1930s, in the first volume of *Chosōn minsok*, where he laments, "The materials of our unique folk culture are disappearing one by one" (Janelli 1988, 40; Song 1934b).

Although the Law for the Cultural Properties Preservation, modeled on a similar yet earlier Japanese law, had been promulgated early on in the Pak regime, the enforcement of the law during the 1960s tended more toward the preservation of items of great artistic, archaeological, and historical significance (Pai 2001). Indeed, most of the early efforts of the Munhwachae Kwalliguk (Bureau of Cultural Property Preservation) were focused on identifying archaeological and artistic national treasures (*kukpo*).⁶ Less importance was attached to elements of folk culture. While certain folk expressions came to be designated as "intangible cultural properties" and some of the practitioners dubbed "living cultural treasures," most aspects of folklore and folklife were either consciously obliterated or, in the best cases, simply ignored during the early years of the Pak regime. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, a sense of impending cultural doom coupled to Pak's own presentation of himself as a man of the people—someone not averse to rolling up his pants and getting his feet dirty during the rice transplanting—gave impetus to a wave of preservationist activities in the realm of folklore and folklife. It is not surprising then, that—along with extraordinary oral literature collection efforts such as the one started in 1968 and finally presented in the eighty-four volumes of the *Kubi munhak taekye*—the designation of folklore items as important national treasures and a general wave of folkloric collecting reached full tilt. By way of illustration of

this increased focus by the Munhwachae Kwallikuk on folklore starting in the late 1960s, only seventeen folkloric performances were designated as intangible cultural properties from the time that the law was implemented through 1968. In the following two years, however, fifteen more folkloric events received this designation, and from 1969 through 1973, a total of twenty-nine were added—more than one-fifth the current total of 109 (see Table 4.1). It was during this time of attention to folklore that Minsokch'on came into being.

Originally funded by the Kihŭng Tourism Co., Ltd. (later the Chowŏn Tourism Promotion Co.), construction of Minsokch'on had enthusiastic government backing and a mandate to preserve and present the “quickly disappearing” folk culture of Korea (*Han'guk minsokch'on* 1980). The folk village is described in a recent tourist brochure as “a living museum that recreates the lifestyle of [one or two] centuries ago. There are potters, weavers, blacksmiths, and other artisans who practice their trades in traditional fashion. There are also two hundred and forty traditional homes and a small amphitheater for music and folk dances” (*Han'guk minsokch'on* 1997). The reproduction of life of a hundred or so years ago at the village positions Korean folk life as a feature of the late Chosŏn period—the “good old days” of Allard’s review—and begins the process of both imagining the source of a Korean identity that is far enough removed from the present to be a forgotten past, yet still close enough to the present time to be remembered. It

TABLE 4.1. National treasures and cultural properties, 1997 and 2004

Classification	Total 1997	Total 2004
National treasures	293	306
Treasures	1,232	1,401
Historic sites	384	452
Historic and scenic sites	6	9
Scenic sites	7	12
Natural monuments	286	436
Important intangible cultural properties	103	116
Persons with skill	181	367
Important folklore materials	228	244
Tangible cultural properties	1,619	2,256
Intangible cultural properties	193	327
Monuments	1,053	1,583
Folklore materials	266	319
Cultural properties materials	1,435	1,999
Traditional architecture	21	—
Preservation areas	2	—

Source: Munhwajae Kwallikuk *Statistical Overview* (1997; updated 2004).

is a profoundly ironic temporal positioning, since the nineteenth century was hardly a period of peace and serenity but rather a time marked by internal political difficulties, including several peasant revolts, social strife, and crises of international scale—a past that is clearly and deliberately forgotten in the context of the village.⁷

A visitor to the folk village enters the sprawling complex through a large three-passage gate (*sammun*) and is thus transported back to an imaginary village of the nineteenth century. A bit to the left and beyond a collection of sufficiently frightening *changsŭng* lies the Filial Son Gate (Hyojamun), a small monument dedicated to the filial acts of Yi Tok-kyu (1850–1900) built in 1904.⁸ Imbued with the proper sense of filial devotion and, by extension, a sense of deference to authority, the visitor continues on a deliberately indirect path that leads past replicas of farmhouses from the entire peninsula, small fields planted with typical crops, the mansion of a *yangban* (noble) family, a functioning Buddhist temple, and a government office, complete with jail and torture devices.

