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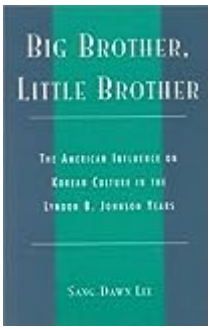

Sang-Dawn Lee. *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years.* Boston and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002. 156 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0435-4.

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Using Culture as a Measure of American Influence

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In Beth Luey's *Handbook for Academic Authors* (3rd ed., 1995), there is an excellent chapter titled "Revising a Dissertation," in which she explains how to change a dissertation into a book. This reader wishes that the editors at Lexington Books had heeded Luey's advice when overseeing the publication of Lee's dissertation. *Big Brother, Little Brother* is a book that promises, at first glance, to provide insightful meaning into the reach of American imperialism on the culture of a developing country, but it falls short due to stylistic, argumentative, and organizational problems.

The book is brief. At only 126 pages of text, less the chapter endnotes, the author sails through his story in six chapters. Sang-Dawn Lee, who holds a Ph.D. in American Studies, describes the American influence on South Korean culture during the 1960s when Korea began its process of modernization. Aided by American financial support, for sending Korean soldiers into Vietnam and for normalizing relations with its former colonial enemy, Japan, Korea was able to industrialize quickly. Lee argues that the process of industrialization naturally led to urbanization and consumerism, which was fueled by the influence of American popular culture. As Korea modernized, or Westernized, those with means began to acquire anything reflecting American culture in order to improve their own standing in Korean society. In a Confucian society where social mobility is nearly impossible, the Americanization that led to a more socially mobile society was very appealing to many Koreans. Lee ends his story in the late 1960s with the Pueblo incident which gave evidence that America was not as reliable a big brother to South Korea as the Koreans had expected. This disillusionment spurred the Koreans into developing a more independent state and, thus, its own culture.

Where the book fails, in this reader's opinion, is not in the thesis, which is derived from Edward Said's argument that national identity "involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us' " (p. 125). America was the "other" to the Koreans. Rather, the book fails to highlight the the-

sis early in the book and support the thesis fully. I suspect that the dissertation was much fuller than the book and as such developed the ideas within the individual chapters to more satisfying conclusions. For example, it is too often in the chapter's "conclusion" that the purpose of the chapter is unveiled. Difficult and jolting transitions along with too many subheadings also disrupt the flow of the argument. Here is where Luey's advice might help "avoid the excessive headings, quotations, footnotes, and lists ... and perhaps an overly visible outline."[1] These criticisms are directed more towards the editor than towards the content of the argument. With that said, Lee's book is worthwhile for those academics looking for concrete evidence of American cultural imperialism notably changing, albeit inadvertently, the social and family relationships, and even the very definition of nationalism, for a developing country.

If John F. Kennedy had dropped Korea as a ward of the state (so to speak), as he had intentions of doing, Korea's development might have followed that of many developing nations. Lyndon Johnson's renewed commitment to the country helped Korea modernize and achieve an economic miracle of sorts. In addition, that process had significant impact on Korean culture and society. This should have been the crux of Lee's argument, namely that the modernization that America helped to spur in South Korea significantly impacted Korean culture. Once Lee broadens his definition of "influence" to include not only financial support, but also influence from popular culture, family planning practices, higher education (particularly via the Fulbright Program), the military, and even nationalism, his argument is weakened. Certainly the process of modernization impacted all of the above, but if there was an implicit American influence, it was because of, not separate from, modernization. For example, in his chapter on mass entertainment Lee contends that Hollywood had a major impact on Korean culture, but points out that much of that influence was via Japanese films, which copied American films. There is no argument, certainly, that there was an official U.S. policy to influence Koreans via Hollywood. The only substantive information on films was that American westerns were popular, perhaps because Koreans saw the United States as being as reliable a hero as John Wayne. Fitting this into a larger picture of U.S.-Korean diplomatic relations, for example, would have created a more useful thesis. Lee skims over the need for the United States to have Korea as an ally and, therefore, to be viewed in a positive light, but the argument is developed too little.

The first chapter, "American Views of Korea," is perhaps the most satisfying chapter in the book and the most useful for diplomatic historians. It reminded this reader of another book on Cold War American perceptions and use of culture in regards to Asia.[2] Lee looks at American perceptions of Korea from the early twentieth century up through the Johnson years. In this chapter, Lee uses literature, the image of the GI, American policy makers, and Edward Said's hypothesis to establish popular American views of Korea. Starting with Jack London's derogatory depiction of the country, while he was a war correspondent during the Russo-Japanese War, Lee establishes the notion that American literature, during the first half of the twentieth century, portrayed Korea as an impoverished country with an offensive smell permeating the entire country from the staple Korean food, *kimchi*. Lee criticizes the venerable Pearl Buck for her "superficial and clich=d" look at Korea in *The Living Reed* (1963) (p. 4). However, Buck is redeemed later in the chapter for her noble work with Korean children of mixed blood and her efforts to help the Korean mothers of those children. Lee remarked that by mid-century, through publications other than *The Living Reed*, Buck had given "a nobler picture of Korea than any other American writer" (p. 7).

