Negotiating National and Transnational Identities through Consumption Choices: Hamburgers, Espresso, and Mobile Technologies among Koreans

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Notions of nationalism, globalization, and transnationalism interplaying with one another in the consumption pattern of Koreans in several kinds of commodities are examined in this paper: hamburgers, rice, espresso coffee, and mobile technological goods. These commodities were introduced to Korean society at different times and in different contexts. By examining how these are received (or rejected) by different groups of Koreans at different junctures in their nation's history, and how the Korean consumers have characterized the commodities and rationalized and negotiated their consumption choices, we can understand how Koreans' identities have transformed through the nation's recent history in the globalizing world. Both globalism and transnationalism are highly relevant concepts in understanding the above issues as some multinational companies and Korean consumers have negotiated and contested the meanings of rational consumer choices and nationalistic sentiments towards particular commodities or brands. It is argued that global identity and global connectedness have become important components of class-based identities among today's Koreans. This study also shows that the nationalistic attitude of Koreans in consumption, which has been recognized and emphasized in many existing literature, is in fact more complex and flexible. The role of nationalism in consumption in Korean society also seems to have changed significantly in recent years as Koreans' self-identity in the globalizing world has transformed.

Keywords: Consumption pattern, nationalistic attitude, rational consumer choices, "Shintoburi," and transnationality.

Introduction

Consumption implies and carries culture-specific meanings. As anthropologist Appadurai (1988: 3-63; 1990: 1-24; and 1996: 66-85) proposed, when objects are produced, exchanged among people, and finally consumed, they acquire and

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transform meanings. These meanings are the outcomes of negotiation processes among those who participate in this process. Naturally, these meanings reflect the cultural attitudes, belief systems, and interests of these people. These meanings, as Douglas and Isherwood (1996) argued, are flexible through time. For these reasons, consumption, as an important concluding stage of this process, has become one of the major windows through which we understand social stratification and change (Fine 1995: 127-165; Miller 1995a: 1-57).

In understanding the identity-construction process of consumption in Korea, the notions of "globalism" and "transnationalism" are quite important. Among many who have tried to discern perhaps the most significant phenomenon in today's world, Watson (1997: 1-38) defines globalism as "an essentially impossible condition that is said to prevail when people the world over share a homogeneous, mutually intelligible culture." Watson also defines a related yet distinct notion of transnationalism as "a condition by which people, commodities, and ideas literally cross-transgress-national boundaries and are not identified with a single place of origin." This paper examines the notions of nationality, globality, and transnationality as they interplay in Koreans' consumption of several kinds of commodities: hamburgers, rice, espresso coffee, and mobile technological goods. These commodities were introduced to Korean society at different times and in different contexts. By examining how these are received (or rejected) by different groups of Koreans at different junctures in their nation's history, and how Korean consumers have characterized the commodities and rationalized and negotiated their consumption choices, we can understand how Koreans' identities have transformed through the nation's recent history in the globalizing world. Both globalism and transnationalism are highly relevant concepts in understanding the above issues as certain multinational brands and Koreans consumers have negotiated and contested the meanings of rational consumer choices and nationalistic sentiments towards particular commodities or brands. By examining several cases of commodity consumption, it will be argued that global identity and global connectedness have become important components of class-based identities among today's Koreans.

Hamburgers, Rice, and Nationalism[1]

1. For a more comprehensive description of the author's research on McDonald's in Korea, see Bak (1997: 136-160).

McDonald's restaurants have been one of the most frequently researched locations to explore the notions of standardized restaurant management, fast food consumption, American consumer culture, and globalization. McDonald's hamburgers have often been mentioned as goods saturated with symbolic meanings. In Korea, McDonald's was well known even before the restaurant chain opened its first restaurant in Korea in 1988. This chapter is based on field research in Seoul during the summer of 1994, a time when many Koreans were debating issues related with food consumption and nationalism. The research was not only about Korean consumption (or, refusal of consumption) of hamburgers, but a more comprehensive examination of Korean discourse on food, body, and national identity.