Along the meandering path that winds its way through the village and passes by the numerous houses that dot the park grounds, the visitor can stop to listen to a raucous performance of farmer's band music (*nong'ak*), perhaps pass by a group playing on a seesaw, or even watch a performance of tightrope walking. The visitor can also stop in at the fortune-teller's house and buy a charm to ward off evil spirits, pop in to buy a traditional pipe at the pipe maker's workshop, or stop to watch mulberry paper being made at the paper mill. After this promenade back through time, the visitor can wander into the marketplace (*chamt'ŏ*), where artisans in small booths produce handicrafts such as masks and musical instruments and *hanbok* (traditionally) clad women sell trinkets for shockingly contemporary prices. Before finally heading home, the weary visitor can sit back on a raised platform and quaff one of the many folk drinks (*minsokju*) offered at small stalls around the marketplace's perimeter. The "proper" route through the folk village is made explicit through signage, visitor maps, and—in a recent development that reveals the penetration of the mediascape into this invented ethnoscape—with an elaborate "cybertour" that proposes four possible itineraries through the park grounds: an introductory route, a route for families with children, an exhaustive route for those who arrive early, and a quick, "greatest hits" tour for those who arrive later in the afternoon (Fig. 4.1).

The folk village is not only a fiction of time and history, it is also a fiction of geography. Although tourist brochures and the museum catalog stake claims to authenticity for the village, Minsokch'on is not in fact a true village but rather an imaginary landscape, despite the wishful thinking of the catalog, which calls the park "a replica of a typical nineteenth century Korean village" that captures an "authentic atmosphere" (*Han'guk minsokch'on* 1982). Unlike other folk villages, such as Ha Hoe village,

Songŭp, or Yangdong, villages that existed long before receiving the designation of “folk village” by the Munhwaje Kwallikuk in 1984, Minsokch'on has no such historical pedigree (Moon 2001). Its position as tourist site is not a reinscription of a lived space.

Instead, while the catalog says that the museum is laid out like a regular Korean village, it in fact does not mimic in organization, building style, or any other readily discernible geographic features the patterns of an actual village (*Han'guk minsokch'on* 1980 and 1997). The buildings are all in pristine condition—thatched roofs are full and thick, *ondol* floors are perfectly sealed, windows are square and walls are plumb. The houses sit much farther apart from each other than would be expected—or perhaps far too close together by many hundreds of kilometers—and there is no sense of a village center point or hamlet divisions. A water mill straddles a stream that runs in an unlikely relationship to nearby structures, and farmhouse courtyards and stalls are kept immaculate and free of animals. The Buddhist temple crowds the unusually situated regional government offices, and a small farmer's cottage nestles up against the walls of a *yangban* estate. Although several of the buildings at the folk village were taken timber by timber from various parts of the southern Korean Peninsula and painstakingly reassembled in situ, as in the case of the Hyojamun, the majority, such as the government office and the Confucian academy, were built with new materials from old plans or descriptions.⁹

Unlike the Cheju folk village, another constructed landscape but one

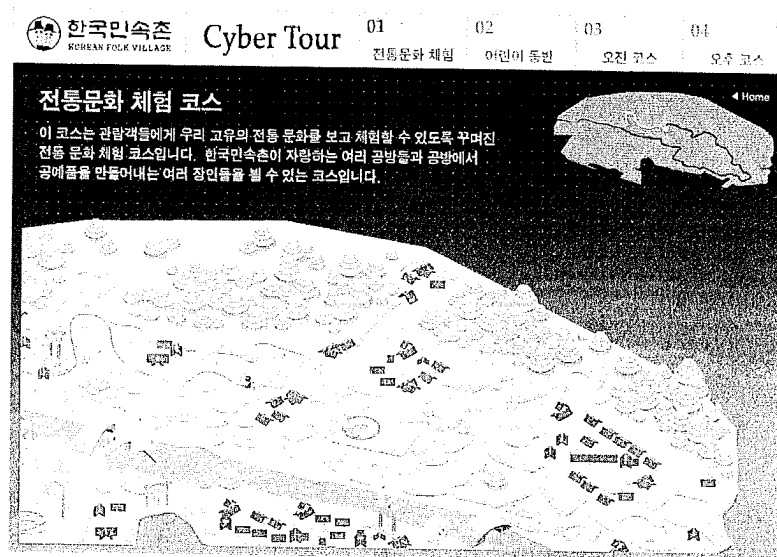


FIG. 4.1. Cybertour (from <http://www.koreanfolk.co.kr>).

