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From Unsaid Feelings to Frank Communication: *Portrayals of* Jeong *in Orion Choco Pie Advertisements and the Encroachment of Emotional Capitalism in South Korea*

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Abstract

For three decades, advertisements for Orion Choco Pie, a chocolate-covered biscuit and marshmallow snack cake, have thematized jeong 情*, becoming a benchmark for this reputedly quintessential Korean sentiment. A time-nurtured affective connection that dissolves boundaries between self and other,* jeong *first featured in the Orion Choco Pie commercials in the late 1980s, to be repeatedly elaborated on into the 2010s. This study examines differences in portrayals of* jeong *in Orion Choco Pie commercials over three decades and relates shifts in those popular-cultural representations to broad changes in South Korean society. Specifically, the article contrasts the inaugural campaign of 1989–1993, which celebrated* jeong *as enabling wordless communication, with the 2012–2013 campaign, which called for expressing* jeong *in words, suggesting a reversal in cultural scripts that govern this much mystified Korean emotion. Drawing on Eva Illouz's (2007) theorizations of "emotional capitalism," my analysis links changes in the advertising depictions of appropriate* jeong *expression to the dominant notions of emotions, selves, and human relationality under neoliberal hegemony.*

Keywords: cultural emotions, *jeong* (*chŏng* 情), emotional capitalism, normative subjectivity, advertising, South Korea

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Introduction

For three decades, advertisements for Orion Choco Pie, a chocolate-covered biscuit and marshmallow snack cake, have thematized *jeong* 情, becoming a benchmark for this reputedly quintessential Korean sentiment. A time-nurtured affective connection that dissolves boundaries between self and other, *jeong* was first featured in Orion Choco Pie commercials in the late 1980s and then repeatedly elaborated on into the 2010s. This study examines differences in portrayals of *jeong* in Orion Choco Pie commercials over three decades and relates shifts in those popular-cultural representations to broad changes in South Korean society.

Specifically, I contrast the inaugural campaign of 1989–1993, which celebrated *jeong* as enabling wordless communion, with the 2012–2013 campaign, which called for expressing *jeong* in words, suggesting a reversal in cultural scripts that govern this much mystified Korean emotion. The two advertising campaigns are located on the two sides of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which has been widely recognized as a watershed event for neoliberal consolidation in South Korea. While South Korean elites have embraced neoliberal doctrine since the 1980s, it was the post-crisis restructuring that realized its prescriptions in many spheres of life, whereas accompanying discourses of global competitiveness normalized neoliberal subjectivities (Abelmann et al. 2009; J. Cho 2009; J. Song 2011; Park 2007). The evolving articulations of *jeong* in the Orion Choco Pie advertisements are explained through this shift in normative subjectivities, whose superposition over the incumbent patterns of emotional display and selfhood this study foregrounds. I argue that the new imperative to clearly communicate what is in one's heart is symptomatic of the neoliberal emotional culture, which demands competent management of feelings. This article thus uncovers another dimension in the constitution of neoliberal hegemony in South Korea.

To build this argument, I combine approaches from socio-cultural anthropology and cultural studies to grasp *jeong* as a culturally inflected emotion and affective sociality whose embodied experiences and discursive articulations are implicated in larger social processes. I draw on Eva Illouz's

(2007) arguments about emotions constituting an important order in the social organization of capitalism and particularly on her theorizations of "emotional capitalism," a late-capitalist emotional culture whereby emotions are to be inspected, abstracted, expressed, and harnessed for effective management of workplace and personal relations. I treat representations of *jeong* in popular advertisements as both reflecting and participating in *jeong*'s adaptations. My analytic strategy is to examine those advertisements for changes and continuities in cultural scripts of expressing *jeong* while drawing out thus-implied normative subjectivities and affective socialities.

This approach resonates with critical scholarship on culturally specific emotions insofar as it rejects essentializing and culturalizing of those phenomena and instead historicizes them (e.g., Borovoy 2012; Ohnuma 2008; Chi Kim 2017). Yet whereas much of such scholarship focuses on discourses about those emotions as markers of local identity and belonging, this article considers a contemporary adaptation of *jeong* that is minimally concerned with its contributions to ethnonational identity politics. I shift attention to questioning how those emotions are made compatible with neoliberal subjecthood. As such, my analysis puts scholarship on culturally specific emotions in conversation with studies on emotions in late capitalism.

After explaining the theoretical basis of my approach in the next section, I sketch the meanings and uses of *jeong* that emerge from scholarly and popular literature. Moving on to the Orion Choco Pie advertisements, the main analytical sections examine their articulations of *jeong*, first in the 1989–1993 series and then in the 2012–2013 ones. While focusing on specific campaigns, I develop a larger argument about the intertwining of emotions and capitalism in contemporary South Korea.

Emotions and Emotional Capitalism

Emotional experiences and practices, including locally specific ones, are constituted by both their social articulations and felt bodily intensities, themselves culturally and socially conditioned. Bridging anthropological

arguments about social constructionism of emotions with the affect theory and feminist work on emotion, recent studies recognize ideas about and embodied experiences of emotional states as co-constituted and intertwined, neither conflated nor dichotomized (Ahmed 2004; Freeman 2020; Lutz 2017; Tran 2015).[1] When felt experiences are assigned certain labels, such as love, grief, disgust, or shame, the act of identification encourages their culturally acceptable expression, such as smiling to express embarrassment in South Korea (K. Kim 1985, 48–49), or head-hunting to cope with bereavement among Ilongots (Rosaldo 1989). Those expressions are performances of selfhoods and socialites as well as reenactments of social norms and emotional cultures.

