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**QUESTIONING A NEOLIBERAL URBAN REGENERATION POLICY:
THE RHETORIC OF “CITIES OF CULTURE” AND THE CITY OF GWANGJU, KOREA**

By Kwang-Suk Lee

Abstract

The present study traces recent trends in cultural policy concerning “cities of culture” in South Korea. The paper is a case study of the city of Gwangju, known as the birthplace of modern democracy in Korea. Currently, public input from below into the urban regeneration project for Gwangju is almost nonexistent, while most urban regeneration policies have been implemented from the top by elites who enjoy exhibiting their performances through constructing massive edifices rather than encouraging the preservation of such intangibles as historical significance through cultural participation from below. The government’s policy of promoting Gwangju as the “city of culture” in order to make it a hub of Asian cultural industry and tourism in the global economy is closely allied to its policy of economic reductionism of culture. The study suggests that Gwangju and its unique heritage would instead benefit from an urban regeneration policy aimed at establishing it as the city of art and culture for human rights and democracy and as part of a collaborative network with the heritage initiatives of international bodies.

KEYWORDS neoliberalism; state interventionism; creative city; cultural industry; sustainable development; human rights

Introduction

The urban renewal programs in South Korea under the military regimes that ruled the country from the 1960s to the early 1990s were based entirely on economic development policies promoting heavy industry and new construction. Thanks to such interventionist, government-driven policies in urban development, since the launching of the civilian government in the mid-1990s, South Korea, and especially the city of Seoul—East Asia's second-largest metropolitan area—has been transformed into an intermediary nodal point or hub for disseminating the global ideas of neoliberal urban development within the developing Asian countries.

The present study surveys the neoliberal paradigm of economic expansion that has dominated policy discourses related to urban development and traces recent cultural policy concerning “cities of culture” in South Korea. Since 2004, the Korean government and its Ministry of Culture and Tourism have implemented a cultural policy of renovating several mid-sized cities such as Gwangju, Kyongju, and Jeonju as “international cultural cities.” This policy of designating Korea's larger cities as niches of Asian cultural industry and tourism in the global economy is closely related to the government's economic reductionism of culture. Heedless of the cultural diversity, social conditions, and local traditions in a given city, the government has aimed at gaining market share by transforming traditional culture into profitable show business ventures. The present paper is a case study of the city of Gwangju, which is known as the “birthplace of democracy” in Korea because of the massacre of striking workers, protesting students, and citizens that occurred there on May 18, 1980. The present study investigates how the historic city of Gwangju, once a democratic “commune” of local citizens resisting the military regime of the 80s, has lost its spirit, and how the Korean government has redesigned a city in an attempt to make it a powerhouse in the global economy.

Currently, the dominant market power of supranational economic institutions has entirely subordinated Korean IT and cultural policies to the global economic order. The effect of the uncritical appropriation of neoliberal discourses about globalization in urban renewal policies has been to replace local geographical, cultural, social, and environmental conditions in a city with a geometrical grid of economic reductionism. Instead of improving urban life, the rhetoric of development usually leads to gentrification, commercialization, and the reduction of the cultural and the local to the economic (McGuigan 2004, p. 98). When the rapid privatization and commercialization of cultural landscapes and resources is the collaborative work of proprietary

desire and government support, the role of the government in building the public commons for citizens is suspect. The incorporation of Korean IT and cultural policies into a new imperial mode of production—the so-called “knowledge-based economic system”—is an abdication of the normative role of the state as a public mediator guaranteeing the cultural rights of the citizen and defending citizens’ common intellectual heritage against overly narrow marketism.

