

**Korean Food, Korean Identity:
The Impact of Globalization on Korean Agriculture**

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Agriculture is the foundation of the nation.
Ancient Korean saying

The mere smell of cooking can evoke a whole civilization.
Fernand Braudel¹

The food situations in North and South Korea, on the face of it, could not be more different. The collapse of the heavily mechanized agricultural system in the North, coupled with a longstanding ideological orientation toward self-sufficiency, has produced an acute food crisis that has lasted for at least a decade. In the South, integration into the global economy has brought Korean products to the world market and flooded stores at home with international brands. There is hunger in the North. There is abundance in the South. While North Koreans try to supplement their meager diets with plants eaten only during a famine, South Koreans are bombarded with messages to increase their caloric intake from such diverse sources as instant ramen, hamburgers, and sugary soft drinks.

At a deeper level, however, the two Koreas are facing the same two problems: how to maintain agricultural production under what are widely considered to be conditions of comparative disadvantage and how to maintain a particular Korean food culture in the face of homogenizing pressures from the outside. In other words, despite their relative differences, both Koreas face the same general dilemma at the points of production and consumption. They are small, and the global market is huge.

In South Korea, for instance, small farmers are struggling to compete against cheap food imports. Korean companies that specialize in Korean-style food and drink – *shikhe*, *kimchi*, *kalbi* made from *hanu* (Korean beef) – face steep competitive pressures from Coca-Cola, Chinese *kimchi* manufacturers, and Australian beef producers. Because of the expanding reach of the World Trade Organization regime, the government-sponsored mechanisms that helped Korean shipbuilding and microchip manufacturers thrive in the 1980s can no longer be used to protect Korean agriculture and food production. Saddled with large debts and with comparatively little in the way of off-farm income, farmers are watching their livelihoods slip away. At the 2003 WTO meetings in Cancun, the suicide of Lee Kyang Hae poignantly but only briefly brought the plight of South Korean farmers before the international media.

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life, Volume 1* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 64.

In the North, meanwhile, the government is struggling with a fundamental political choice. According to the governing *juche* ideology, self-sufficiency in food production frees the country from dependency on the outside world, which includes both capitalist enemies as well as undependable patrons in Beijing and Moscow. The paucity of arable land in North Korea – along with the fatal dependency of North Korean agriculture on imported energy – has made such food self-sufficiency an ever more rapidly retreating goal. Indeed, even with outside assistance, North Korea cannot feed its citizens. Foreign development organizations – both governmental and non-governmental – are encouraging North Korea to transform its agricultural sector along more conventional lines, toward the import of basic commodities and the export of niche market goods. However rational from the point of view of agro-economics, such an accommodation to world market conditions does not necessarily sit well with the North Korean government. These changes would bring North Korean farmers and consumers into greater contact with the outside world and diminish the central government’s control over the flow of goods and information. Such reform would also seem to contradict the North Korean government’s many statements that it, not the “flunkeys” in the South, has better preserved Korea’s national heritage by keeping the worst excesses of globalization at bay.

Both the North and the South, then, are coming to terms with the effects of globalization on their highly industrialized agricultures and their distinctive cuisines. This question involves not only today’s headline stories but also deeper historical transformations, particularly the globalizing legacies of the Columbian exchange, Japanese colonialism, and Cold War politics. For Korea, globalization did not begin in the 1990s with the *segyehwa* debate in the South or the introduction of Coca-Cola in the North. Both halves of the Korean peninsula have been caught up in a larger global narrative of historical “development,” with at least four principal plot lines that lead from production to consumption, from countryside to city, from diversity to homogeneity, and from local knowledge to global standards. These trajectories are neither natural nor inevitable, but they are nevertheless powerful.

How the two Koreas accommodate to these simultaneous trajectories is already reshaping Korean identity and, necessarily, the shifting terms of reunification. Viewed through a myopic lens, the divergent food situations in North and South underscore two very different Korean identities and, coupled with other economic and political differences, further complicate the already complex task of reunification. Considered through a hyperopic lens, however, the underlying similarities of position – a “we’re in the same boat mentality” vis a vis globalization – suggest that food issues will exert a centripetal force on inter-Korean relations. In either case, the production and consumption of food on the Korean peninsula remains central to any understanding of how the two Koreas understand their changing place in the world.