In media-saturated contemporary societies, those cultural patterns are revealed, scripted, and negotiated in the domain of public culture. As Sara Ahmed (2004, 13) argues, public texts that name emotions do not *identify* existing orientations but *produce* them, so that emotions are "effects of the very naming of emotions [in texts]." When advertisements comment on culturally appropriate ways to display emotional experiences, they too participate in those negotiations.[2]

While shaped by the contingencies of media production and divergent goals of media producers, the public-cultural scripts for expressing particular feelings are not isolated artistic or commercial expressions but are

1. To further elaborate on this approach via Allen Tran (2015, 482), the analytical orientation is to "distinguish between the emotions as a set of discrete feeling states (e.g., happiness, anger, etc.) and affect as a felt bodily intensity" but avoid the Cartesian dichotomy that too sharp a distinction would postulate and instead recognize that emotions and affects overlap and slip, to a greater or lesser degree depending on "ethnopsychological context." To emphasize, this approach departs from the strands of affect theory that treat affect as strictly bodily, presubjective, and beyond social articulation.
2. For a discussion of advertising as data about its epoch, see Marchand (1985) and O'Barr (1994). Lefkowitz (2003, 73) makes the point about the significance of advertising, "In ads, as elsewhere, the bodily (or felt-as-if-bodily) dispositions we call emotions form 'structures of feeling' that are powerful because they are felt to be present, lived, and therefore vouched for." As I argue elsewhere, South Korean advertising is particularly sensitive to social shifts because of its occupational ideologies that impel advertising makers to capture the spirit of their times, however often the realization of this ideal is thwarted by practical difficulties (Fedorenko 2022a, 79–83).

intertwined with their sociopolitical contexts. On the one hand, they generally align with the worldviews that are conducive to the interests of their sponsors—in the case of commercial advertising, corporations. On the other hand, to be relevant and resonant, they must speak to their audiences' lived experiences in an engaging way (Hall 1998; Fedorenko 2014). Cultural productions resonate when they express "structures of feeling"—lived and felt meanings and values that are dynamically shaped by social structures, including dominant production relations, historical events, and physical surroundings (Williams 1977). Shifts in public culture are symptomatic of some "structures of feeling" becoming residual, and new ones emerging.[3] Following this reasoning, changes in media portrayals of emotion scripts suggest changes in the meanings and values of those experiences—and, by implication, changes in their societal context.

To consider feelings as socially structured is to critically question their politico-economic implications. "The making of capitalism went hand in hand with the making of an intensely specialized emotional culture," observes Eva Illouz (2007, 4) and details how social arrangements of modern capitalism have been buttressed by emotional hierarchies. She specifically tracks the emergence and consolidation of "emotional capitalism" whereby emotions are made economically productive and argues that, by the late 20th century, that emotional orientation spilled into everyday personal relations. Within this emotional culture, emotions are managed via the so-called "communication model"—treated as discrete things disconnected from their situational context ('ontologized') and subjected to the logic of exchange. Illouz identifies the origins of this configuration in the popularization of psychoanalysis, its embrace by the corporate world to ensure cooperation among large groups of workers, and its eventual morphing into self-help discourses and adaptation to feminist critique. As she describes it, a system of knowledge became a structure of feeling (Illouz 2007, 50). While Illouz's argument is developed primarily for the 20th-century USA, it offers insights for other capitalist locales, such as South Korea, whose social arrangements and emotional cultures have been

3. For a discussion of residual and emerging cultures, see Williams (1977, 121–123).

influenced by the similar demands of capitalist productivity, especially with the intensification of neoliberal globalization, as well as by American popular culture.

Indeed, in contemporary East and Southeast Asia, emotional landscapes have been shifting in response to the changing regime of capitalist production and accumulation, namely transition to post-Fordism, the increased role of affective labor in the economy, and intensified capitalist globalization (Rofel 2007; Tran 2015; J. Yang 2014). Since the end of the 20th century, those post-developmentalist and post-socialist societies were swept by the neoliberalization tide (Harvey 2005). Positing market competition as the arbiter for all areas of life, the neoliberal ideology incites its subjects to conceive of themselves as autonomous enterprises, take personal responsibility for their success and failures, repudiate dependencies on social safety networks, and relate to others as competitors (Dean 2009; McNay 2009; Rose 1999). Neoliberal subjecthood implies "radical abstraction of self from context, an entrepreneurial understanding of self as an ongoing development project, an imperative for personal growth and fulfillment, and an emphasis on affect management for self-regulation" (Adams et al. 2019, 190).