The present study first examines the current neoliberal logic of economic reductionism of culture and how local cities in the process of neoliberal urbanization have been entirely subordinated to policy discourses of the cultural or creative industry. The study then looks at the historical value of Gwangju for Korea and East Asia and at the cultural policies driven by entrepreneurial urban management which have been implemented for Gwangju. The study next explores how the current Korean policy drive to create “cities of culture” is being catalyzed by market initiatives. Finally, this study recommends that if the government wants to address the historic pain of an oppressed region, it should embark on a different urban project, both by designating Gwangju as an international sanctum of human rights resistance to authoritarian regimes and by connecting with the cultural initiatives of international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which could situate Gwangju’s unique human rights heritage within one of its cultural heritage projects.

Neoliberal Urbanization of Local Cities

Cities have always included spatial vocabularies of power: there is an uneven geography of segregations, disparities, and exclusions between downtown and ghettos or slums, between urban and rural, between local and global, between center and periphery, and so on. For instance, “fortified” or “carceral” cities (Davis 1990; Soja 1996) are terms reflecting a new stage of deregulatory social control, one that involves policing urban space through pervasive and ubiquitous mobility. The “dual city” (Castells 1999), the “de-industrialized city” (Lash & Urry 1994, pp. 151–153), and the “polarized city” (Short 2004) are all terms depicting the uneven development of cities within the networks of global economies. Either local and regional cities are subordinated to serve as intermediaries transfusing their material and immaterial assets into major global cities, or they are excluded and disconnected from the “control points for the reproduction of capitalist society in terms of labor power, exchange, and consumption patterns” (Soja 1989, p. 95).

From the early 1980s onwards, a huge trend in the global age of neoliberalism has been a new entrepreneurial urbanization in particular localized settings. Neoliberalism goes beyond the classical claims of the *laissez-faire* market operated by the “invisible hand” and represents instead a pervasive drive to reconfigure society entirely by national and international business powers. In the neoliberal phase of capitalism, the scope of market commodities is extended to the private appropriation of tangible or intangible cultural forms and intellectual creativity as new profit sources for capitalism and to the legitimating of this process through the legal system that defends intellectual property rights such as copyright, trademark, and patent. Once disregarded as a profit source, the material and immaterial cultural assets of local cities are increasingly seen as key resources for creating the new productive value chain of the cultural industry. Local cities have gradually become “strategically crucial arenas for neoliberal forms of policy experimentation and institutional restructuring” (Brenner & Theodore 2002, p. 357). The spatial reconfiguration weaving together the global–local nexus within specific regional and local places implies the major trends of urban entrepreneurialism: that of the “creative city” projects, which are directed toward exploiting cultural resources for local economic development, and that of the “techno-city” projects, which aim to create ideal future cities incorporating digital technology and communication networks in leading advanced IT countries.

These high-tech and market-driven models of urban renewal reflect the changing mode of profitable resources in capitalism, which is creating a new value productive chain from the privatization of cultural assets in local and regional cities. Harvey (2005, pp. 101–108) describes some of the political and territorial logics of neoliberalism, such as capturing local and regional dynamics as a source of capitalist power and augmenting that power by setting up havens for capital investment such as constructing new high-tech industrial districts, designating special districts for tourism, and granting privileged loans for real estate speculation in local economies. Moreover, as shown in a study of thirteen large-scale urban development projects in European Union countries (Swyngedouw et al. 2002), the policy processes of urban development in targeted cities are characterized by “less democratic and more elite-driven priorities” (p. 542). The new urban renewal projects are “the material expression of a developmental logic that views megaprojects and place-marketing as means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital” (p. 546).

The “creative city” discourse has also made its way to the center of cultural policy debates, as well as of urban renewal policy issues. Landry (2000, p. xii) describes the “creative city” as a new “method of strategic urban planning” by reinventing the city as a “vibrant hub of creativity, potential and improving quality of life.” Florida (2002, pp. 244–266) emphasizes a “creativity index” used for the purpose of reviving regional growth that includes a high-technology indicator and a cultural resource indicator which mainly consists of a diversity index measuring such factors as the proportion of gay population, bohemian culture, and nontraditional lifestyle found in a specific region.