The Four Waves of Globalization

Except for the lifestyles of the most isolated of the world’s remaining hunter-gatherers, what people in the world grow and eat today differs so considerably from the diets and

agricultural practices of their ancestors of a thousand years ago as to make all claims to an “indigenous” food culture from time immemorial quite dubious. Seeds, growing techniques, and culinary presentations, which have circled the globe by caravan, ship, and military supply train, have continuously transformed lands and diets. Until 1492, however, the impact of these transfers of knowledge and germ plasm were, at most, regional in nature, along the Silk Road or across the American landmass. The Chinese exerted a “globalizing” influence during the T’ang Dynasty, for instance, but the “globe” did not extend much further than Central Asia in the west and Japan in the east. The Austronesians reached Africa some time between 300 and 800 A.D. but their influence was largely confined to Madagascar.² It was only in 1492 that the “old” and “new” worlds were encompassed by a new, truly global system of trade and conquest.

In the beginning of this Columbian age, globalization started out relatively “thin,” as a complex of circulating goods and diseases. As connections proliferated, globalization became “thicker” as it acquired additional structures and functions in the form of institutions (League of Nations), communications (telegraph), transportation (airlines), language (English), scientific concepts (longitude), military conflict (world war), and so on. When assessing the impact of globalization, then, the entire array of these overlapping networks must be considered, not just global trade but global institutions, not just the economic but the cultural and the political, not just how global goods are produced but how they are received.

In terms of globalization’s impact on food and agriculture, there are four important dates for the Korean peninsula – 1492, 1910, 1945, and 1967 – which correspond to the Columbian exchange, Japan’s formal annexation of Korea, the division of the peninsula, and South Korea’s entrance into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The dates themselves are symbolic and will refer here more to processes than discrete events. In all four cases, the impact of the processes did not become clear until some years after the date itself.³

First Wave: the Columbian Exchange

Korean food and agriculture were, like language and religion, affected by contact with and domination by the Chinese empire, particularly during the era of the Three Kingdoms. The Chinese likely contributed the technology of rice farming during the Bronze Age as well as the process of pickling during the Shilla Dynasty.⁴ China’s development of Champa rice in the Song Dynasty – a drought resistant variety originally from Vietnam with a shorter growing period that permitted double-cropping for the first

² Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp. 392-3.

³ There are many attempts to categorize the different eras of globalization. In one of the more recent, Robbie Robertson identifies three discrete waves – the globalization of regional trade after 1500, the spread of industrialization of 1800, and the construction of an international order after 1945. I have tried to adapt this approach to the specifics of Korean history. See Robbie Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2003).

⁴ On rice, see Carter Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 1990), p. 10; on pickling, see Korean Food Research Institute; http://kimchi.kfri.re.kr/html_en/html/kimchi_01.htm; accessed October 30, 2004.

time – was a forerunner of the Green Revolution.⁵ The Mongols who swept through Northeast Asia in the 13th century brought with them the grilling techniques that would eventually become the barbecue dishes that occupy the heart of Korean cooking today.⁶

Through China, Korea was connected to a larger world of trade and tribute, but the first wave of true globalization – involving the entire globe – didn't come until 1492 and the “Columbian exchange.” The arrival of “New World” crops in the “Old World” (and vice versa) transformed global diets to an extent not seen since the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture in the Neolithic period.⁷ For Korean farmers and consumers, the exchange brought red pepper, squash, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, and tomatoes. Both white and sweet potatoes permitted farmers to cultivate hitherto unusable land, with a consequent improvement in diet, amelioration of periodic famine conditions, and boost in population. (Or, to consider the issue from a more realistic vantage point, the new crops introduced what Edward Seidensticker has described in Japan as a “new kind of poverty,” where the sweet potato made “life precariously possible for people who without it would have died young or not been born.”⁸)

Red pepper proved to be the most influential of these crops. Although the Japanese introduced red pepper to the Korean peninsula in the wake of Hideyoshi's invasions of the late 16th century, it would take over 150 years before Koreans added red pepper to pickled vegetables for the first time in 1766. And it was another thirty-four years before the most common kimchi -- *tongpaechu* or whole cabbage kimchi fermented along with red pepper powder – debuted in the Korean diet.⁹