Those ideals of extreme individualization compete with the relational patterns of selfhood that had predominated in the region historically.[4] The relational self is grounded in the collectivities and hierarchies one belongs to and is fluidly delineated through relations with others. While not precluding individualistic action when situational logic demands it (Hollan 1992), those notions of self have informed social norms and values, such as, in South Korea, emphasis on mutuality rather than competition in capitalist workplace settings (Janelli 1993, 115–120). The reorientation toward neoliberalism-friendly individuated selfhood has nurtured new ideas and practices concerning feelings and their appropriate display and management. China scholars have extensively tracked the adoption of neoliberal techniques of governance that instill new practices of reflecting on the self and in particular encourage emotionality in private and public

4. On the relational notion of self in East Asia, see Jung (2013).

lives (Kipnis 2012; Rofel 2007; J. Yang 2014). Writing about Vietnam, Allen Tran (2015) argues that, before the neoliberal reforms of 1986, the dominant category for thinking about feelings was "sentiment" (*tình cảm*), which he defines through its orientation toward others ('the emotional connections between people rather than an individual's state of feeling' [481]), whereas the neoliberal transformation brought forth emotional experiences that are self-oriented and pointedly not about relationships.

Scholars of post-military-rule South Korea also detail the embrace of neoliberal subjectivities, albeit focusing on self-development undertaken to increase one's employability in a highly competitive job market, not on feelings per se. Dongjin Seo (2011) traces the emergence of the neoliberal ideologies of the self in South Korea from the 1980s, when the self-help industry flourished. Nancy Abelmann, So Jin Park, and Hyunhee Kim (2009) show how, in the early 2000s, college students internalized the neoliberal discourses and accepted the responsibility for their personal growth and career opportunities, complying with the narrative that obscured the structural inequalities of class and gender. Joo-Hyun Cho (2009) documents how physical appearance became an asset to be managed and linked neoliberalism to the oft-commented plastic surgery craze in South Korea. Rachael Miyung Joo (2012) tracks how discourses of globalization were harnessed to compel Koreans to cultivate individual competitiveness for the global market. Changing representations of *jeong* in the Orion Choco Pie commercials reveal the making of those individuated neoliberal subjectivities in the affective register.

Defining *Jeong*

A complex emotional experience, *jeong* describes an affective sociality that grows from prolonged and frequent contact in daily life. According to cultural psychologist Choi Sangjin, a prolific authority on the socioemotional grammar of Koreans, *jeong* denotes both a particular personality trait and an attitude toward someone, though the two meanings intertwine, because, in a chicken-and-egg situation, *jeong* personality

reinforces a *jeong* attitude which in turn nurtures a *jeong* personality (2011, 37–38). His co-authored analysis of interviews regarding vernacular meanings of *jeong* among South Korean university students reveals that it arises (*deunda*) when one senses the other's proactively caring (*akkyeojuneun)* heart (*maeum*) in their action or in the course of everyday activities (Kim and Choi 2002, 29).[5] Declaring Korean culture a "culture of *jeong,*" Choi (2011) places *jeong* within the indigenous notion of humanism, which he defines as a subordination of individual self-interest to the needs of others.

Celebrating *jeong* as the pillar of Korean ethnonational identity is the main vector of the academic and popular discourses, in whose spectrum Choi is at the subtler and more empirically grounded end (e.g., Bak 2012; Im 1995; W. Song 2012; Yi 1986; Kim-Yoon and Williams 2014). Those discourses on *jeong* anchor it in the essentialist notions of Korean culture, rely on anecdotal data, and revel in its uniqueness to Koreans and alleged incomprehensibility to outsiders. Many of those commentators tint it with nostalgia and question *jeong*'s fate amidst modern living, though usually those authors assert its innateness to Koreans, and hence timelessness, and muse on how South Korean *jeong* could become a solution to modern problems, in South Korea and beyond (e.g., Yi 1986; Bak 2012).[6] In those nativist discourses, the alleged irrationality of *jeong* renders it a stronghold against the perceived excessive rationalism and instrumentalism of Western-style modernity.

An important exception to that cultural-essentialist literature is an ethnographic portrayal of lived *jeong* in Joo Hee Kim's (2018) study of a rice-cultivating village from the late 1970s, where she observes *jeong* being among the most frequently uttered words, a surprising development for the urbanite anthropologist. Glossing *jeong* as "affection," Kim explains it as "a feeling of attachment…that develops slowly and unconsciously through

5. *Maeum,* "the faculty of all kinds of psychological activity and is used as a metaphor for a person" (Yoon 2008, 235), is often translated as mind-heart or heart-mind. Because those nuances are not essential to my analysis, I render it as "heart" to avoid a clunky expression.
6. For a summary and comparison of definitions of *jeong* among South Korean authors, see Kodayama (2018).

close and constant contact, and continuous reciprocal behaviors" (231), and her ethnography shows it to be the affective glue that mediated farmers' reciprocal exchanges of labor and goods during busy farming seasons and family events. While far from the typical accounts of *jeong*, Kim's re-study of the village from the early 2000s supports their usual lament of *jeong*'s gradual disappearance from South Korean everydayness as the anthropologist registers the decline in mentions of *jeong* in everyday conversations and of *jeong* behaviors among villagers. As Kim concludes, with the mechanization of labor, reorientation of the village economy toward outside connections, and commercialization of family events, the importance of maintaining reciprocal relationships within the village was lost and so was the importance of *jeong* relationships. In other words, she treats *jeong* as shaped by the material conditions of life, an approach that leaves room for considering *jeong* adaptations.