This idealistic appeal to the innovative and creative index of cities, however, ignores how such rhetoric is co-opted by market-driven policies that lead to spatial disparity and segregation of populations by social class which degrade the urban landscape. The new policy discourses of entrepreneurial urban management ignore such realistic aspects of cities as wage slavery, high unemployment, and alienated urban ghettos — the desolate conditions of urban life vividly depicted as the “unreal city” in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). The “creative city” approach presents a “sanitized” picture of urban life, passing over such realities of city life as the stark inequalities between urban dwellers, the dwarfing of local cultural resources by large-scale corporate ownership, and the elite-led processes through which such cultural policies are made (Chatterson 2000).

Gwangju, one of Korea’s local cities, is an example of such neoliberal urban regeneration policies. Gwangju was once known as “a center of revolution against the established order” (Harvey 1973, p. 203); the neoliberal shift in cultural policy to economic reductionism, by establishing Gwangju’s topological status as a semi-peripheral hub for promoting and connecting global and Asian trade and cultural industry, has transformed it instead into “a center of power and privilege (to be revolted against)” (p. 204). Neoliberal urban policy in Gwangju thus has rapidly subverted insurgency and cultural diversity, stripped the natural environment from the local urban landscape, and commodified the local tangible and intangible heritage. In their place it has brought economic exploitation, cultural decay, the impoverishment of urban ghettos, increased traffic congestion, and the destruction of local urban ecologies by out-of-town developers. A city that was once a symbol of local pro-democratic political insurgency has been co-opted by neoliberal urban and cultural policies such as creating new incentive structures to reward local entrepreneurialism, constructing large-scale urban projects to attract corporate

investment, and repositioning the city within supranational capital flows, while excluding the underprivileged from the processes of cultural policy-making.

In sum, the new entrepreneurial approach to cultural policy is pervasive in large-scale urban regeneration projects of for local cities throughout the world, and this approach effaces local cultural heritage and historical memory in the name of local economic development. The Korean government's cultural policy has embraced the neoliberal economic reductionism of culture, to the diminution of Gwangju's significance as a shrine to human rights.

The Economic Reductionism of Korea's Urban Regeneration

Although cultural policy is a kind of “balancing act” between competing visions of the role of culture in society (e.g., Matarasso & Landry 1999), the Korean government has taken a major role in the neoliberal rearrangement of urban spaces and Korean cultural policy is largely market-driven. The spatial redesign of the modern Korean city has been entirely conditioned by the strong alliance between state interventionism and neoliberal economic reductionism, along with a conscious desire to be brought under the umbrella of the globalized economy of cultural industry. Harvey (2003) describes how the active role of the state releases a set of public assets through deregulation, privatization, financial liberalization, and the commercialization of cultural and historical assets that were once in the public domain. To optimize conditions for capital accumulation, a market-friendly public policy is essential to the neoliberal state system, and this consequently causes cutbacks in welfare provision, healthcare, public education, and core social services, while at the same time providing market incentives in the form of tax breaks, the creation of infrastructure at state expense, and the opening of local markets known as “structural adjustment” to global forces (Harvey 2006, pp. 23–26). The state-driven urban development policies of East and Southeast Asia, such as those of Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea, are examples of state interventionism and the economic growth it can create. In Korea, the spatial appropriation by capital and the state is currently being vitalized by a new state-generated rhetoric directed at persuading citizens to legitimize it by cooperating with a “cities of culture” policy project, a version of “creative city” projects elsewhere.