that actually succeeds in mimicking the spatial organization of a Cheju village because of its intense localization—a peon as it were to the fierce regionalisms that characterize internal Korean politics and that resist the hermetic closure of the nation—Minsokch'on attempts to act as a representation of all of Korea (a house from Chejudo sits unabashedly next to a house from Ch'ungch'ōngbukdo, for example), even while insisting on its status as authentic replica. The regionality of a museum such as the Cheju folk village is an impossibility for a museum such as the Minsokch'on because, unlike the Cheju village, Minsokch'on does not attempt to represent Korean life as it was lived in a specific place. Rather the museum strives to represent Korean life as it was never lived—and situated in no particular place at all—a narrative strategy reminiscent of the fairy tale (in this context, it is interesting to note that Korean fairy tales frequently open with the formula, “Yetnal yetnal e, Chosŏn sidae e . . .” [A long, long time ago, in the Chosŏn period . . .]). Paradoxically, this nostalgia for a time that never was, marked by an anonymity of place and persons who never were—a nostalgia that Appadurai (1996, 77) aptly labels “imagined nostalgia”—is what imbues Minsokch'on with the power to emerge as part of the narrative of national identity that lies at the root of the motivation for its initial building.

The original audience for the folk village was largely Korean, and it seems likely that visitors to the museum in the early 1970s did indeed interpret the village in the context of the government narrative of national identity. In fact, a large percentage of the early visitors to the village were schoolchildren on field trips. As Shin Gi-wook (1998) has pointed out, in the 1960s and 1970s the educational system was mobilized by Pak's government to inculcate young Koreans not only with a narrative of 5,000 years of Korean history but also 5,000 years of strong Korean government. A visit to Minsokch'on played into these educational goals. Here, schoolchildren had an opportunity to see the peaceful rural past of their now modern Korea, where farmers wearing clean linen *hanbok* lived in simple yet exquisitely crafted houses, worked in perfectly tended fields, and had plenty of spare time to play farmer's band music, bob up and down on seesaws, or watch a tightrope performance. As the schoolchildren moved through the park, they would also gain an understanding of the grandeur of the nobility (*yangban*), the importance of education based on the tenets of the Confucian academy, and the fair but firm hand of the government. By the end of their visit, the children would have gained an understanding of Korea's long, unique, and idyllic past, as well as an appreciation of the benefits of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization.

The folk village also offered new urban dwellers a glimpse of the rural life they had recently left behind, and it perhaps could play into a nostalgia for a country idyll abandoned in favor of the opportunities of the

city. With a visit to the village, the urban dweller returns to an anonymous yet conveniently located home town (*kohyang*) and experiences once again the rhythms of the countryside, devoid of the noisome aspects that accompany actual rural life. Walking through the three-passage gate, the visitor is transported into the distant world of their great-grandfather's youth, where fields of rice glint green on a hazy summer day and storage jars catch the long rays of the setting sun. Visitors can thus reminisce about their own rural past, regardless of whether they had ever experienced it. Interestingly, this narrative of reminiscence also allows for a reversal of the rural idyll: "Think how much better we have it now than we did back then!" the visitor can muse. This new reading, in turn, validates the breakneck speed of South Korea's industrialization.

The Danish folklorist Michael Chesnutt (1999) proposes that folklore emerges from the dialectic tension that exists between the individual and tradition. The representations of tradition inherent in any folk cultural display force individual visitors to that display into a position in which they necessarily interrogate not only their own relationship to tradition but also the extent to which they can accept the narrative of tradition presented in that environment. Sandberg, in his examination of the folk museum in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Scandinavia, proposes the theoretically rich notion of "spectatorship," a position that invests the visitor to a museum space with individual agency. Spectatorship stands in marked opposition to the concept of display, a concept that evacuates this positionality of agency and substitutes a more static consideration of objectivity. In his study, Sandberg proposes that the museum visitor, the spectator, enjoys the liminality, the in-betweenness, inherent in the potentially contradictory position of fully entering a space that is narratively defined as traditional—as is the case at Minsokch'on—and the individual's own ongoing negotiation of the traditional in everyday life. Because of the tension that arises in this confrontation of the individual and the traditional at the site of the folk village, the role of the folklorist in the study of such places takes on an added dimension. Not only does the folklorist need to map the contours and the historical basis of the narrative of tradition presented by the museum, but he or she must also explore the individual responses to that narrative.