To combine those diverse insights into *jeong,* its ultimate cause is familiarity developed from time spent together—a familiarity that grows into intimacy and affectivity that can feed an array of emotions, both positive and negative. As one scholar puts it, "Korean *jeong* is so expansive that it can include any feelings that a person can feel toward another object [human or non-human]" (W. Song 2012, 55). Among his examples of *jeong*-driven behavior is frequenting a restaurant run by a foul-mouthed grandma and tolerating her abuse while paying for food, because "swearing is an expression of *jeong*" (54). The ambivalence of *jeong* is registered by a popular saying—"hateful *jeong*, beautiful *jeong*" (*miun jeong, goun jeong*). The hateful *jeong* could mean complex feelings arising from a long-term experience of inflicted suffering, as, for example, pity for a hated abusive partner or parent (S. Kim 2007); it could also describe an attachment manifesting in obsessive and destructive behavior (Kim-Yoon and Williams 2014). As another saying goes, "*Jeong* is scarier than love" (*sarang boda jeong-i deo museopda*): if love wanes with time, *jeong* only grows deeper.

Whether beautiful or hateful, *jeong* blurs the boundary between self and other. Within the sociality of *jeong*, the other is not quite other but a part of "us" (*uri*) entangled with the self, whereas the boundary is erected against outsiders (*nam*). Choi (2004) posits that "the most ideal state of *jeong*

is when, like in family relations, the other is thought about as oneself" (152).[7] This statement, though idealizing relations found in most families, insightfully points to how *jeong* de-individualizes feeling subjects. *Jeong*'s bothersome sides—excessive requests of those considered one of *us* or meddling in their business (W. Song 2012, 69)—are precisely an effect of this mélange of I and you into a we. Importantly, because of this blurring of self and other, *jeong* is understood as mutually felt and therefore does not need to be stated. The experience of *jeong* is often described as felt "warmth," a bodily intensity, which alerts one to their bonds with another. When perceived as *jeong*, a social connection becomes imbued with thick cultural meanings and experienced as shared we-ness conceptually, affectively, and practically.

Those *jeong* entanglements, however, may conflict with the values and socialities valorized in modern capitalist societies. In the workplace, *jeong* gets in the way of "fairness and rationality" and causes "conflicts between public (*gong*) and private (*sa*)," observes Bak Seona (2012, 82). In the personal domain, *jeong* behaviors are often described as *irrational* because they run in the face of the transparent cost-benefit calculus that is supposed to govern the behavior of properly modern subjects. Scholars of communication and psychology see *jeong* as a challenge to effective communication (Jang-Ee Kim 2014; Choe 2008). As Kim Jang-Ee (2014) argues, learning to express one's emotions—rather than leaving them unsaid and counting on *jeong* to avoid awkwardness—improves one's quality of life, by allowing a better understanding of oneself, greater empathy for others, and effective resolution of conflicts. Such arguments echo the discourses that Illouz identifies as constitutive of the "communication model" in the USA, although Kim points to particularly Korean obstacles to accumulating "emotional capital" for economic and personal success.

The adaptations of *jeong* come to the foreground in HyangJin Jung's (2014) comparative study of the affective ties between homeroom teachers and students in South Korean secondary schools between the early 1990s and 2010s. In the 1990s, the homeroom was a competition unit for various

7. On the notions of self and other in Korea, also see Elfving-Hwang (2010, 19).

school events, participation in which fostered a sense of belonging and unity within the homeroom—what Jung calls a naturally arising "*jeong* community." By the early 2010s, collective activities gave way to practices that favored individual competition—under the influence of educational reforms that could be interpreted as promoting neoliberal individualization. In the new environment, the *jeong* relationship itself became a goal to be proactively pursued, and Jung's ethnography suggests that the difficulty with naturally experiencing *jeong* amidst the social emphasis on individual achievement might be whetting an appetite for the kind of affective sociality it implies. Jung's study delivers important ethnographic evidence to *jeong's* mutability, yet its scope is limited to the educational setting. The following analysis offers a window on broader societal reinterpretations of *jeong*, as they were refracted in Orion Choco Pie advertisements from the late 1980s into the 2010s.

Chocopie *Jeong*, 1989–1993: "Even If You Say Nothing, I Know…"[8]

Jeong became the organizing concept of Orion Choco Pie advertisements in the late 1980s, when a series of commercials presented South Koreans with the brand's new slogan, "Share your heart" (*maeum-eul nanwoyo*). Representative of Orion's take on *jeong* is the inaugural ad, "Teacher and Pupil."[9] The commercial opens with a young bespectacled woman walking into an empty classroom, and the next shot shows a boy dashing out. The teacher opens her desk drawer to find a Choco Pie on top of a handwritten apology. A flashback shows her scolding the boy, then a closeup of his penitent face. Back to the present, the teacher smiles gently and presses the chocopie against her chest. Through the window she notices the boy running across the yard, who notices her and bows in greeting. The closeups

8. Choco Pie, in English, is a trade name of Orion Group. However, the Korean word for the snack, *chokopai*, was ruled to be a generic term, and I follow the Korean usage when describing the commercials.
9. All mentioned commercials are viewable at www.orionworld.com or https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcTchk6dCjczE229T2DeyF1CNpxeAuwMd.

of the protagonists connote their affection for each other as well as their knowledge of the other's feelings, despite those feelings being left unspoken. The character for *jeong* 情 at the end symbolizes this silent communion. The commercial's soundtrack, a sentimental ballad, reinforces the message, "Even if you say nothing, I know, just by your look, I know, just by grabbing your hand, [I know] what is in your heart" (*malhaji anado arayo nunbitman boado ara geunyang son jabeumyeon maeum sog-e itdaneungeol*). Both the commercial and particularly the song express the common knowledge of *jeong* as being beyond verbal declarations yet unmistakable in how it feels.