In Korea, since 1973 when the military regime established the first master plan for cultural development, the title of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has changed several times, responding to the policy focus of each administration: the Ministry of Culture and Information

(1973–89), the Ministry of Culture (1990–92), the Ministry of Culture and Sports (1993–97), and finally, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (1998–the present). The concept of “cultural welfare” which the government had officially supported since the 1970s was rapidly transformed under the civilian regimes of the 1990s into the neoliberal policy agenda of promoting the domestic cultural industry and tourism, especially since 1998 when Dae-jung Kim, once a prominent political activist, became president. The IMF-driven financial crisis of 1997 in Korea meant that the Kim administration which took office in 1998 inherited the heavy political burden of attempting to restructure the domestic market so as to allow it to become vulnerable to the pressure of global conglomerates. While Kim had advocated a democratic reform of the old authoritarian regime, under the conditions of increasing globalization his policy shifted to the radical adoption of neoliberal economic policies and to promoting the information and culture industries over the labor-intensive heavy industries. Because of Kim’s success in enacting political reform, opposition to his administration’s economic drive toward privatization and commercialization was muted (Cho 2000, p. 422). Since that time, culture has been widely regarded both as a key dimension of economic globalization and as a creative industry for earning foreign dollars and creating a new job market.

Throughout the administration of Dae-jung Kim and that of the current president, Moo-hyun Noh, policy plans for the cultural or creative industry have been so driven by economic reductionism of culture that voices advocating cultural diversity have been drowned out by a vague rhetoric of “international competition” (Amin 1998, p. 46). Bourdieu’s (2003) critique of “the policy of depoliticization” is quite apt for describing current cultural policy in Korea. Bourdieu pinpoints exactly the destructive aspect of the emergent neoliberal policy, which aims to “grant economic determinisms a fatal stranglehold by ‘liberating’ them from all controls, and to obtain the submission of citizens and governments to the economic” (p. 38).

Since the establishment of a Committee for Planning the Cities of Culture by presidential order (No. 18279) in February 2004, Korea’s major cities, such as Gwangju, Busan, Incheon, Kyongju, and Jeonju, have been strategically designated “cities of culture” in order to promote the creative industries in response to global market demands. Kyongju (designated the “city of history”) and Jeonju (the “city of tradition”) are being promoted for tourism as having an ancient historical tradition and cultural heritage, while larger cities such as Gwangju (the “city of culture”), Incheon (the “city of entertainment”), and Busan (the “city of visual media”) have

been designated as “creative cities”; all these cities have been placed under the direct supervision of the national government and its Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The concept of “creative cities” means adjusting local urban spaces to make them function within a global framework (e.g., Tay 2005), and the Korean “cities of culture” are versions of the “creative cities” that cultural policy theorists and urban geographers have described as being created through the cultural globalization promoted by local and central government policy initiatives. The Korean government’s “city of culture” project in Gwangju, however, involves more state intervention than is used in other Korean cities. Before investigating why the current Noh government is so deeply involved in the urban policy of Gwangju, this study gives an overview of the democratic history of Gwangju and the living conditions of its citizens.

The Unique Role of Gwangju in Korean History

Located in Cholla Province, Gwangju, which means “village of light,” is the hub of the southwestern (Honam) region of the Korean Peninsula and is a first-tier metropolitan city with a population of about 1.41 million (Korean Bureau of National Statistics 2005). From ancient times, the Honam region has been known for its fertile plains. Ironically, the optimal conditions for agriculture enabled feudal landlords to squeeze labor out of the peasant farmers in a miserable way for three centuries during the Chosun dynasty. Despite the people’s impoverished economic and social life, the region has been important in the development of art (Gwangju is the birthplace of *namjonghwa*, the southern school of Chinese painting) and music (Gwangju is a center of *seopyungae*, a form of *pansori*, the traditional Korean epic music-drama). The popularity of art and music in Gwangju suggests that it served as a cultural catharsis in the midst of so much exploitation by feudal overlords.