At the time of research, in the eyes of many Koreans, hamburgers, especially McDonald's hamburgers, stood in symbolic opposition to locally produced Korean rice. As the Korean economy had steadily grown to become one of the major players in international trade, the outside pressure to open the Korean market for foreign farm products was high. Given Korea's limited availability of farmland and the country's competitiveness in industrial manufacturing, it might have made economic sense to import agricultural products while exporting high-tech industrial products for greater profits. But reasons such as national food security and nationalistic sentiments have been raised by those who oppose importing staple foods such as rice. In this heated public debate over food, body, and identity, the Buddhist phrase of "Shintoburi" was often used as a slogan by agricultural protectionists. The phrase literally means "body, earth, not, two," and its contextual meaning is that "human body and the earth (physical environment) are so closely linked that a person should only eat what is produced in his/her native land." Amongst public discourse, McDonald's, the archetype of foreign food and symbol of Americana, was in a difficult position in fighting against the nationalistic and pseudo-scientific attacks. In 1992, when trade negotiations on agricultural products were under way, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, and the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) jointly produced a poster to promote the consumption of local agricultural produce. The slogan read "Healthy eating = eating our rice," and the poster depicted a large, healthy grain of rice trampling a greasy hamburger. American trade representatives complained that the poster was insulting and accused the Korean government of blocking free trade (*Chonsun Ilbo*, Dec. 5, 1992). As this incident indicates, rice and hamburgers are clearly understood symbols representing indigenous Korean food and imported American food respectively.

The Korean people's perception of the McDonald's restaurants as representing foreignness and Americanness had made the company reluctant to enter the Korean market until 1986, when a joint venture was established between McDonald's International in the United States and its Korean partner. The time of introduction was relatively late compared to neighboring countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. "Anti-Americanism among Koreans" was cited as one of the reasons why the company decided not to enter Korean market in the 1970s after market research. Reflecting such public sentiment towards what is perceived as a prototypical American brand, local media coverage of the restaurant chain has been mostly negative. When the McDonald's restaurants (and to a less degree other American-based fast food chain restaurants such as Burger King or KFC) are mentioned in the newspapers and magazines, the following points were frequently mentioned; lower nutritional value of the food, profits being siphoned out from Korea by the American firm, business practices that are perceived to be inappropriate or unfair in the Korean market, their alleged destruction of indigenous Korean food culture by luring the younger generation away from traditional Korean meals.

In this environment, McDonald's had to simultaneously tackle two somewhat contradictory tasks; they had to represent themselves as being both "local (Korean)" and "authentically American" at the same time to win more customers while defending themselves against their critics. To emphasize the localness of McDonald's restaurants, they emphasized that: Korean investors own fifty percent of the McDonald's Korea joint venture, the employees are entirely Korean, they use Korean suppliers for key ingredients such as hamburger buns, milk, and ketchup whenever possible. Following the tradition of the American McDonald's, Korean McDonald's also participated in local charity efforts. These efforts have only garnered limited success. Despite some positive reaction by Koreans for its standardized and rational management style, most Koreans did not agree that McDonald's was local. This was clearly a dilemma for the company as well, since it had to emphasize that they were also authentically American to win the customers looking for the "real" thing. The latter was relatively easy to achieve, since the name McDonald's was well-known among Koreans as symbolizing the ultimate American, mass-produced, restaurant chain. This helped McDonald's to firmly establish itself as a purveyor of genuine American food, and thereby win the authenticity battle against other hamburger chains. The dilemma between local friendliness and American authenticity still exists for this restaurant chain.