Despite what the folk village curators might want, the museum visitors do not necessarily reconcile their own relationship to the traditional with the projection presented by the village. Rather, the individual visitor engages the space with the understanding in mind that the environment, while seductive, is a construct. Even though the "traditional" presented in these places offers a seemingly "thicker" narrative of identity-as-heritage than perhaps is found in everyday life—an ethnographic thickness that many of my informants cite as the initial impetus for them to seek out Minsokch'on—once at the folk village, the visitor rarely accepts uncritically the proposed narra-

tive. Instead, I have found that the individual's engagement with the proffered narrative of tradition is one marked by sliding interpretive registers on a grid of understanding anchored at its extremes by a series of nodes. As a form of shorthand, I label these nodes the complicit, the compliant, the resistant, and the ludic. These positions are influenced by the visitor's varying degrees of experience with rural life and knowledge of history, and they range from the completely uninformed to the very informed. Similar to the individual's negotiation of the traditional in everyday life, no single museumgoer ever occupies any of these extreme points in his or her interpretive engagement with the museum. Instead, individual interactions with the "traditional" as presented at the museum cluster around the nodes; neither the nodes nor individuals' interpretive stances are static. Rather, both are mobile and set against a fluid, rapidly changing social and political background, where the meanings of the nodes as ideal categories and the individual's gravitation toward these nodes are in a constant state of flux, even during their visit to the park.¹⁰

To illustrate briefly the sliding interpretive registers that visitors engage on a visit to the folk village, I offer several of my key informants: Kim Min Sun, a researcher with the Cultural Properties Preservation Research Institute; Pak Rae Hwan, a mask maker and sculptor who used his employment at the folk village as a means to fund his burgeoning artistic career; Kim Yŏng Hwan, an international studies student at Yonsei University in the late 1980s; and Stephen Coleman, a young American who taught English in Seoul for the summer of 1999. Perhaps I could also have offered an elementary school tour group and their teacher and myself as examples, but I believe that in the first case, the positionality of the group teeters on the edge between the complicit (the teacher) and the compliant (the students) and a naive form of the ludic (seen in the playful use of the torture bench at the district governor's office); as for myself, while allowing for a tempting descent into the self-reflexive, my interpretive engagement with Minsokch'on is conflicted and constantly changing—and also informed by my own development as a folklorist with experience both in Korean villages and cities, as a student intrigued by progressive politics at a Korean university in the late 1980s, as a junior researcher working for a large Korean governmental institution while being supported by a foundation whose fortunes are closely tied to the ever-expanding global mediascape, and later as an American academic. A similar complex series of engagements would obtain for my colleague, a well-known scholar of Korean Christianity, who recently held his wedding at the folk village; perhaps these last two cases are illustrative, as they belie the seeming simplicity of interpretation that mention of Minsokch'on at times evokes. Indeed, one of my colleagues at Yonsei University, a sociologist, was recently puzzled by my interest in the folk village, saying, "Is that really important?"

I first visited the folk village with Kim Min Sun, at the time a curator at the National Folklore Museum, several weeks after my arrival in Korea in June 1987 as part of my crash course in Korean folklore and folklife. She has been a gracious host to the village on five occasions since then. Through her work at the folklore museum as it prepared for the Olympics, she had become attuned not only to the general theory of cultural display but also to the specifics of display and performance at the folk village—indeed, since she knows of my familiarity with Scandinavian outdoor museums, she has over the years been particularly interested in learning how “successful” the folk village is in comparison to its Nordic ancestors, Skansen, Maihaugen, and Frilandsmuseet.