While the miserable conditions of the people’s life may have stimulated their artistic and cultural sensibilities, Gwangju’s citizens also have a long historical tradition of defending themselves against landlords who made the farmers suffer in abject poverty (it was the center of the 1894 *Donghak* rebellion) and against the Japanese colonial occupation (it was the location of the 1929 student revolt). Most importantly, the uprising of Gwangju’s citizens in May 1980 is remembered as marking a new era of democracy in modern Korean history. It is ironic, therefore, to see the historical memory of democracy and human rights be diminished by a top-down cultural policy decision of the national government.

In South Korea up through at least the early 1990s, the grid of military-authoritarian practices that threatened citizens' public rights was pervasive: for instance, the national ID system identifying each Korean, the use of paramilitary violence to break labor unions, the use of closed-circuit TV's for policing, and the widespread practice of government eavesdropping and of politically-motivated investigations of activist citizens. During the 1970s and 1980s, the regime in power employed a wide variety of means to compel most citizens to become docile subjects—imposing a curfew, forcibly shearing the hair of “hippies,” torturing political activists, searching citizens' possessions on the street, silencing the voice of leftists in the public arena, and so forth. During the dark period of rule by military regimes, Korean citizens were eager to have more political rights such as freedom of speech, expression, and assembly, but these were repeatedly denied.

The times were turbulent: in 1979, South Korea's first military dictator, Cheong-hee Park, was assassinated, and on December 12 of that year General Doo-hwan Chun came to power in a military coup. Chun declared nationwide martial law, which was directed at banning all political activity, crushing the labor movement, closing the universities, and arresting pro-democracy politicians and activists, including Dae-jung Kim (Shelley 2001). These actions sparked an uprising in Gwangju on May 18, 1980. For the five days of the uprising, the citizens of Gwangju held the city: over 200,000 people participated in demonstrations and hundreds of civilians in the provincial capitol building (which served as the headquarters for the citizens' army) took up arms against the military regime. During this period, when Gwangju was completely blockaded by the military siege and cut off from contact with the outside world, a Citizens' Council was spontaneously organized to defend the city, maintain public security, distribute food and water, and prepared to offer armed resistance to the military. On May 22, 1980, however, the military regime brutally quelled the uprising, massacring as many as 2,000 people—striking workers, protesting students, and citizens—and took control of Gwangju.¹ Chun then used the demonstrations in Gwangju as a pretext for furthering his repressive policies.

The Memory of the Gwangju Massacre as an Unhealed Wound

The Gwangju uprising is seen as the most tragic event in the history of modern Korea. Gwangju is viewed as a shrine of democracy where Koreans remember both the painful history of violent repression by the military regime and the first, brief instance of a functioning

democracy in Korea. Ironically, since 1993, when Young-sam Kim became Korea's first democratically-elected civilian president, Korean presidents have regarded Gwangju as a nuisance. Young-sam Kim made some superficial gestures to memorialize the dead: the establishment of a 5/18 Foundation in 1994, a new memorial 5/18 Mangwol-dong Cemetery (1997) and other memorial sites, and the Gwangju Uprising Act (1997), which offered some compensation to the families of those massacred. Rather than promoting national unity as the government intended, however, state-sponsored projects in Gwangju instead revealed the deep divisions that remain between Gwangju and the central government. For instance, Yea's (2002) field study of the 5/18 Cemetery demonstrated how the state-sponsored "memorial industry" — which arbitrarily relocated the old Mangwol-dong Cemetery and converted the old sites of a torture chamber and of a military court into a "5/18 Memorial Park" and a "Remembrance Park" — resulted in covering over, rather than healing, the memories that the old sites had preserved. It is quite natural that these arbitrary state projects have little historical meaning for the citizens of Gwangju.

