Introduction: Globalization and Transformation in Contemporary Korean Society

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SPECIAL SECTION: GLOBALIZATION AND KOREAN SOCIETY

Introduction

Globalization and Transformation in Contemporary Korean Society

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Four articles in this issue are the product of a special seminar titled "Globalization and Korean Society," held in summer 2005. They represent an effort to grapple with how this oft-invoked phenomenon actually plays out in contemporary South Korea—to capture, in other words, lived experiences of globalization. Accordingly, these articles attend not only to the blunt force of global influences on Korean society generally, but also to the more subtle responses of various Korean stakeholders, such as the state, mass media, and civil-society groups. All four articles focus on what might be called global-national-local interactions—as manifested in the marketing and commodification of traditional Korean cultural forms during the 2002 World Cup (Kyoim Yun); the constitutive effects of global and national media on the crowd phenomena during the same World Cup summer (Rachael Miyung Joo); the politics of the "scientization" of Korean medicine (Jongyoung Kim); and, finally, the evolution of the postliberation movement to change Korean family law (Ki-young Shin).

A catchphrase of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *globalization* connotes worldwide flows of people, products, capital, ideas, and other resources across national boundaries. Though in operation for centuries, such flows have intensified in recent decades with the breakdown of political barriers to trade and travel, as well as impressive technological breakthroughs such as satellite communications and the Internet. Korea has certainly been involved in these globalizing processes for at least the past one hundred years. The intrusion of global capitalism in the late nineteenth century, Japanese colonialism (1910–1945), the occupation by Cold War superpowers (1945–1948), and since the 1960s the dramatic economic growth in the southern half of the peninsula have brought waves of economic, political, and cultural-ideational influences to bear on Korea. Throughout this tumultuous process,

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Korea has struggled to create and maintain local identities while absorbing myriad forces from abroad.

Korea's experience of globalization has typically been rendered in all too familiar and generic terms: as a dichotomous face-off between global and national forces, wherein the dominant "core" (Western capitalist economies and perhaps Japan) exercises agency, imposing globalizing dictates on hapless "peripheries" (everyone else) left with few options but vain "resistance" and eventual capitulation. To be sure, such a perspective is not entirely invalid, especially if one focuses on state-level responses to globalization. The South Korean state's stance toward global influences has been fraught with tensions. Claiming to protect Korean political, economic, and cultural autonomy, its policies sometimes seemed to lead to the very opposite. The post-1960 "developmental state" is often credited with freeing South Korea from dependency on U.S. economic aid and making it an important player in global capitalism. Yet to play in this arena has also meant exposing Korea to external forces, which by the mid-1980s brought increasing pressures to open its markets to global capital, foreign manufacturers, Hollywood movies, and so forth. With respect to cultural identity, the state has promoted "modernization" and "internationalization" while struggling, usually unsuccessfully, to exclude those influences deemed deleterious to the formation of a unique and unitary Korean essence. These renderings of global-national interactions, where the state signifies the national, are undoubtedly meaningful and deserving of study. However, it cannot be assumed that they represent Korean experiences with globalization at the local level.

The papers presented here attempt to capture how globalization plays out inside specific local movements within Korean society. These reveal a complex process of multiple interactions. Indeed, the global versus national struggle plays differently at the subnational or local level. Globalization creates multiple responses within any national realm. The national is local vis-à-vis global forces, but becomes an intermediate player when in dialogue with subnational actors. For example, as discussed in Kyoim Yun's paper, Cheju provincial officials planned to market the province and expand tourism by staging cultural festivals for a global gaze during the 2002 World Cup. State interests in displaying the nation via the World Cup stimulated provincial officials to market Cheju not only to a global audience, but also to augment its allure to a national audience. This was all fine, but the Cheju shamans and the diving women (*haenyŏ*) mobilized for the provincial festivals contested the design and content of the programs. In the end, the intended beneficiaries of the grand shaman ritual ended up boycotting some of the rituals. Poor local turnout likewise compromised the energy of the events and diluted the effects of the state officials' original plans.

The 2002 World Cup also forms the backdrop for Rachael Joo's discussion of the formation and features of the huge crowds that gathered during the games. She explores how the state provided the early impetus in its celebratory preparations and the construction of new stadia; in addition, she demonstrates how global and national media further stimulated crowd formation. But once the Korean national team began winning, the newly emerged and spontaneously evolving local participation took on a life of its own. The result was a creature produced by the global gaze, traditional mass media, and new media forms (the Internet, cell phones, and so forth) to create a nationalistic response to the games that was decoupled from official nationalist discourse. Here the unpredictability, spontaneity, and creativity of the local response provide counterweight to conventional assumptions about the power and direction of global influence.

Jongyoung Kim's paper on the scientization of Korean medicine (KM) also reveals the complex patterns that evolve locally in the face of global forces. Kim's story reveals a complex interaction among global, national, and local politics. He traces the interests of the Korean state in promoting the export of knowledge derived from traditional KM. Such interest was a perfect match for the avowed policy of *segyehwa* (globalization), whose slogan was "the World to Korea and Korea to the World." State funding supported a major research center where traditional Korean medical knowledge was being "translated" into the hegemonic argot of Western science. This translation project had already emerged in the aftermath of local conflict for control over the right to prescribe KM between practitioners and pharmacists. The scientization project lay at the core of a controversial hybridization of KM, which combined traditional KM (local) and international science (global). Along the way Kim shows how this project evolved in a complex of different "powerscapes": global and local power, power struggles and an identity crisis within KM, and power struggles between KM and other forces within the national provenance of medical delivery.

Finally, Ki-young Shin's paper on family law discusses the indirect effects of global forces—specifically, ideas about family structure, women's rights, and their relationship to development, population control, and democratization. She demonstrates how various stakeholders in the family law debate have aligned and realigned over time in response to the social and political context shaped by larger global forces. For example, the state's interest in the form of the family has shifted. In the period after liberation, the family became a symbolic reservoir of identity, notwithstanding Japanese tampering during the colonial period. In the 1950s the state supported conservative resistance to changing the family law, but shifted its stance during the development era of the 1960s and 1970s. Considering the family form (emphasizing the nuclear

family in particular) to be a key part of development—and a locus of population control—the state's attitude ultimately began to favor women's groups, who wanted to see the law amended to provide more rights for women. It might be noted that this was also an era in which UN declarations (1974, World Population Year, and 1975, Year of the Woman) strengthened global discourse on population control and women's rights. Later, with the democratization movement, forces again realigned to produce the fourth change in the family law (2005).

Each paper in this special section provides a different view of the effects of globalization at Korea's national and local levels. Whether the subject is the commodification of local culture for a global audience, the idiosyncratic processes of crowd formation loosed by the presence of global media, the effects of global science standards on the political economy of traditional Korean medicine, or the protracted struggle over the laws governing power and resources of the family, these articles provide detailed analysis of the increasingly complex interaction of global and local forces in Korean society.