The route we have followed on our first and subsequent visits to the folk museum has always been the same—although as the folk museum has been built up, it has increased somewhat in length—and has always hewn to the prescribed pathways through the village. The discussions of the buildings and the various performances and other aspects of folklife presented at the village have also closely followed the village map, although—given her specific expertise in folklife and my own deepening knowledge over the past seventeen years—the discussions have become more detailed and our excursions perhaps more leisurely, lingering over a newly acquired money chest here or marveling at the skill of an acrobat there. Despite these discussions of form, Min Sun has never once questioned the “authenticity” of the space, despite my queries about the seeming impossibility of an Ullŭngdo Island house perched next to a pond and a house from Chungchŏngpukdo, or the obvious elision of regional differences in the farmer’s band performance, where Chwado and Udo styles commingle unabashedly. The day with Min Sun always ends with a visit to the marketplace, usually for lunch, and then a quick detour over a footbridge to avoid the increasingly large amusement park built to compete however meekly with the nearby megapark of Everland. In our coengagement with the folk village, there are few questions about the adequacy of the narrative, nor do questions arise as to why a vision of rural late Chosŏn quiescent to the demands of competing regionalisms and seemingly oblivious to the stress of industrialization and the encroachments of globalization should be presented as the site of an originary narrative predicated on the cultural nationalism of early scholars such as Yi, Ch’oe, and Song. Instead, “Here is what makes Korea Korean” is the repeated implicit message of all these visits.

While the visits with Kim Min Sun are the closest I have ever gotten to outright complicity with the narrative of the park, the visits I have made with numerous tourists, domestic and foreign, and the interviews I have conducted with them suggest that many of the visitors are utterly compliant with the proposed narrative and the proposed route. Stephen Coleman, who had been in Korea for only two weeks when I met him, found the folk

village to be a “pleasant respite” from the frenetic pace of Seoul and mentioned that the folk village allowed him to “get a feel for the real Korea. Accompanying him through the folk village grounds, I was impressed by his tenaciousness in sticking to the prescribed pathways and his willing engagement with the park narrative, despite the awkward translations in the brochure—his admission of an unwillingness to travel too far afield in Korea (“too much of a hassle”) stood in contrast to the seeming adventuresome nature that had brought him to Korea in the first place. His engagement with the park was not too removed from that of countless foreign tourists (admittedly, I was a bit surprised that he was not part of an organized tour bus) as he was not accompanied through the grounds by flag-waving guides, but to a certain extent was it removed from the parade of schoolchildren, who still constitute the largest single group of visitors to the park. That is not to say that the visit was as serious an affair as my at times dour walks with Kim Min Sun. Rather, while there were moments of playfulness, moments of enjoyment, and moments of introspection, these moments were all contained within the bounds of the scripted environment. A walk up the hill to the monastery encourages introspection, while attending a farm band performance provides musical entertainment—and perhaps even a little dancing. A visit to the *yot* (taffy) maker encourages similar enjoyment and joking, particularly among students, while the torture rack begs to be tried. Similarly, the marketplace and food stalls all present opportunities for scripted play. But none of this play rises to the level of the carnivalesque or the ludic, that also stands as an extreme positionality.

By way of contrast, the ludic engagement with the space was immediately evident in mask-maker Pak Rae Hwan’s insider maneuverings through the terrain. On one of my many visits with Rae Hwan, I was captivated by his movements through the park and his easy flow in and out of character. One moment he would pose for a picture, his topknot perched smartly atop his head and his “work clothes” completing the image of the rustic idyll many visitors had come to experience. The next moment he would remove the hat and guide me along the closed alleyways between buildings and farm enclosures. Understandably, he paid no attention to passageways and signage and moved through, across, and in between the otherwise well-structured spaces. Indeed, our movements through the park seemed to be utterly chaotic at first, providing unexpected views of buildings and people. Occasionally, on my first whirlwind tour of the park from his perspective, he would stop to point out some aberration or to comment on the arrival of a new building, or he would stop to flirt with his fiancée selling trinkets in one of the booths, scurry off to introduce me to his friend the pig maker, where we talked about the upcoming presidential elections, or duck into a disguised employee rest area for a smoke and a chat with friends. On one particular afternoon, while on the way back to his mask-carving

shop, he caught the eye of one of his friends, a tightrope walker also on a break, and they pretended for a moment to be normal park visitors. To the bemusement of other visitors, the two proceeded to launch each other several meters into the air on a seesaw, an impossibility for the untrained. For Rae Hwan, the folk village stood as little more than an elaborate playground—his movement through the space was playful and contestatory, completely ignoring the park's narrative of national identity and unity. The folk village, however, was also his place of employment and where he sold his masks to visitors from all over the globe (indeed, shortly before the 1988 Olympics, I spent one evening helping him write signs with prices in dollars and yen as well as wŏn: "Yangban mask, \$29.95"), and because of his commercial investment in the space of the folk village, he was on some level entirely implicated—complicit as it were—in the manufacture and sale of the museum's constructed narrative of cultural identity, even while he was engaged in his own playful refiguration of that same narrative.