During its operation in Korea for over fifteen years, McDonald's has not been able to achieve the degree of success they had expected. This has been the case both in terms of the numbers of restaurants opened, and also in the amount of sales. The restaurant chain had planned to open fifty-eight restaurants by the end of 1990, but the total number reached only twenty-six even in 1994. At the end of 2003, the total number of their restaurants has increased to 341. As for the initial difficulties the restaurant chain experienced in the Korean market, there were several other factors that worked against the more ready Korean acceptance of McDonald's hamburgers in addition to the nationalistic sentiments of the Korean consumers. For most Koreans, hamburgers are not considered proper meals, but rather, rice takes the central position. This is slowly changing, especially among the younger generation, as reflected in the ever-decreasing per capita rice consumption. But many Koreans, including younger Koreans, like to use the McDonald's restaurant space for something other than the company's intended purpose. Many young Koreans use the space as clean, air-conditioned cafes, and tend to linger for a long time, countering the chain's intended use of the restaurant space. More recently, the so-called "well-being" trend in Korean society in which eating fast food has no place has also deepened the trouble fast food restaurants in Korea are encountering. In 2003, fast food restaurants in Korea experienced a decrease in the total number of operations for the first time (*Financial News*, January 5, 2004).[2] They are making efforts to adapt to the new environment by introducing healthier menus, but whether these changes will bring the intended consumer reaction remains to be seen.

Espresso, Anti-Americanism, and Global Modernity

If McDonald's restaurants represent typical American fast food culture in which standardization and mass production are key characteristics, the introduction of Starbucks Coffee Shops heralded a new kind of American consumer culture in Korea, namely a high-end food and drink brand that sells not only the food and drink but also promotes a luxurious atmosphere to the visitors of the shops. This segment on espresso cafés in Korea is based on field research conducted from

2. For instance, the sales volume of Korean McDonald's in 2003 is estimated to be 15% less than that of the previous year.

2003 to 2004.[3] Anthropological fieldwork was conducted at Starbucks cafés in Seoul, and in-depth interviews were conducted with Starbucks employees and various consumer groups. To understand the younger generation's attitude on consumption, nationalism, and globalism, four- to five- page essays were also collected from about 147 college students during the research period at two different times.

Coffee is not a staple food (as hamburger or rice is as discussed in the previous section), yet is fully saturated with meanings significant for consumers. People have been imagining, talking with others, negotiating or critiquing on why they drink coffee, how they should drink it, or why they should refuse to drink it. These stories provide us with valuable information on the consumers themselves, including who they are in constructing various relationships with coffee and where they stand in the discourse on consumption, nationalism, globalism, and transnationalism.

According to historical records, coffee was first introduced in Korea in 1896 to the royal family and thereafter enjoyed as an exotic drink by a limited number of Koreans, many of whom were wealthy and had contacts with the outside world. But it was during and after the Korean War (1950-1953) when a larger number of Koreans came into contact with the new drink due to the wide availability of instant coffee powder as part of the US military food ration. The taste of the exotic brew received at best a mixed reaction from Korean consumers, but many regarded drinking coffee as a part of the affluent western (American) lifestyle. Currently, the Korean coffee market is quite large (the thirteenth largest in the world) and unique due to the high popularity of instant coffee. The availability of good quality instant coffee at a reasonable price has made coffee very popular among ordinary Koreans. Some Koreans started to drink freshly brewed coffee in the 1980s, but the quality of coffee beans available in Korea at the time was generally poor. With some global brand espresso cafés starting their business in Korea in the late 1990s, the Korean coffee market experienced a new era of drinking coffee with a more discriminating taste. Still, instant coffee occupies more than 90 percent of the Korean coffee market, but espresso coffee is rapidly expanding its share.

After more than 100 years since its introduction in Korea, coffee is a foreign but familiar drink with a firm place in the nation's food system. But coffee sold

3. Fieldwork for this part was initially funded by The Academy of Korean Studies. A separate paper based on the research will be included in a forthcoming edited volume.