While there are hundreds of different kimchi dishes, including some without any red pepper, the spicy *tongpaechu* variety is both the most common global representation of the dish and the one most commonly linked to Korean identity at home. The connection between hot, spicy food and Korean personality has become a staple of cultural stereotyping.¹⁰ Such overdrawn characterizations aside, kimchi is indeed the first Korean food to merit inclusion in English-language dictionaries as well as the first Korean food considered deserving of an international standard from the Codex Alimentarius.¹¹ That this most typical of national foods is a hybrid – derived from the first wave of globalization – is not unique to Korea. The Zumbagua, who live in the Ecuadorean Andes, refer to themselves as “we who eat *ma'chica*,” a dish made from a crop, barley,

⁵ Sucheta Mazumdar, “The Impact of New World Food Crops on the Diet and Economy of China and India, 1600-1900,” in Raymond Grew, ed., *Food in Global History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999), p. 64.

⁶ Naomichi Ishige, *The History and Culture of Japanese Food* (London: Kegan Paul, 2001), p. 53.

⁷ Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

⁸ Quoted in *Discover Japan, Volume 1* (Tokyo: Kodansha international, 1987), p. 57.

⁹ Information from the Kimchi Museum, Coex Mall, Seoul, Korea.

¹⁰ Here's but one example: “The Koreans have been called the ‘Irish of the Orient’ for good reason. Unlike the emotionally disciplined Japanese, they are volatile and violent. Their tempers are as hot as their peppery foods and as savage as their shaggy nasty-tempered ponies.” Henry Weiboldt, “For Korea I Prefer Koreans,” in In-Hah Jung, *The Feel of Korea* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1966), p. 306.

¹¹ The case has been made that kimchi is Korea's national dish by default since Japan had already seized on rice as its national food symbol. Yi Jeong Duk, “Globalization and Recent Changes to Daily Life in the Republic of Korea,” in James Lewis and Amadu Sesay, eds., *Korea and Globalization: Politics, Economics and Culture* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 27.

that came from the Old World.¹² Or, to take another example, Japanese identity is intertwined with rice, but as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney points out, wet-rice cultivation came from the Asian mainland, making this most nationalist of food products a hybrid. The Korean self, then, was not only “born through discourse with the other,” to use Ohnuki-Tierney’s phrase, but through discourse with globalization.¹³ It would not be the last time in the history of Korean food that globalization was associated with suffering, for the Japanese left behind not only red pepper in their 16th century incursions but widespread destruction as well.

The impact of 1492 can be felt still in the modern era on the Korean peninsula. After 1945, the South Korean government encouraged the spread of sweet potato cultivation as a hedge against starvation. And attempts to boost food production in North Korea during the current agricultural crisis have included campaigns to increase the cultivation of white potatoes and corn, both of which were planted in large quantities in Europe, Africa, and Asia to alleviate famine from the 17th century onwards. The arrival in Korea of French fries, tomato ketchup, and apple pies flavored with corn syrup – in the current McDonald’s in Seoul and in the McDonald’s of Pyongyang’s future – are also, in a more convoluted way, ripples from this original Columbian exchange.

Second Wave: Japanese Colonialism

The second dramatic transformation of Korean agriculture and eating habits came at the turn of the 19th century along with Japanese colonialism. While other “periphery” countries first experienced agro-colonialism through some form of plantation agriculture, Korea skipped the plantation phase and received modernization and colonialism, as it were, in the same gulp.

Before Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910, the agrarian sector on the peninsula had been undergoing profound turmoil. The Tonghak rebellion, under the slogan of “Drive out the Japanese dwarves and the Western barbarians, and praise righteousness,” brought to the surface all the resentments of the feudal underclass. The rebels, largely peasants, focused their wrath against not only the landlord class but also outside modernizers affiliated with Japan, all in an effort, paradoxically, to preserve the same Confucian order that so thoroughly subordinated the farming sector.¹⁴ The Kabo Reforms of 1894-6 combined some of the demands of the Tonghak rebels with elements of Meiji-style modernization, eliminating slavery and establishing a new tax system but also creating new national traditions such as Korean Independence Day.¹⁵ Some countries are sufficiently strong or independent to implement their own Meiji-style reforms while others have such reforms thrust upon them. Korea fell into the latter category. From 1876 to 1900, under the influence of American, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian interests, international trade began to reorient Korea toward the outside world, with foreign imports

¹² Harriet Friedmann, “Food Politics: New Dangers, New Possibilities,” in Philip McMichael, ed., *Food and Agrarian Orders in the World-Economy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 18.