In addition to literary depictions, Lee explains that American GIs saw the country as "a den of thieves" and were not shy about using Korean prostitutes. He concurs with Edward Said's hypothesis that Westerners writing about Easterners view the East as exotic, feminine, and infantile; and he argues that even American policy makers saw Korea as weak and likely to always be on the dole. Korea was supposed to be America's prot=g= after the Korean War, but Kennedy was ready to dump Korea after the 1961 coup. Kennedy, insensitive to the history and politics of Asia, believed he could ask Japan to take a leading role in overseeing the affairs of Korea. Lee explains that before Kennedy could break off all relations with Korea, his assassination and the increased American involvement in Vietnam restored relations to Korea's benefit. It was Korea's commitment to helping the United States in Vietnam, argues Lee, that transformed Korea's status from "prot=g=" to "friend." This marked an important change since American policy-makers now viewed Korea as a friend that had to succeed. Lee points to a 1965 document from McGeorge Bundy's files that outlined Korea's significance: Korea was to be a buffer between Japan and China; its success was to measure the validity of the non-Communist approach to nation-building; and Korea had proven itself as an ally and as staunchly anti-Communist via the Korean War and by the 20,000 troops fighting in Vietnam. As such, the United States had to

ensure Korea developed "into an economically and politically viable nation." The report ended by remarking that the failure of Korea to develop would, in fact, be seen by the world as a U.S. failure (p. 16).

The second chapter, "Korean Views of America," showed that Korean attitudes towards the United States were complex. They included feelings of deep respect and gratitude for being a "liberator, philanthropist and protector" (p. 22). Koreans also viewed Americanization as a way for social mobility in a society that was rich in Confucian heritage. When the United States trained the Korean military to be among the most powerful institutions in the country, it inadvertently gave Korean society an avenue for social mobility. In this vein, Lee contends that the 1961 military coup was also a social coup. Koreans viewed America as rich and, as such, anything related to American culture was regarded as a symbol of status. Pointing out that Korea today boasts the largest Starbucks shop in the world, reflecting its current infatuation with the West, Lee demonstrates that in the 1960s most Koreans were just learning to covet the consumerism of the West. The third chapter, "American Influence on the Korean Way of Life," details this evolution more closely.

The Korean consumer culture evolved through the decade of the 1960s. At the start of the decade the economy was poor, with high unemployment and little aid from the United States. However, after normalizing relations with Japan, as the United States wanted, Korea received $800 million from America between 1965 and 1975. More importantly, Korea received monetary rewards for sending Korean soldiers to Vietnam. Lee writes, "Vietnam in the 1960s helped lay the foundation for the Korean economic miracle" (p. 51). This economic development led to urbanization, which led to a change in cultural perceptions. As Korea modernized, family and social relationships changed, and the western concept of time became so important that a wristwatch became a status symbol. The topic of changing family relationships is explored more closely in the fifth chapter, "How Korean Women's Lives Changed." As with the previous chapters, those with means admired American ways and sought to adopt what they could from America. This was true with women as well. The upper- and middle-class women imitated American culture and those rural women who were less educated either ignored or mocked American ways.

Chapter four, "American Influence on Korean Mass Entertainment," continues Lee's argument of the United States as big brother and influencer, but the chapter left this reader disappointed. In addition to films, popular music is discussed, with the point being that the type of music one liked as a Korean depicted one's social class. Overall, this chapter ought to have stressed up front the points made in the conclusion, in order to give the reader a clear sense of the purpose, which is to demonstrate that while American capital poured into the country, a consumer culture developed that was driven by popular culture.

The last chapter, "Modernization and Korean Nationalism," is a very brief chapter that deviates from the limited scope of the book, trying to tackle the large topic of nationalism. For the diplomatic historian this chapter title is intriguing, but Lee fails to deliver, leaving more questions than answers. He boldly asserts that Korean nationalism was developed via modernization, that is to say that Koreans gladly put aside centuries of traditions to embrace a nationalism that reflected economic growth and Westernization. Looking towards its old enemy, Korea copied Japan's success for economic growth: "increase production and construction at home and exports abroad" (p. 116). With everyone agreed that Korea's success lay with industrialization, Korea turned to its big brother for insight into science and technology, the keys to industrialization. Here Lee (too briefly) mentions that the shock of *Sputnik* in 1957 left many Koreans to wonder if the United States was really superior in science and technology. Without discussing the ramifications of *Sputnik* or the ensuing years, he argues that Johnson repaired the damage with the development of the Korean Institute for Science and Technology and by sending two crewmembers of the Gemini program to Korea. Overlapping this development was nationalism, in which Lee states that Korea turned to Japan in the early 1960s for support and increased its stand of independence from "powerful" countries (p. 118). He ends with a description of the *Pueblo* affair where Johnson held talks with North Korea to get the crewmembers back without consulting with its little brother, South Korea. This was viewed as a major insult by the South Koreans and was the beginning of the end of the big brother-little brother relationship.

The chapter leaves far too many questions unanswered by bringing Japan into a story that had been dominated by the United States. Although his conclusions appear reasonable, there is little evidence in the text to support them. Lee does not want to veer too far from his defined topic of culture, but the nature of his statements require that his story be enlarged to include more diplomatic history and even Korean cultural history. How is

it that a country that is embracing Westernization and relying on its big brother to aid in this growth, which it defines as its primary national goal, rejects that same big brother? Did the increasing disillusionment in Vietnam and/or Korea's economic successes have anything to do with the reaction to the Pueblo affair? Perhaps the most nagging question is, if Korea began to look away from American political and cultural influences by 1968, how and when does it transition back, as it obviously has with the Starbucks example? The narrow scope of the topic chronologically is a common disadvantage of dissertations, leaving the reader longing for a fuller picture.

Notes

[1]. Beth Luey, *Handbook for Academic Authors*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 38.

[2]. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).