at well-known American brand cafés (such as Starbucks, which is a place of focus here) has a particular and complicated meaning significant to many Korean consumers. Nationalistic sentiments are sometimes expressed towards the foreign brands, and in this context the national origin of the brand is highly relevant. A case in point is the public discourse surrounding the opening of Insadong Starbucks in 2001. Both Koreans and foreign visitors alike consider Insadong (Bak 1998)[4] in Seoul as a central place of Korean traditional culture. Due to its location central to modern Seoul, the traditional and serene atmosphere of Insadong is regarded as being even more special and inviting. When the Starbucks chain was known to be preparing to open a shop in Insadong, it encountered vehement resistance from many Insadong insiders and outsiders alike. Many of the insiders were in fact shop owners in Insadong whose business might be negatively affected by a Starbucks café in the area. But business concerns by potential competitors were not the only reason behind the opposition. At the height of the resistance, a huge placard with slogans opposing a Starbucks café in the area hung at a strategic juncture across the Insadong Alley. They accused Starbucks of destroying Insadong's unique characteristic as a sanctuary of traditional Korean culture. They argued that the existence of a multi-national brand café in such a traditional place would ruin the identity of the area as a place of cultural heritage.

In fact, the store space where Starbucks was preparing to have its café had previously been occupied by another American based coffee shop chain named "The City of Espresso," which closed its Insadong store due to unsatisfactory business. So, there was nothing new about having an American-owned multinational coffee shop chain in Insadong. But Starbucks had the burden of being a well-known global company that tended to contrast with the concept of an area known for its indigenous Korean businesses. Starbucks assured the local shop owners that its existence would not harm the business of existing stores and cafés, and that it may even help draw more foreign visitors to the Insadong area. They also went so far as decorating the outside and inside of the café in what is supposed to be the Korean traditional style. The most prominent feature is perhaps the fact that the signboard of the store is written in Korean, making the Insadong store the only Starbucks in the world with Korean name written on its signboard. The inside of the three-story building is also decorated with items

4. For an examination of the historical and cultural significance of Insadong and the political dimension of the process of constructing place identity, see Bak (1998).

that people recognize as components of Korean traditional culture: Windows are decorated with wooden latticework; and Hahoe masks and bamboo fans are hung on the wall. Even the menu includes some Korean drinks and desserts: *Shikhye* (a sweet malt rice drink), *sujeonggwa* (a cold cinnamon-flavored drink with dried persimmon), sweet red bean soup, and various kinds of rice cake. Very few people order these Korean-style drinks and desserts, and the management confessed that they had to throw away leftovers regularly due to limited demand. Many of the people interviewed in my research stated that if they wanted to have those items, they would simply go to a place that specializes in Korean food and drink. Some people were critical about the chain's effort to Koreanize its Insadong store, alleging that the company is making a cosmetic disguise in paying tribute to the traditional culture of Insadong solely for the sake of business. Partly due to these efforts, and also due to the general popularity of Starbucks brand coffee and its central location, the Insadong Starbucks has been successful and in fact has not become one of the prominent landmarks. The marketing manager said that the success of the Insadong store is a testimony of how successful Starbucks is in Korea. As the only Starbucks store with a Korean signboard, it now appears in the tourists' map printed in foreign countries, and it is a common sight to see foreign tourists taking photos in front of the store. The public discourse surrounding Insadong Starbucks has been full of important issues in contemporary Korea in the era of globalization: Traditional culture, cultural identity, the proper image of Insadong, the expansion of global brands, and English and Korean languages, among others. The commercial success of Insadong Starbucks is an important marker of where culinary culture and cultural identity are located in the Korea of today.

In today's Korea, Starbucks bears the burden of being American but definitely has the lure of being global, as was clear in the College students' essays. As the case of Insadong Starbucks shows, in the Korean market, Starbucks cannot easily escape from the burden of being an American-based global brand. When there was a boycott of American products in Korea as part of an anti-American (anti-base) movement following the death of two schoolgirls in an encounter with an American military vehicle in late 2002, Starbucks, together with the more obvious target, McDonald's, became a place to avoid. This did not actually result in a sharp decrease in sales for Starbucks, but the marketing manager of the company told me that doing business in Korea where the company may become a target of an anti-American movement at a moment's notice is like "walking on thin ice." The strategies of the company regarding this issue are

quite straightforward: Actively participating in community affairs, and consciously representing itself as a globally responsible firm that conducts environment-friendly business and engages in fair trade with third-world coffee growers. The company also hopes that it serves as a model for the franchise business in the Korean business world by rationalizing their business practice. In sum, the management of the company tries to avoid the potential threat of anti-Americanism in Korea by emphasizing the "global" while minimizing its "American" identity. But still it is not an easy task, given that most Koreans recognize Starbucks as an American brand, and furthermore, "global" is often equated with "American," especially according to those who are concerned about the unfairness accompanying the globalization process.