The following episodes of the "Share your heart" campaign similarly presented giving a chocopie as an act of caring that expresses and nurtures *jeong*. A girl sneaks a chocopie and a note for her uncle who is joining the army; a girl gives a chocopie to a building attendant before her family moves out; a girl slips a chocopie to her grandmother during a village visit; a boy gives a chocopie to a girl as an apology for teasing her. As "Teacher and Pupil," they rely on closeups to convey the depth of the protagonists' affections, and the tender mood is enhanced by the earworm ballad. Because of its moving portrayals of *jeong*, the campaign has been praised as a benchmark for "Korean-style" (*hangukjeogin*) advertising (Choi 2011, 273).

To draw out *jeong*'s cultural script, the commercials celebrate the affective clairvoyance that results from frequent everyday interactions among family and others in one's immediate circle. This is a circle of *us*, within which self is intertwined. The other's heart could be known, or rather felt, without them having to say anything. *Jeong* here is unspoken yet unmistakable, an affective intensity that melts the boundary between self and other, producing a densely entangled *we*. Grounding *jeong* in Korean lifeworld and Korean lifeworld in *jeong*, the commercials affirm the normativity of the relational self which is maintained by *jeong*-driven interactions.

The commercials won cultural significance not simply by their evocative portrayal of *jeong*, but with their resonant commentary on its fate in the rapidly industrialized and urbanized South Korea, a concern for many *jeong* observers, as noted in the previous section. The celebration of native

emotion in Orion Choco Pie advertisements participated in what Cho Hae-Joang (1998) terms a "boom in finding us"—a cultural revival in the 1980s, especially after the 1988 Seoul Olympics, when South Koreans were rediscovering Korean traditional culture and assigning it a positive value after many years of disparaging it under the influence of modernization ideology. It is noteworthy that chocopie givers in most of the commercials are young girls, whose gender connects them to the patriarchal nationalism that charges women with symbolizing the nation and preserving traditions. On the one hand, the commercials were commonly perceived as a reminder to Koreans to reconnect with their innate *jeong* amidst the hustle and bustle of modern living (e.g., KAA 1992, 134–135). On the other hand, they assuaged the anxieties about the disappearance of Koreanness by locating it in the affective register, ostensibly shielded from encroaching westernization.

While affirming the centrality of *jeong* to Korean everydayness, the commercials also subtly modify the cultural script for enacting *jeong*-knit affective socialities. Most immediately, the commercials sanitize *jeong* by obscuring the possibility of "hateful" *jeong*. All of them portray unequivocally "beautiful" *jeong,* which could adequately be described as affection with no further subtleties. Chocopie *jeong* is thus reduced to feel-good sentimentalism. Even in the episode about the teased girl, the context makes it clear that her teaser thus expressed his fondness for her—as he does again by giving her a chocopie.

That only beautiful *jeong* is acknowledged—affection for people who have been a positive influence in one's life—also rationalizes *jeong*. The erasure of *jeong* for people who have caused, or associate with, suffering or discomfort aligns *jeong* with utility-maximizing behaviors expected of rational modern subjects. If the Orion Choco Pie commercials are the yardstick, there is no prospect for *jeong* for the foul-mouthed grandma at a restaurant—only if, like the teaser in the commercial, she herself repents and offers chocopies to abused customers. Reduced to warm feelings for kindly people, chocopie *jeong* is hardly an *irrational* rejection of cost-benefit calculus and immediate self-interest, the implied counter-hegemonic values that rendered it a nativist counterweight to the perceived rationalist excesses of westernization.

Furthermore, the suggested feeling script—giving a chocopie to express and grow *jeong* connection—also rationalizes the outward expressions of *jeong*. Contra the essentialist *jeong* discussions, which foreground beautiful *jeong* that remains unexpressed (Y. Kim 1995, 31) or hateful *jeong* that is expressed in irrational destructive ways (Kim-Yoon and Williams 2014), the Choco Pie commercials channel the affective intensity of *jeong* in the gift of an affordable snack, a sensible consumerist ritual to convey one's affections to another. To push the rationalization angle even further, if gifting a chocopie is expressing *jeong*, the established equivalence between *jeong* and a chocopie signals the beginning of *jeong* itself becoming objectified. Namely, this containment of *jeong* within chocopies, discrete objects of known value, prepares the ground for *jeong*'s reconceptualization from an *intersubjective* affective sociality, which grows naturally and possibly even against the will of feeling subjects, to an *individual* attitude, which needs to be cultivated—in Illouz's vocabulary, for *jeong* acquiring an "emotional ontology" and aligning with the late-capitalist "communication model."

This adaption of *jeong* to "emotional capitalism," however, is selective and, as should be expected in advertising, attuned to the needs of industrial-era South Korean workplaces. On the one hand, it is noteworthy that though *jeong* is sanitized and rationalized, it is also relegated to children, the protagonists of all the commercials. The viewers can thus infer that *jeong* is unsuitable for the demands that modern public life puts on adults. This containment of *jeong* to unproductive members of society reflects the ideology of capitalist workplaces as spaces of rationality—an argument that perhaps still needed to be presented to the Korean workforce, many of whom hailed from the countryside where "irrational" *jeong* reciprocities were still the norm, as Joo Hee Kim's (2018) ethnography documented.