Although Rae Hwan's ludic engagement with the park offers its own form of resistance, it is a resistance qualitatively different from the resistance I encountered in my visit with Kim Yŏng Hwan in late November 1987. While Rae Hwan's main resistance was physical, contesting the boundaries of the park, Yŏng Hwan's resistance was primarily ideological. Indeed, the well-orchestrated narrative of national spirit carefully constructed in Minsokch'on experienced a significant interruption at the beginning of the Chŏn Du-hwan era. A crisis of trust in government accompanied the Kwangju massacre of 1980 and the martial rule of the first fifteen months of Chŏn's regime. A coordinated spirit of resistance arose and was bolstered by the increased emphasis among dissidents of the *minjungjuui* concept. Thus, in the 1980s, while the intended narrative of Minsokch'on certainly continued to be one of the main interpretive modes available to the visitor, the potential for a narrative of resistance emerged alongside this official narrative.

I met Yŏng Hwan in a *p'ungmul* (farmer's band music) class in which I had enrolled, both to learn more about Korean traditional rhythms and to get entry into the student-dominated world of the democracy movements. Our *p'ungmul* lessons came with a heavy dose of progressive and, at the time, clandestine Korean history, coupled to readings and discussions of Marx and revolution. Initially, I was surprised when Yŏng Hwan and a friend of his proposed a visit to the folk village, after our group had played at the beginning of one of a long series of protests at Yonsei University leading up to the presidential elections slated for late December. Partly, he and his friend wanted to listen to the farmer's band music groups that had been invited to play that weekend at the folk village, but they also wanted to introduce me to "*uri nara*" (our country). Not surprisingly, the majority of our visit was split between the performance amphitheater listening to the bands

and, being students, the market, where I was given lessons in the regional and class differences of a wide array of alcoholic drinks. However, the beating of the *chang'gu*, the hourglass drum, in the farmer's band performance unexpectedly acted as a powerful disruption of the well-crafted park narrative, forging a direct yet unintentional link to the student movement, political protests, and *minjung* discourse (Tangherlini 1998). Immediately, the *yangban* mansion was cast in the light of class struggle and the small houses were seen as honest representations of the life and hard times of the rural poor—the encounter with this differential in land apportionment led to a discussion of the contemporaneous rampant real estate speculation that was chasing people from their houses and bulldozing communities. The houses reconstructed from the North were looked at longingly in the context of national reunification, while the regional government office became part of a discussion of police, surveillance, and torture, and thus aligned well with our experiences the previous weekend at the student demonstration. The shaman's tree was seen in the context of indigenous religious movements and the resistive nature of shaman ritual that Kim Kwang-ök (1994b), Choi Chungmoo (1993), and Ryu Je-hun (this volume) have explored, and the Buddhist monastery was seen in the context not only of government policies that forced Buddhist temples into the hills during the Chosön dynasty but also the encroachment of Christianity.¹¹ (Interestingly, if the folk village is supposed to reflect late-nineteenth-century Korea, there is no compelling reason for it not to include a Christian church.) Ultimately, the discourse was one of *minjungjuüi*, at times tempered with a dose of North Korean *juche*—the idea of self-sufficiency espoused by Kim Il-süng and his son Kim Jong-il—and not the discourse of *munhwa minjokjuüi* that characterized my walks with Kim Min Sun. Of course, unlike the North Korean parks, the best known of which is Mangyöngdae, where the focus is on the leader and his humble beginnings (a park that finds its South Korean counterpart in the birthplace of Pak Chung-hüi), this reading of the folk village espoused no such political elitism and focused quite deliberately instead on the *pot'ong saram*—the everyman.