As of June 2004, Starbucks has opened ninety-one cafés in Korea and continues to grow rapidly by doing brisk business, especially among the younger generations in their 20s and 30s, and those in the middle and upper-middle class in all age groups. Day by day, more Koreans are learning to enjoy espresso coffee and other coffee drinks with an espresso base. Some even order take-outs. These are all new to most Koreans and many attribute such new phenomena to the pioneering role of the Starbucks Company. Amidst Korean consumption of Starbucks coffee, what we can observe is the (selective) acceptance of the middle and upper-middle class culture from the United States. Koreans consume what they perceive as the exotic filtered through the American consumer's taste. This also testifies to the changing self-identity of Koreans: In the past, anything American might have been desired as an object of consumption, but nowadays the desire is more pointed and class-based. Koreans want to consume what Americans from a similar class background consume. Koreans' consumption of Starbucks coffee is not just a consumption of high-quality coffee imported from the United States but rather may reflect the Korean desire to acquire a "global modernity," which has been mainly constructed by the United States and is surprisingly familiar to many Koreans due to the particular role that the United States has played vis-á-vis Korea and in the global arena. But Korean consumers are not just passive partakers of the ready-made global modernity. Sometimes they identify with the perceived global modernity, sometimes they find an appropriate place in it, but sometimes they also participate in the very process of constructing global modernity. The notion of global modernity is not homogeneous or unchanging. It is rather fluid and differently perceived and practiced by different people at different times in different places.

It seems that Starbucks is more successful than McDonald's in representing

itself as being "global" rather than being "American" in Korean society. Perhaps the most obvious interpretation of this would be that McDonald's is paying for its own reputation as the arch-symbol of Americana. When Starbucks was introduced in 1999, Koreans were much more familiar with consuming global brand products than in 1988 when the first McDonald's restaurant opened. Starbucks' conscious effort to represent itself as global also helped. In 2003 Starbucks equipped several cafés with wireless Internet access spaces. An obvious reason for this would be to help the customers enjoy their stay in their cafés even more. This has also aided in creating an atmosphere where boundaries (geographical, national, etc.) are irrelevant. By extension, it implies being "global." Through Starbucks the customers had instant access to the global, and this is exactly how Starbucks wants to portray itself. The relationship between this global connectivity and one's identity is the topic to be explored in the following segment.

Global/Transnational Networks and Mobility[5]

Consuming high-tech products tells many stories about the user and the society s/he belongs to due to the knowledge and particular characteristics of lifestyle assumed to be associated with such products. When high-tech products are associated with notions of "modernity" (Rofel 1999)[6] and "knowledge," owning and using them may reflect the desires and aspirations of the users. Incorporating high-tech products in our lives, especially the means of communication as will be the case here, has brought in profound changes in our social relationships as well. Related with these changes are our notions of locality, identity, and the boundaries between them. As individuals and their social relationships are less constrained by time and distance, it is necessary to reconfigure the nature of relationships among people, locality, and identity.

I examine the use of mobile phones in Korea in this part, focusing upon the notions of identity, local consumption, global businesses, and their social implications. As the economy of Korean society has grown at an unprecedented speed, the newly emerging groups of affluent people have constantly discovered novel ways to satisfy their consumer needs and display their wealth (Pinches

5. For a more comprehensive analysis of this, see Bak (2002).
6. There is no question that the notion of modernity is complex and variegated as Rofel (1999) illustrated.

1999: 1-55; Young 1999: 56-85; and Rosenberger 1992: 106-125). These groups of privileged people are good sources of information on the new frontiers of the consuming societies in Korea. Anthropological fieldwork, including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and literature and media research was conducted for about one year in 1999. In the original research project the Korean case was compared with those in Shanghai and Singapore, but in this paper I will be mainly discussing the Korean case, with some exceptions where a comparative perspective is useful.