¹³ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 8.

¹⁴ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 115.

¹⁵ Eckert et al., p. 215.

increasing by 23-fold and exports of mainly rice and beans increasing 15-fold.¹⁶ Japan monopolized this trade, absorbing 90 percent of Korean exports and supplying more than half of Korean imports.¹⁷ But Tonghak, the Kabo reforms, and this tentative opening to global markets only prepared the ground for more thorough-going change.

It was once common for scholars to argue that Japan's sole agricultural policy toward Korea during the colonial period was the extraction of resources, particularly rice. Even Japanese officials and economists at the time used the phrase "starvation exports" to refer to the transfer of food from Korea to Japan.¹⁸ More recent scholarship, however, has emphasized that Japanese colonial policy was a great deal more nuanced and extraction was not the sole or even the most important aim. Japan was not only modernizing Korean agriculture but more importantly connecting the country to global markets and processes, albeit through Tokyo.¹⁹ The transformations of 1492 linked Korean diets to the global circulation of crops. The transformations of the Japanese colonial period linked Korean agriculture *systematically* to a model of industrialized agriculture that became the global standard via the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

Japan's transformations began in 1910 with an eight-year cadastral survey. Although the Korean government had conducted earlier programs to determine the size and ownership of agricultural land, the Japanese survey was of a different order altogether.²⁰ To use James Scott's useful formulation, the Japanese colonial authority needed first to make Korean agriculture "legible" in order to "see" it properly.²¹ Legibility, in this sense, means administratively ordered and manipulatable. Once legible, Korean agriculture could be more easily taxed and Korean farmers more easily controlled. A portion could also be seized for Japanese use. And once "seen" properly, Korean agriculture could be remade according to Japanese designs.²²

Japan transformed Korean agriculture but, unlike its policies in colonial Taiwan, did not overturn the agricultural order. The colonial authority needed the help of the Korean landlord class, particularly at first, in promoting change. Instead of overturning the agrarian order, Japan implemented a policy of substitution. Landlords replaced the *yangban*, a bourgeoisie replaced the merchant class, and, most importantly, peasants, tenants and workers replaced the lowest category of commoners. Economic class, the

¹⁶ Gi-Wook Shin, *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), p. 27.

¹⁷ Cumings., p. 120.

¹⁸ Sang-Chul Suh, *Growth and Structural Changes in the Korean Economy, 1910-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 88.

¹⁹ Scholars following the "world system" approach of Immanuel Wallerstein have in particular emphasized this point. See, e.g., Hagen Koo, "The Interplay of State, Social Class, and World System in East Asian Development: the Cases of South Korea and Taiwan," in Frederic Deyo, ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 166.

²⁰ Shin (1996), p. 42.

²¹ James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²² A useful comparison could be made to Foucault's arguments about the relationship between the panopticon and the disciplining of the body. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

categories of modernization, replaced the status categories of the previous feudal order.²³ This transformation, a realization of the thwarted Kabo reforms, was in some sense a change of the “language” of Korean social relations so that the country could “communicate” with the global economic order. There was, however, no concomitant transformation of the underlying “grammar,” no fundamental reordering of social relations.