Because of the success of the prodemocracy movements of the 1980s, there were profound changes in the Korean political and cultural landscape. Among the many changes attendant to this burgeoning democracy were significant reforms in labor practices and a concomitant increase in leisure time available to the ever-growing middle class (Ministry of Transportation 1994). The 1987 presidential elections also ushered in a substantial loosening of government control in the economic, political, and social arenas, a loosening that has continued in the years since. The 1988 Seoul Olympics was touted as the opening of Seoul to the world and was grafted onto the emerging discourse of globalization—*seggyehwa*. The Olympics also saw the first significant influx of foreign tourists in modern Korean his-

tory, an influx reinforced by the 2002 World Cup. Along with these changes in the cultural landscape came a shift in the location of Minsokch'on in the public imaginary perhaps best expressed in the spatial relationship of the folk village to the nearby megatheme park and its transformation from "Yongin Farmland" to Everland. In recent years, rather than being primarily an institution that imbues domestic visitors with a sense of national pride, Minsokch'on has also become more and more of a theme park—a place for modern people compliant with the park's main narrative to examine the quaint customs of a long-forgotten past and, at the end of the day, to buy a small piece of the past to bring home and hang on the apartment wall of the present.

The theme park, the folk village, and this form of global consumerism are drawn together under one roof at Lotte World in Chamsil, described in a recent tourist brochure as "a mammoth indoor leisure and shopping mall . . . composed of a . . . folklore center, indoor theme park . . . shopping mall and department stores." Built by a Korean conglomerate as part of the massive development south of the Han River in the lead-up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Lotte World has become a mainstay of both tour groups and the adolescent mall culture that has grown up in contemporary Seoul.

Perched atop the mall's glass galleria, with its always crowded skating rink, its many chain stores, and its unusual diversions, such as a shooting range, sits a re-creation of a crazed fantasy of Holland, Baghdad, and the Bavarian Alps named Adventureland; across a footbridge on a man-made island is another amusement park: Magic Island. Fittingly, the main feature of the island is a castle that sits halfway between Mad King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein and Disney's Sleeping Beauty Castle. The itinerary through the bottom of the complex takes one up through the colder reaches of the skating arena, the stores of the second and third levels, the impossible balloon ride through the windmills of the amusement park, and the monorail out to the castle. At the very top of the complex is the more staid Folklore Museum that provides, in miniature, a glimpse into the "folk culture" of Korea. The spatial organization of this folklore museum is one that resists anything but absolute compliance—this does not mean that one cannot engage the space playfully, but unless one is willing to climb large barriers, there is no escape from the narrative presentation of Korea that takes one from the Cretaceous period, where we learn that the Korean Tyrannosaurus was three times the size of the North American variant (a narrative that stretches far beyond the normal 5,000 years of Korean history and also ignores the fiction of the Tyrannosaurus), through a Stone Age dwelling, the Bronze Age, and a series of rooms dedicated to the earliest kingdoms of Korea. The itinerary then takes one on to the spectacular "miniature village." Despite the size, these small, almost caricature-like models of people and folk customs might be more honest than the painstaking reproduc-

tions at the folk village. Here at Lotte World, folk culture is nothing more than a diversion, small, packageable, and saleable as part of a narrative of Koreanness that concatenates consumption, tourism, and a sense of "something unique" that can be understood—and enjoyed—as a spectacle, far removed from the "real life" of the shopping mall, ice rink, and amusement park downstairs.

The tentacles of this contemporary representative endeavor that keys on "Chosŏnness" as part of the commodification, at times even fetishization, of the past, reach out in all directions in modern Korea and exert their grip in areas as diverse as the media (through film, television, and advertising), the city (in the guise of cafés and restaurants), and popular culture (through video games, pop music, and the covers of—oddly enough—punk rock CDs). Appadurai, describing this reach of the past into these modern realms, opines that "the past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be taken as appropriate, depending on the movie to be made, the scene to be enacted, the hostages to be rescued" (1996, 30). The tentacles of this synchronic warehouse reach even further than the very public urban landscapes and mediascapes, grabbing hold of illegal economies such as room salons, gambling rooms, and brothels that in various guises play on received notions and projected ideas about this rural late Chosŏn idyll.¹²