In Seoul, the percentage of mobile phone users among the population is one the highest in the world (the fifth as of March 2001, with more than 70 percent of the total population owning mobile phones in March 2002). Most adults have them and more and more junior high school students have started to use them. One of the important characteristics of the Korean market is that there are several large Korean firms manufacturing mobile phones, and that they enjoy global recognition. Among them, one quite dominates the market, occupying more than 50 percent of the total sales in the mobile phone market. Many Koreans expressed loyalty and affection for that brand, and said that they were proud of the firm's technological achievements. Nationalistic (supporting a local company) as well as practical (convenient service) considerations were cited as some of the reasons for buying the firm's products. Some people even confessed that they were pressured into using domestic brand phones in their workplaces to support the national economy. Companies producing local brand phones were well aware of this, and this was reflected in the TV commercials of these phones: They claimed that local brand phones are best suited for the particular conditions of Korean terrain.

In contrast to the Korean case, the Singaporeans were not very brand conscious. This seems to be due to two reasons. First, lacking domestic brands, they were not very interested in the phone manufacturer's country of origin. When asked about their knowledge on a phone manufacturer's country of origin, many of them provided wrong answers. This was quite different from the users in Seoul, who displayed a nationalistic and protective attachment to the domestic brand that had the largest share in the mobile phone market in Korea. More Korean consumers provided correct answers to questions on the country of origin of various phones. The second reason why Singaporeans did not show much interest in the brand names of phones is because they were not prestige symbols as they were in Shanghai as also examined in the research project (Huat and Ean 1999: 137-158).[7] Singaporeans are willing to purchase phones regardless of

country of origin as long as their practical needs are satisfied.[8]

In Shanghai, the phone's country of origin was taken seriously. American firms were trusted, as the US is known for its economic prosperity and technological advancement. Some people assumed that phones made in Germany should be good because the Germans have good reputation in science and technology. Japanese products were supposed to be of high quality, but some people said that they would avoid Japanese goods nevertheless, citing China's experience of Japanese invasion as the reason. They said they would rather purchase Korean brands than buying Japanese. Korean brand was expanding its market share in Shanghai at the time of research, but they were still regarded as products with lower quality compared to those produced in the US, Europe, or Japan. One of the Northern European brand names, Nokia, sounds Japanese, and some Shanghainese said that they would avoid this brand because purchasing them would make the Japanese even richer.

Mobile phones are unique among high-tech products due to their close association with their owners. The phones are carried around by their owners, often being attached to the body of the owners. Many users, especially younger people, go so far as to place their phones next to their pillows when they go to sleep, since it is very common for them to exchange phone calls late at night. Some youngsters said that they sometimes fell asleep while talking with their friends (often of the opposite sex) on the phone. It is probably one of the most personal kinds of industrial product that may be comparable to cars in the US, but the mobile phones are even more personal. Having such a personal technological commodity is quite new in all the three societies dealt with in the above-mentioned research. Most consumer goods (TV's, refrigerators, cars, and even "personal" computers) are shared by family members. When purchasing these items the needs and preferences of the family members are negotiated. Mobile phones, however, are used individually, and this is why manufacturers produce numerous models with various characteristics. The consumers in this research readily distinguished phones for men from those for women. They could also tell which phones were suitable for younger people and which were good for older consumers. This is all because of the fact that the phones are carried and used by individual owners. Many women said that they considered phones an

7. See Huat and Ean (1999: 137-158) for an in-depth discussion on the affluent middle class in Singapore and their consumption behavior.
8. Personal interviews in Singapore, July 1999.

important part of the whole coordination of personal style together with their clothing and other accessories. For these reasons, consumption of mobile phones is highly relevant in discussions on identity.