On the other hand, the commercials' celebration of *jeong* as the fundamental Korean value could be interpreted as another mobilization of tradition for the needs of workplace discipline, as, for example, was done with the Confucian value of harmony (Janelli 1993, 108–109). When the commercials celebrate expressions of *jeong* with gifted chocopies, a synchronous face-to-face verbal communication of parties' feelings is averted, and so is the danger of having to face the uncomfortable reality that

one's intentions were misunderstood or unwelcome. This is the social grace of *nunchi* (literally 'eye measure'), inferring the interlocutor's feelings and thoughts without the latter having to state them directly (Choi 2011, 163)—an emotional style conducive to minimizing open conflicts or challenges to authority. South Korea's rapid industrialization was achieved also at the cost of enforcing military-style workplace discipline and sacrificing workers' rights, giving rise to a militant labor movement (Janelli 1993; Moon 2005). In the context of workers' intensified struggles in the 1980s, silent inference of others' hearts, and especially reading *jeong* into otherwise disagreeable behavior suffered by subordinates from superiors, were feeling scripts conveniently aligned with the needs of Korean capital.

Jeong continued to anchor Orion Choco Pie promotions for decades. The soundtrack ballad chorus, "Even if you say nothing, I know," became instantly recognizable to any South Korean. In 2006, none other than Orion chairman Tam Chul-kon sang it himself in a Choco Pie commercial, earning much praise from the South Korean media. There were some attempts to change the Orion Choco Pie's concept, albeit without challenging the idea of *jeong* as sentimental affection that is understood without words. The series run in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis showed children helping each other in awkward situations—messing up lyrics while on stage and being excluded by playmates—while their feelings were visualized as round chocopies popping up above their heads ('Round *jeong* has risen'). The 2011 series suggested the idea of "*jeong* time," or a chocopie break, a Korean answer to the coffee break enjoyed overseas, according to the campaign planners.[10] Two campaigns, in 1996 and 2012, commented on chocopies' international success, interpreting it as Korean *jeong* moving the hearts of foreign consumers (Fedorenko 2022b). Again and again, Orion Choco Pie advertisements affirmed *jeong* as a heart-warming sentiment that every Korean unmistakably recognizes in the other without anything being said—until the 2012–2013 series radically revised the *jeong* script to adapt it

10. Jang Seungik, "[Aha! geu gwanggo] Orion 'jeong (情) taim' kaempein" ([Aha! That Ad] Orion's '*Jeong* Time' Campaign), *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 8, 2011, https://www.donga.com/news/Economy/article/all/20110107/33790960/1.

to the realities of postmillennial South Korea.

Chocopie *Jeong*, 2012–2013: "If You Say Nothing, I Don't Know"

A solder is about to bite an unwrapped chocopie as the song, "Even if you say nothing, I know…," the version sung by the Orion CEO in a 2006 commercial, plays. Between the military service reference and a building with a cross in the background, the commercial engages viewers' cultural knowledge: chocopies are the only sweet treat available in the South Korean army, and Protestant services often encourage attendance by handing out chocopies. The lyrical mood changes to a comical one when the soldier startles and, with a pained expression, cries out, "No! If I say nothing, he won't know!" Then the camera shows a smiling pastor chewing a chocopie to the same serene melody, and he confirms to the camera, "If you say nothing, I don't know." In the next scene, the pastor is handing out chocopies to lined-up soldiers. As the protagonist's turn comes, he tearfully blurts that he is a Buddhist and hugs the bewildered pastor. The voiceover announces, "Whatever is unsaid because of *jeong*, let's say it frankly!" (*jeong ttaemune motanmal, kkanoko malhaja*). In the final scene, the soldiers are eating the pastor's chocopies but when someone yells, "they are giving out two each at the Catholic church!" they run, presumably to the Catholics.

In addition to this 30-second "Soldier" episode, the new series launched in 2012 included four more television commercials—"Lovers," "Mother and Daughter," "High-school Couple" and "Married Couple"—which all dramatize the sudden realization that others won't know unless they are told and the protagonists' resolution to say it frankly. A boyfriend admits to wearing insoles to appear taller to his girlfriend; a mother explains to her daughter that they do not look alike because of the mother's plastic surgery; a high-school girl confesses to her boyfriend that she is a year older than him; and a husband, after sniffing a dish his wife made, suggests that they order food in. As many a commentator noted, the campaign was a reversal of Orion Choco Pie's then 23-year-old message that assured Koreans that others know what is in their hearts because of *jeong,* even if nothing is said.

This proved such a radical departure from the original concept that one article questioned, "Is it an ad by a competing company?"[11]

Seemingly, the role assigned to *jeong* in the 2012 Choco Pie commercials could not be more different from Orion's earlier articulations. If in 1989 *jeong* was enabling Koreans to clear misunderstandings without words, in 2012 *jeong* was the obstacle that led to misunderstandings. In all the 2012 episodes, because of *jeong*, one party is afraid to express their true circumstances and, as a result, misleads or puzzles their interlocutor. The pastor presumably believes that chocopie-receivers are Protestants, the wife is proud of her cooking, the daughter wonders if she is adopted, and a boyfriend assumes the role of the girl's senior with all the perks of being an *oppa*. The commercials, however, reject this false harmony buttressed by misunderstanding. The truth-teller takes certain risks—will a Protestant pastor give chocopies to a Buddhist? will a woman continue dating a short man, or a boy an older girl? The commercials assert not only that without telling the truth a real understanding is impossible, but also that the truth-teller will feel relieved to be done with pretenses. This is quite a contrast from the first *jeong* campaign, whose protagonists enjoy the feeling of being perfectly understood without risking the awkwardness of having to explicitly express their thoughts and feelings.