Minsokch'on, the folk museums, Everland, Lotte World, and the myriad yet less developed representations of folklife that abound in contemporary Korea ultimately stand as remarkably complex loci intimately linked to the cultural politics of display, accessed by spectators in various ways as resources for the negotiation of individual identity, implicated in the competing nationalisms that characterize Korean ideological debates, and bending in the fierce winds of globalization. With the rapid changes in the political and cultural landscape over the past ten years, individual spectatorship and subsequent interpretations at sites such as the folk village have necessarily changed. Ultimately, one cannot propose a single position of spectatorship at any of these sites—rather, one must recognize that visitors move between the complicit and the resistant, the compliant and the ludic. The history of the development of the field of folklore in Korea, the politics attendant on the earliest display of Korean rural life for non-Korean audiences, the role of the earliest Korean folklorists as cultural nationalists fighting Japanese colonialism and the policies of cultural erasure, the competing claims to the discourse of Koreanness in the postcolonial era, the division of the country by warring superpowers, the later emergence of the folk museum as an institution intended first for domestic edification and then foreign education, the more recent incorporation of folklore and

folklife into the open-air museum, and the ever-closer connection between the folk village and the theme park all play important roles in the insertion of Korean rural folklife into the competing definitions of what it means to be Korean. Subsequent readings of these sites by scholars, by Koreans from all walks of life, by international tourists, and by immigrant workers, as well as reinterpretations—at times collaborative, at times resistant—of these cultural displays and the translation of displays of rural life into locations as diverse as shopping mall attractions, cafés and restaurants, television dramas and computer games, bars and room salons all reveal the extent to which conceptions of the Korean “folk” are central in understanding the complexities of contemporary Korean society. Folklore and folklife are not peripheral phenomena in Korea, as they might often appear to be in other countries. Rather, the control and manipulation of the symbols attached to Korean folklife are hotly contested battlegrounds between rival institutions, between generations, between classes, between genders, between individuals, and even between countries.

Notes

I would like to thank members of the Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars in Cultural Studies for comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. The village was established in May of 1973 and opened in October of 1974. Yi Yong-sop (1994) provides an excellent, albeit outdated, overview of Korean museums.

2. Bjarne Stoklund (1993) contests the importance of Hazelius in the emergence of the folk museum (see also Sandberg 2003).

3. The updated Korean National Folklore Museum from 1993 has shifted some of these displays to include technological innovation (Kendall 1999; Kungnip Minsok Pangmulgwan 1994).

4. The “will to authenticity” aligns with MacCannell’s discussion of authenticity in tourist experience (1976). Ning (1999) proposes a more complex understanding of a range of authenticities in various forms of the tourist experience.

5. Hendry (2000, 134) notes a similar genealogy for certain Japanese parks, a genealogy that has also reached to other Asian countries (Hitchcock 1995).

6. National Treasure number one is Namdaemun, so designated on December 20, 1962.

7. Peasant revolts in 1812 and 1862, the aborted reform attempts of 1884, crop failures of 1889 and 1891, the Tonghak rebellion of 1894, increased foreign pressure on Korea in trade, a crumbling monarchy, and increased Japanese incursions into the region are just a few of the events that countermand the image of the nineteenth century as an idyllic period in Korean history.

8. I was unable to find any information about Yi Tok-kyu in the standard

biographical dictionaries such as the *Kuksa taesajŏn* or the *Han'guk inmyŏng sajŏn*. I would like to thank Professor John Duncan for his assistance in trying to locate information about Yi.

9. Hendry's (2000, 151–178) discussion of similar phenomena at Japanese museums resonates with the Korean situation.

10. Cohen (1979, 183) provides a similar typology of tourist experiences, positing five experiential modes: (1) the recreational, (2) the diversionary, (3) the experiential, (4) the experimental, and (5) the existential. In Cohen's model, the differentiation of standpoints is somewhat linear, and there is little appreciation of the movement between interpretive registers that characterizes individuals' engagements with the folk village, both over repeated visits and during a single visit.

11. See also Kendall 1996.

12. It is not difficult to find, for example, room salons and brothels catering to a primarily Korean clientele (as opposed to primarily foreign clientele) concentrated in areas of Seoul such as Miari, where young women and girls are forced to wear *hanbok* and sing *minnyo* (folk songs) to their customers, in many cases proposing to create an environment reminiscent of a village inn amid the urban sprawl of Seoul.

HAWAI'I STUDIES ON KOREA

Sitings

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