In Korean public discourse on mobile phones, "upgrading" their phones and thus being able to utilize the advanced features has implications that surpass the technological domain. They tell how "advanced" the users themselves are. In Seoul, one of the markers of whether a user belongs to the "informed" and "up-to-date" generation is whether s/he regularly exchanges text messages using mobile phones. Typing messages with a surprisingly rapid speed is the typical behavior of the "N" generation, who are competent in using new technologies. Using other functions of the phones such as the scheduling function or checking e-mail messages are not as popular, but certainly helps to make the user look competent. Again, being able to use such functions is associated with the particular knowledge necessary to do so. Having information and knowledge are valued in all three societies examined in the research. In Seoul, quite a few senior citizens enroll in computer classes, and some of them become quite competent. Those who belong to the most advanced group proudly build glossy homepages. Many of them confessed that they make an extra effort "not to fall behind" the current trend. This attitude is not limited to the older generation. Even for the younger people, "super-connectivity" achieved through utilizing the latest information technology is one of the signs of their ability. It means they are needed at all times and may even be needed at several places simultaneously. In addition to having various means through which people can reach them at any time, they also interconnect these various means so that they can transfer calls to each other. As "being busy" is a sign of success, "super-connectivity" is one of its necessary accompaniments. "Super-connectivity," by extension, is a feature of globality, and this is often regarded as a desirable component of one's identity. By crossing borders through utilizing connected networks, the users show globality and transnationality.

Conclusion

One thing that was clear from the results of the mobile phone research mentioned above was that the advancements in communication technology have redefined the notions of locality, globality, mobility, and connectivity, and how these notions interplay with one another in the process of constructing individu-

als' identities. It is more than obvious that new means of communication (such as the Internet and mobile phones) have enabled many of us to connect with people with almost no limitations on distance or time. This affects our social relationships profoundly and makes existing notions of social networks too rigid to incorporate the fluid and complex nature of connectivity among people. Redefining the connectivity among people is also related to the identities of people concerned. For instance, "locality" has long been one of the important components in constructing individuals' identities (Watts 1996: 59-97; Liechty 1996: 98-130). Throughout history, units of society and culture have often been associated with particular localities, and the boundaries between these localities have overlapped (Bak 1998).[9] New patterns of mobility (of people and of things) and novel means of linking individuals to individuals (again, most prominently the Internet and mobile phones) make it necessary to reconfigure our identities.

According to the essays written by 147 college students, globality seems to have a firm place in constructing the identity of the younger generation. They said that in many contexts they do not feel that they are confined to their Korean identity. Global identity was often mentioned as something they want to pursue, and they believed that a significant part of their identity was indeed global. They often mentioned the importance of the English language in their career.[10] Many of them also confessed that they felt very comfortable with global culture with an American bias. But at the same time, they were concerned about the American dominance in the process of globalization. Some students mentioned that they are shocked when they realize that what they perceived as global is in fact American. But many decided that to be globally competent, they needed to be knowledgeable in American culture and English. Their familiarity was most pronounced in consumption culture. A few students mentioned that when they use messenger services on the Internet with friends in foreign countries, participate in fan-club activities for an international star, or when they play on-line games such as Starcraft, they feel they are part of the global community. They said they even temporarily forget that there is such a thing as a national boundary. But they also admitted that there are unique characteristics for Koreans who play on-line games. One of them is that Koreans like to play games in groups in popular PC cafés and not in the privacy of their own homes as many Westerners do. They figured that this may be compared to the Koreans' unique way of eat-

9. For a discussion on the relationship among place, culture, and identity, see Bak (1998).
10. See also Drohan and Freeman (1997).

ing french fries at McDonald's restaurants; even when eating hamburgers individually, almost without exception Koreans pour the fries on a single tray and share them.[11] At the same time, however, the common founding among the three cases of consumption discussed above was that the initial nationalistic response of Korean consumers did not necessarily lead to poor business. Also, the degree of nationalistic resistance in all three cases has significantly and steadily decreased over the years. Nationalism in consumption choice does not seem to have been critical especially among the younger generations that are the target consumer groups of McDonald's and Starbucks, while "being global by consuming" has been quite appealing.