Some commentators interpreted the series as abandoning *jeong*, but, according to the advertising agency, the commercials were merely updating it in line with modern times. In an interview, the Cheil Worldwide advertising producer explained, "honest and direct communication… delivers even deeper *jeong* than before."[12] The riddle (*hwadu*) of the epoch, according to the agency, was that amidst the increased volume of communication, people were feeling lonely in their hearts: "Though it seems like people are talking more than they ever did in the past, actually they

11. Seo Yeonggil, "'Kkanoko malhaja' deulgo naon chokopai sae gwanggo" (New Choco Pie Advertisement 'Let's Say It Frankly'), *The PR,* November 10, 2012, http://www.the-pr.co.kr/.

12. Seo Yeonggil, "'Kkanoko malhaja' deulgo naon chokopai sae gwanggo" (New Choco Pie Advertisement 'Let's Say It Frankly'), *The PR,* November 10, 2012, http://www.the-pr.co.kr/.

yearn for an honest conversation, so in the end the opposite of increased communication fatigue is an actual decline in situations when *jeong* could be meaningfully shared. […] now is the time when if you don't say it honestly, they won't know."[13] In other words, the pace of life and communications volume demanded an adaptation of *jeong* practices—and Orion Choco Pie advertisements attempted such an intervention.[14]

Indeed, contemporary urban living, when even family members spend most of their time apart, limits the opportunities for *jeong* to grow spontaneously. The value of *jeong*, however, is only elevated by those obstacles. As Jung's (2014) ethnography of affectivity in South Korean secondary schools reveals, *jeong* remained an important relational value for Korean teachers in the early 2010s, but their orientations toward *jeong* changed, from registering it as a naturally occurring phenomenon to recognizing it as something that needs to be cultivated for its own sake. Both Jung's study and the commercials suggest that to experience *jeong* in the 21st century one must exert effort.

The new chocopie *jeong* then corresponds to an emergent emotionality culture whereby feelings are not simply felt but managed. By asserting the

13. "Jeong ttaemune motan mal, kkanoko malhaja! chokopai jeong kka mal kaempein" (Whatever Is Unsaid Because of *Jeong*, Let's Say it Frankly! Choco Pie Campaign), *Cheil Blog*, April 30, 2013, http://blog.cheil.com/9485.

14. Incidentally, communication crisis (*sotong-ui wigi*) was also the common diagnosis for many political controversies in the new millennium, from regular party wrangling to the mass mobilizations to protest US beef imports in 2008 (S. Yang 2011, v). In 2011, a symposium by the Korean Communication Association, "The Crisis of Communication in South Korean Society: Diagnosis and Prospects," explored how "the spread of the Internet increased the freedom of expression and diversity of information but also lead to a 'miscommunication era' (*bultong-ui sidae*) because the public (*daejung*) obtains information passively and [displays] a remarkable tendency to collectivism" (Bang Yeonju, 'Sotong-ui wigi? Daejung-ege chaegim-eul gahada' [Crisis of Communication? Putting Responsibility on the Public], *PD Jeoneol,* May 27, 2011, http://www.pdjournal.com). Questioning how Korean traditional culture contributed to communication problems in contemporary South Korea, one paper focused on "face-keeping" (*chemyeon*), a traditional sensibility that purportedly blocked communication in conflict situations (Kim and Yang 2011, 462). The new Choco Pie campaign was thus very much attuned to the concerns of the time.

new ideal of frank communication, the Orion Choco Pie advertisements effectively revise *jeong* relationality to match what Illouz diagnosed as the "communication model" of late capitalism. Namely, the new way of expressing oneself is premised on ontologization of emotions. The latter, according to Illouz, leads to abstraction and commodification of human relationships—an embrace of rational cost-benefit calculus to manage human relations in all spheres. *Jeong*, in other words, becomes another emotional experience incited, produced, and exchanged in the economic and personal marketplaces of late capitalism.

The neoliberal emotionality has been rightly critiqued for mediating intensified exploitation of immaterial labor (Dean 2009; Illouz 2007; Rose 1999) and for trapping its subjects in "cruel optimism," or attachment to the conditions that prevent them from actually improving their lives (Berlant 2006). Yet, as Illouz acknowledges, its effects are ambivalent insofar as the new propensity for introspection and communication of emotions opens up new opportunities for professional and personal fulfillment. Her ethnographic examples demonstrate that "emotional intelligence" benefits individuals dealing with life hardships, such as uncomfortable feelings or a relationship breakup (67–73). Developing a similar line of reasoning, Carla Freeman (2020) critiques the blanket equation of neoliberalism with alienation and argues that neoliberal mobilization of emotions also creates new possibilities for hope and optimistic desire, which, even when unfulfilled, are not necessarily "cruel," but could become "meaningful sources of joy and pleasure" (72) and as such positively transformative. In neoliberalized Barbados, Freeman shows, neoliberal attention to feeling has opened up room for seeking love and intimacy, a novel endeavor in the context where such experiences were devalued historically. Despite significant differences in historical and cultural contexts, in South Korea too, the neoliberal emotionality, particularly its impetus to examine and communicate feelings, could allow for enriching intersubjective experiences. Expressing oneself frankly could be a *jeong*-accumulating event because it requires exposing one's vulnerability and trusting the other with it, hence deepening the underlying affective sociality. When opportunities to grow *jeong* naturally are scarce, neoliberal techniques of explicit self-expression

become an unlikely asset in cultivating that desirable experience.