Unlike Young-sam Kim's clever attempt at political resolution by memorializing the uprising, Moo-hyun Noh, during his campaign for the presidency, announced a plan to promote Gwangju as "the capital of Asian culture." Since Noh's election in April 2003, the government's cultural policies for Gwangju have been repackaged as part of a new urban regeneration project with several aims: integrating the local into the global economy; promoting the local economy, which has been lagging behind the rest of the country, by means of urban tourism and city marketing; and sanitizing the painful past of the city. Noh's administration began to actively implement the Gwangju project through a series of policy initiatives: first there was field research to establish Gwangju as the "city of culture" (June through August 2003), followed by an official briefing, with President Noh in attendance, announcing Gwangju as "the Cultural Capital of Asia" (November 2003), the establishment of a Committee for Planning the City of Culture (March 2004), the announcement of open bidding for research projects to regenerate Gwangju as Asia's cultural capital (August 2004), and the official invitation of Gwangju's citizens and artists to a policy briefing about regenerating Gwangju as the cultural capital (November 2004).

A series of neoliberal interventionist cultural policies for Gwangju was also set forth in "C-Korea 2010," a white paper published in 2005 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The

white paper describes the “C-Korea 2010” vision of a so-called “creative” or cultural national economy. It specifies encouraging foreign exports of Korean music, drama, and film, promoting Korean entertainers in the Asian entertainment market, and installing international trade fairs or film and leisure-sports festivals in major cities that are designated as international cities of culture or tourism. This white paper has the ambitious goal of placing regional and local cities in the first-tier of the global cultural/creative industry, along with the rapid incorporation of national and local development into the global economic system. To realize the state’s vision of “development” through the economization of culture, the C-Korea 2010 concretely suggests ten major policy goals and, among them, the “Cities of Culture” Project (Chapter 7), and the “Establishing Gwangju as the Cultural Capital of Asia” (pp. 62–63) is specified as a primary goal for realizing national cultural policy goals.

While the regeneration of Gwangju aims at reducing Cholla Province’s exclusion from the country’s economic growth, the reduction of culture into industry has dominated the government’s cultural policy: For urban regeneration in Gwangju, the government has launched enormous state projects such as establishment of the Cultural Hall of Asia (through the investment of \$2 billion: \$1 billion from national funding, \$50 million from local funding, and \$50 million from private capital) and of a Multi-Complex for the Culture Industry (\$53 million) — all to meet the government’s goal of making Gwangju the capital of the culture industry. The state-sponsored market initiatives relating to culture and the arts have been the main driver for the renewal of Gwangju. Local policymakers have launched initiatives such as hosting international arts biennales and culture festivals and promoting tourism to supplement the powerful drive of the central government to promote local growth through the culture industry. The national and local governments are busily calculating the synergistic effects of these efforts, such as creating new employment and increasing market profits from the huge investment in the “city of culture” project. In response to the central government’s investment plan, the local government has also suggested their own vision, the so-called “Gwangju Vision 2010.” The local government’s “Five-year Plan for the Creation of a First-Class Gwangju” corresponds exactly to the central government’s investment plan. The city government’s first goal is “to create an affluent city by attaining an average per capita income of \$14,000” through the “power of culture” (Planning & Management Office of Gwangju City 2005). Stimulated by the central

government's investment, the city government has poured frenzied effort into only two goals for the city: tourism and the industrialization of culture.

In a social climate dominated by the central and local government's logic of economic development through the culture industry and competition in the global economy, the historical memory of the 1980 uprising in Gwangju has either been effaced or converted into the "memorial industry." In general, during the implementation period of cultural policy from 1993 to the present, the establishment of a cultural identity in Korea has been evaluated by the economic value of the cultural industries (Yim 2002). In fact, the original rhetoric of "the city of culture" was questionable from the beginning, when the government, seeking economic expansion and an international profile for the city, applied a concept derived from European experience.

The Mirage of the "City of Culture" in Gwangju

The state-generated rhetoric aimed at persuading the people of the advantages of the "city of culture" project is part of a larger effort throughout the last decade to accelerate the economic and cultural globalization of South Korea. The rhetoric of a "New Korea" began gradually increasing under the Young-sam Kim government (1993–1997). Kim was the first president to popularize the discourses of "internationalization" and "globalization." The motto of "New Korea" aimed to persuade people to voluntarily adopt "a market liberalization policy that was required by the 'globalization' of capital in order to become a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)" (Kang 2000, p. 451).