The land survey made Korean agriculture legible; the transformation of social relations made Koreans structurally compatible with the new global order. Before I turn to the agricultural reforms themselves, it is important to mention the character of the “global order” taking shape at the end of the 19th century. Japan’s initial imperial forays coincided with a tremendous expansion of world trade that, until interrupted by World War I, would not be seen again until several decades after World War II. This global system was centered in London, linked to the gold standard, and embedded in a complex multilateral payments network.²⁴ It was predicated on national policies of modernization: the gradual application, with state support, of industrial principles to agriculture and food processing. The first large-scale industrial farms (culminating in the Thomas Campbell farm in Montana in 1918) and vertically integrated food processing operations (pioneered by Heinz in the 1880s) appeared at this time.²⁵ Agricultural prices and production responded to fluctuations in an expanding global market, rather than simply the vagaries of domestic weather patterns, national policies, and the proclivities of local farmers. The impact of business cycles of boom and bust, once confined within national boundaries, could be felt in an increasing number of countries. As importantly, trade circulated with comparatively few barriers in terms of tariffs.²⁶ It was, by and large, a system characterized by laissez-faire at a global level and economic nationalism at a domestic level. For the larger powers, this economic nationalism extended beyond national boundaries to include distant colonies.

Japan was a newcomer to this order in terms of its colonial aspirations, which began in 1895 with the seizure of Taiwan and the subsequent defeat of Russia in 1905. But in economic matters, Japan had narrowed the gap with the industrialized world during the Meiji era. And its agriculture was, in some respects, more advanced.

In 1910, Japan was approximately thirty years more advanced in agriculture than Korea and already seeing the leveling off of its own production levels.²⁷ For the next three decades on the Korean peninsula, Japan applied its technological advances in seeds,

²³ Clark Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant,’” in Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 292-3.

²⁴ A.G. Kenwood and A.L. Lougheed, *The Growth of the International Economy, 1820-1980* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 105-15.

²⁵ On the Campbell farm, see Scott (1998), p. 198; on Heinz, see Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table* (New York: Oxford University, 1988), p. 37.

²⁶ Between England’s repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and 1880, trade circulated with very few barriers. There was a modest increase after 1880 but still, over all, duties remained comparative low. Kenwood and Lougheed, pp. 73-89.

²⁷ Suh, p. 37.

irrigation, and fertilizer and pesticide use. New land came under cultivation; inspections improved the quality of rice and beans. In the first part of the 20th century, in other words, Korea and Taiwan were the first developing countries to undergo an externally applied Green Revolution several decades before its official debut during the Cold War period.²⁸ Indeed, the dwarf wheat variety that launched the Green Revolution can be traced back to Norin 10, which Japan developed in 1917, one of the many dwarf varieties that the country had been experimenting with since 1868.²⁹

Korean agriculture responded dramatically to these new technologies. Yields grew at a rate of 1.25 percent annually between 1920 and 1925 and then double that rate over the following decade.³⁰ Labor and land productivity increased to levels comparable to the more agriculturally advanced Taiwan;³¹ fertilizer consumption increased 38-fold over the colonial period;³² livestock management improved; new fishing techniques that increased catches were also introduced.³³ The kind of agricultural growth Korea was experiencing more or less matched Japan's performance a generation before. And this agricultural growth was part of an annual increase in GNP from 1910 to 1940 that exceeded Japan's rate over the same period.³⁴

Did Koreans themselves benefit from these agricultural advances? Some clearly did. In a recent oral history, Kim Won Keuk recalls how his father successfully functioned in the new environment:

To show you how modern Father was, instead of farming in the old way by hand, he ordered machinery from Japan for digging and weeding, and because of Father's connections with the government, every day we had visitors from the county government or the provincial government, all Japanese. When the local government wanted to train young people in agricultural methods, they sent the people to our house to learn from my father.³⁵

The Japanese did not simply impose modernization. They found quite a few Korean partners in the landlord class willing to collaborate and even serve as disseminators of the new techniques. These larger landowners quite literally gave birth to a new elite of

²⁸ The Japanese approach at home and in its colonies "in many respects served as models for the agronomists of the Green Revolution," according to Francesca Bray, *The Rice Economies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 45.

²⁹ Peter Pringle, *Food, Inc* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), pp. 41-2. See also Penelope Francks, *Technology and Agricultural Development in Pre-War Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 144-176.

³⁰ Kenneth Kang and Vijaya Ramachandran, "Economic Transformation in Korea," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 47, no. 4 (July 1999), p. 786.

³¹ Shin (1996), p. 118.

³² Kang and Ramachandran., p. 789. Shin (1996) reports 23-fold increases in fertilizer use.

³³ Vincent Brandt, *A Korean Village* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 61.

³⁴ Korea's rate of increase in GNP over this period was 3.57 compared to Japan's 3.36. See Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy," in Deyo, p. 45.