In South Korea, the new emotional labor of examining one's own interiority and communicating it to those around replaces the historically normalized emotional labor of observing *others* and inferring *their* emotional states. The latter model tends to hold the observer responsible for misunderstandings, hence the normalization of the "communication model" might also mean relieving South Koreans from the burden of intuiting others' feelings and intentions when nothing is said. In other words, the imperative to tell it frankly could be interpreted as abolishing not *jeong* but *nunchi*, the unwritten rules that prescribe "telepathing" the other's desires without them having to state them explicitly. While some commentators romanticize *nunchi* as "the Korean secret to happiness and success,"[15] this social practice is implicated in abusing power inequalities, for *nunchi* is disproportionately expected of subordinates, particularly women,[16] while allowing the powerful to leave things unsaid, assuming a silent consent from the powerless—and blaming the latter's lack of *nunchi* in case of misunderstandings. The commercials thus devalue the old ideal of wordless communication and tolerance for its ambiguities—which, in some contexts, doubtlessly could be liberating.

Undermining *nunchi* arguably brings South Korean communication culture in alignment with the current needs of South Korean capital as well. If the industrial-era 1980s workplaces demanded obedience and reverent attention to superiors' orders, the shift toward knowledge work in the new millennium calls for creativity and initiative from employees across ranks. Yet, within South Korean corporate culture, it has been a struggle to have subordinates "frankly say it as it is" to their superiors, despite much lip service being paid to participatory managerial techniques and various attempts to implement them (Rakova and Fedorenko 2021). In this light, the Orion Choco Pie campaign could be interpreted as a corporate discourse

15. Euny Hong, "The Korean Secret to Happiness and Success," *New York Times*, November 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/opinion/sunday/nunchi.html.
16. Yi Hana, "'Twimyeon an doenda'…nunchi saengjonsul gwonhaneun sahoe" ('Don't Stand Out' … A Society That Recommends *Nunchi* as a Survival Technique), *Yeoseong sinmun*, December 28, 2016, http://www.womennews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=110708.

that optimizes normative subjectivities for the new regime of value extraction.

What is rendered residual in the Orion Choco Pie commercials is not *jeong* but the relational self with its porous boundaries. The scene of realization that the other cannot know what is not said ('No! If I say nothing, he won't know!') registers a departure from the self of the classic *jeong* scenarios, the self that knows what is on the other's mind because they are intertwined as a *we*. That unsaid things are unknown and unfelt in this new script implies that both selves are individualized, discrete, and abstracted from their relational contexts. The updated *jeong* is no longer an affective sociality of entangled *us* but of individuated I's. It is a discrete *individual* emotion that needs to be explained for the other who cannot grasp the interlocutor's interiority without it being explicitly verbalized for them. Whether by needing to be expressed with frank communication as in the Orion Choco Pie commercials or by being actively pursued as a relationship quality by school teachers, *jeong* no longer requires relational selves and its new practices point to far-reaching shifts in normative socialities and subjectivities among South Koreans.

Conclusion

The presentations of *jeong* in the Orion Choco Pie advertising have drastically changed between the late 1980s and the early 2010s. In the late 1980s, expressions of *jeong* needed no words and its parties simply knew each others' true feelings and intentions because of the porosity of their selfhoods that morphed I's into we's. In contrast, in the early 2010s, *jeong* had to be explicitly stated, for the parties it connected were individualized selves whose interiorities would stay mutually opaque unless explicitly verbalized. Admittedly, an advertising campaign, however successful, does not represent social reality as it actually is and a different kind of research is needed to establish shifts in the everyday meanings and practices of *jeong* for South Koreans. Nevertheless, the advertising depictions offer a snapshot of the ongoing negotiations of normative feeling scripts and correspondent

subjecthoods, whereas their commercial advertising medium renders transparent material interests at stake in such negotiations. This account of changing social scripts for a prized local emotion complements other studies of South Korea's neoliberalization and foregrounds its local inflections.

The *jeong* portrayals in the Orion Choco Pie commercials suggest that the many commentators who lament the disappearance of *jeong* in modern South Korean life are both right and wrong. They are wrong insofar as *jeong* remains a social fact of South Korean everydayness and offers a vernacular conceptual tool for grasping relationality with others. *Jeong* remains a meaningful category to express complex attachments that develop in the course of ongoing quotidian interactions. But the alarmists are also right insofar as, in the 21st century, *jeong* of the 21st century is being re-scripted according to the playbook of the communication model of emotional capitalism and in the process is losing some of its unsayable complexities to become compatible with increasingly individualized subjectivities produced by neoliberal discourses and practices that have saturated South Korea. Nevertheless, this very adaptability of *jeong* testifies to its cultural dynamism and ongoing relevance in South Korean society.

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