Since becoming a member country of the OECD, the Korean government has been rapidly incorporated into the worldwide intellectual property (IP) system that aims to monopolize the new immaterial resources in the new paradigm of the "knowledge-based society" (or "creative society") by means of international IP institutions. Consequently, South Korea became a party to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) in 1995, the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works in 1996, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty in March 2004. Between 1957, when the Copyright Act was first enacted in South Korea, and 2004, the Act was revised eleven times — with three such revisions occurring since the year 2000. The trajectory of the Act's revisions can be summarized in one phrase: "the reinforcement

of intellectual property rights” (Hong 2005). The wholesale subordination of the Korean government to the international IP system coincides with a shift in policy interest from industrialization to the commercialization of cultural expression.

The rapid affiliation of Korean society with cultural globalization was simultaneous with the government’s active interventionist policy for redefining the development of local cities. Historically, the initiative for “the city of culture” policy in Korea derived from the “European cities of culture” program originated by the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercuri, in 1985. The European Commission’s motto is to promote cultural “imagination, innovation, and creativity” in European cities, and it designates a new “city of culture” every year with the goal of achieving a platform for European networks of artists and institutions. The name was changed to the “European Capital of Culture” program in 1999, at which time a new selection procedures were adopted to avoid “overly fierce competition to win the accolade”; the EU’s own study saw a need to place “increased emphasis on the cultural and European components” in the selection process and recommended further changes (Wikipedia 2005a). An “American Capital of Culture” program was established by the Organization of American States (OAS), and since 2000 the so-called “American Capital of Culture Organization” has awarded the title to one or more North or South American cities annually. This program also aroused criticism, in this case because cities were asked to donate money in order to receive the “honor” (Wikipedia 2005b).

Ignoring such questions surrounding the “city of culture” programs in Europe and America, the Korean government launched a similar program as part of its urban regeneration policy. Through a revision of the Act for Urban Planning in 2001, the Minister of Construction and Transportation designated some cities as “model cities” in order to promote them for global tourism, a policy dominated by the logic of economic development, just as the “cities of culture” policy has been. The shift of terminology to “the city of culture” was made when the concrete experiment of government investment in Gwangju was launched. Garnham (2005, p. 16) describes the “reinforcement of economic language and patterns” within recent policy rhetoric in England; similarly, in Korea the shift to the rhetoric of “cities of culture” implies a move from marketing and promoting tourism through the idea of “model cities” to the commercialization of cultural assets and identities in the “cities of culture.” In a Korea desiring to accomplish in a compressed time-frame the creation of a modernity resembling that of wealthier Western

societies, the element of indigenous cultural identity is always viewed from within a business perspective of “development” and “competition.”

In sum, the “city of culture” project in Gwangju is a mixture of the neoliberal policy approach to culture as an industry and the Korean government’s attempt to consign historical memory to oblivion rather than promoting its spirit. The civilian governments’ cultural policies have functioned as a political gesture to “buy off” the local residents; rather than curing the unhealed memory of the city, they have minimized the historic value of the political uprising and human rights. It is no surprise, then, that the policy initiatives for Gwangju manifest such undemocratic characteristics as elite-led exhibitionism of urban regeneration, the top-down policy-making process, and the market-driven designs of cultural policy.