Using new communication technology, we may be locally absent but globally connected if we can be reached when on the move. The question we need to seriously ask here is whether "globality" can be part of someone's primary identity.[12] When being "global" is associated with "being advanced," or "being superior to local," "global" can certainly be an important part of someone's identity. In this case, a global person is someone who has overcome the limitations of locality. Commanding the technological information and knowledge and having the financial means to acquire the necessary equipment are the prerequisite of becoming a new global person. Those who spend weekdays and weekends in different global cities maximize the benefit of new technologies by being connected and transported; examples of this are the so-called *taikongren* in Hong Kong, or those who work in Hong Kong on weekdays while spending their weekends in most cases in North America where their families are (Sassen 1992; Sassen 1996)[13]. These people are not pitied for losing their firm local roots or local identities, as might have been the case previously. Rather, they are regarded as those who have created a new kind of identity by taking the best of the two worlds in which they belong (Sassen 1996: 131-151).[14] It is also said that mobility and connectivity should be positively correlated for a person to be responsible and successful. In other words, connectivity compensates a person's physical absence. In the case of phone transfer services, web mail, and mobile phones, it is often more important to be connected appropriately than to be phys-

11. We can in fact see this in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China.
12. For a discussion on cultural identity in the context of globalism and localism, see Featherstone (1996: 46-77).
13. For discussions on mobility and professional work in global cities, see Sassen (1991 and 1998).
14. For a discussion on the identity of people who work in global cities, see Sassen (1996).

ically present at a certain location because an individual may be needed at several different locations simultaneously.

Our emphasis on being connected also causes us to rethink the closeness between people. We tend to think that closeness between people means more frequent interaction. This has been more or less true with letter correspondence, wired telephone communication, or face-to-face meetings. But with the use of new technologies, there are additional factors that determine the frequency of interaction among people other than emotional closeness: Information, knowledge, and the financial means to have access to those technologies. People often find that their interaction with others is often determined and limited to the availability of the technology for both themselves and the people they want to interact with. As social relationships are affected by the introduction of new communication technology, the whole society is newly organized according to each member's access to the technology. As many sociologists have already discovered, a new version of social classification and stratification is being born.

As individuals are getting less confined to geographical (and the existing social and cultural) boundaries, and becoming part of new communities (which consist of individuals with diverse backgrounds), the nature of inter-culture contacts is transforming rapidly. Increasingly, contacts are occurring at individual levels rather than societal levels, and these contacts are therefore much more complex and varied. Individuals also have more control and initiative in making inter-cultural contacts. They not only decide whether to have contacts with the outside world, but also choose the kinds and frequency of such contacts. When local adaptation of practices or commodities from the outside world occurs, individual variations are even more significant. This is more than clear in the cases I have examined in this paper. When Korean people consume McDonald's hamburgers, espresso coffee, or mobile phones they freely define the meaning of the products or their consumption behavior, and therefore there is a wide variety of possibilities. Crossing cultural borders through the individual consumption of commodities opens a host of possibilities in the adaptation and accommodation of global and transnational cultures.

One of the critical questions in our discussion in the context of the globalization of culture(s) is whether there will be a homogenization of cultures as a result of globalization. We do see some evidence that this might be the case in the context of the new communication culture. Standardization of the technology and the use of the English language (Drohan and Freeman 1997) on the internet may be two of the more conspicuous pieces of evidence of homogenization.

But as we can see in the ingenuous adaptations that Koreans have made with foreign products, homogenization (global standardization) and local (especially individual) adaptation have simultaneously been under way (Bak 1997:136-160; Hannerz 1991).[15] These dual processes might be much harder to grapple with and difficult to control or direct, yet very much dynamic and colorful. Another kind of dual process is the global firms that become localized, adapting to local contexts, while the local culture itself changes through contacts with the global culture. This is where globalism and transnationalism have relevance simultaneously; they are not mutually exclusive.

15. See Bak (1997) for an example of a multinational fast food restaurant chain (McDonald's) pursuing both standardization of business practices and local adaptation in marketing. Hannerz (1991) emphasized the polycentral characteristics of culture in the age of globalization.

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