Regenerating Gwangju as the City of Human Rights

Looking at the official website of the City of Gwangju, a visitor sees the five catch-phrases of “the 21st Century Gwangju Vision”: the “city as an international hub,” the “high-tech information city,” the “city of culture and art,” the “ecological city,” and “the city of humanism and democracy.” The image of a city that defended peace, human values, and democracy now functions as an ancillary ornament to a top-down policy goal of urban regeneration through the economic reductionism of culture, rather than as “a vehicle for local representation and empowerment” (García 2004, p. 103). The “city of culture” project in Gwangju was born out of a confluence of various factors: the current Noh administration’s desire to salve the old wounds of the 5/18 uprising (the political factor), a desire to overcome regional separatism and economic unevenness (the social factor), and a desire to reconfigure local culture and the arts as economic motors within the international market (the economic factor). These top-down and business-driven policy decisions have made it impossible to hear the real voices of the citizens of Gwangju (the logic of exclusion) and to sustain the historical memory of the 5/18 uprising in the face of the rhetorical onslaught of cultural globalization (the logic of oblivion).

In the “Symposium on the 20th Anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising,” the critical scholar Katsiaficas (2000a; 2000b) evaluated the significance of the 1980 uprising in Gwangju as comparable to that of the Paris Commune in French history and of the battleship *Potemkin* in Russian history. Gwangju’s historical significance, he argued, has three dimensions: that of “the capacity of self-government,” of “the organic solidarity of the citizens,” and of “the international

significance of the uprising.” These three dimensions suggest how the democratic heritage of Gwangju should be cultivated through the government’s urban policy. The first and second dimensions that Katsiaficas saw in the 1980 uprising, the historical value of “self-government” and “solidarity,” should be reflected in the current cultural policies of the national and local governments. Currently, public input from below into the huge urban project is almost nonexistent: most programs have been implemented from top by elites who enjoy exhibiting their performances through constructing a monstrous cultural center or theme park, rather than encouraging the spiritual values of a “soft” and “immaterial” heritage through cultural participation from below. Katsiaficas’ third dimension — “the international significance of the uprising” — is the most important aspect of Gwangju in a global society. Rather than sanitizing the memory of the 5/18 uprising, the cultural policy needed is one that will regenerate the city as an Asian hub for human rights and democracy in order to renew the heritage of the uprising for the present day.

A cultural policy aimed at creating a “city of human rights” is not antithetical to the economic growth principle of local cities. If the local government allows the active participation of the citizens in the decision-making process of cultural projects in the city and if its current activities such as sponsoring international festivals, conferences, and art biennales are continued on the more democratic basis of encouraging a real sense of historical memory, Gwangju could rebuild its image as the preserver of a heritage of pro-democratic political resistance—an image that is not enhanced by building larger, prettier cemeteries or by sanitizing the sites of the military terror that was perpetrated there.

Current urban policy in Gwangju, however, has been greatly conditioned by corporate culture, which ignores the importance of social inclusion and the civic participation of marginalized community groups that should lie at the heart of urban regeneration. Although development of the local economy is central to such a policy agenda, urban policy needs to promote the spiritual value of an historic heritage while simultaneously promoting the active involvement of underserved and underprivileged local communities. As Mercer (2000) argues, integrating sustainable urban development with the concept of “cultural citizenship” enables local and regional communities to be defined by the “texture, quality and diversity of the new city” (p. 11). UNESCO’s (2005) initiative also situates within local and regional development the concerns of “sustainable” development, which aims to promote democratic values such as the

diversity of cultural expressions, respect for all cultures, human rights, and the relative independence of culture from the industrial approach. Cultural policy programs for sustainable development in Gwangju should construct a collaborative network with the initiatives of international bodies such as UNESCO, which would perform such roles as cross-national mediator, joint funding coordinator, or supporter of cultural research networks. Gwangju's involvement in international initiatives will be a positive step toward protecting its rich cultural heritage from the neoliberal attack of market-driven policies.

NOTE

¹ The role of the US in crushing the Gwangju uprising has never been officially clarified. Since the US government had final authority over the US-Korean Allied Forces Command, and thus the Korean government would have had to obtain official permission from the US in order to move infantry divisions, airborne units, and special task forces into Gwangju, most Koreans believe the US government was indirectly involved in the Gwangju massacre.

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