³⁵ Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001), p. 12.

Korean entrepreneurs and businessmen who took over the economy after liberation.³⁶ Some scholars have gone even further to suggest that a great deal larger number of Koreans participated voluntarily in this system. Korean economist Myung Soo Cha writes that “Japanese colonialism did not rely chiefly on forced extraction of resources to generate export surpluses, but on the working of the market and on the commercial interests of farmers and landlords to bring these surpluses to Japan.”³⁷ This is a key feature of globalization – the shift in emphasis from political actors to allegedly neutral mechanisms, from a specific set of exploitative relationships to a set of global market relations that appear to be coercive only in the way that, say, a traffic system exerts pressure on individual drivers to obey laws not only for self-interest but for the benefit of all. Korean farmers, according to this economic analysis, were not exploited. They were simply acting in their own self-interest given Korea’s new relationship within the global economy.

Not surprisingly, given the global nature of the economy, Japan was subject to the same forces at work on the Korean peninsula. Its decision to modernize Korean (and Taiwanese) agriculture stemmed from its own eroding self-sufficiency in rice production and the consequent political debates between agrarian fundamentalists and free traders.³⁸ Japanese farmers and their political supporters were not pleased with this decision. The very success of the government’s modernization policy – and the flood of cheap rice from the colonies – led to riots and boycotts and the imposition of Japan’s first agricultural protection measures in the early 1920s.³⁹ The government used tariffs and quantitative restrictions to keep out imports (that is, non-colonial rice), and it also kept prices of foreign rice higher than international levels to keep down demand and encourage the consumption of domestic rice.⁴⁰ (Consistent with the thirty-year lag in their respective agricultural development, Korea would later introduce similar measures after the Korean War.) The very cheap rice that constituted “starvation exports” for Koreans was responsible according to one study, not only for Japan’s stagnant rural sector but to a large extent “the general economic and political instability of the interwar period.”⁴¹ This cheaper rice from Korea – and from Taiwan and China – also produced a subtle shift in Japanese identity. The emerging preference for *naichimai* (domestic rice) over *gaimai* (foreign rice), with colonial rice hovering somewhere in between, privileged the Japanese

³⁶ Carter Eckert cites one study that discovered that 47 percent of South Korean businessmen were sons of large-to-medium landowners and further quotes Cho Kijun and Kim Yongmo on the transformation of landed wealth into capital during the Yi and colonial period. See Carter Eckert, *Offspring of Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), pp. 14-15.

³⁷ Myung Soo Cha, “Imperial Policy or World Price Shocks?” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 58, no. 3 (Sep 1998), p. 733.

³⁸ See, e.g., Yujiro Hayami, *Japanese Agriculture Under Siege* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), p. 35.

³⁹ Sung Hwan Ban, Pal Young Moon, and Dwight Perkins, *Rural Development: Studies in the Modernization of the Republic of Korea, 1945-1975* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 198.

⁴⁰ Kym Anderson, *Food Price Policy in Korea, 1955 to 1985*, Pacific Economic Papers, no. 149 (Canberra: Australia-Japan Research Centre, 1987), pp. 3-6.

⁴¹ Yujiro Hayami and V.W. Ruttan, “Korean Rice, Taiwan Rice, and Japanese Agricultural Stagnation,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 84, no. 4 (November 1970), p. 563.

over other Asian rice, an “our rice versus their rice” distinction that would play a central role in post-World War II rice policy in the region.⁴²

While both Korea and Japan were both buffeted by the competitive pressures of the global economy and Korean farmers were clearly responding to such global market signals as the worldwide depression of the 1930s, it is difficult to adopt the economist’s “rational” point of view and see the food issue during the colonial period as simply a working out of impersonal forces. The Japanese used their imperial power to personal advantage. Japanese landlords, for instance, were making a good profit renting out land (earning rates of 10-20 percent in the early colonial period and 8-9 percent from 1928 to 1936).⁴³ And the improvement in Korean agriculture didn’t translate into better diets for the average Korean. Despite the large-scale increase in rice production, rice consumption in Korea declined between 1915 and 1933 by 35 percent and per capita consumption of all grains declined by 20 percent,⁴⁴ with overall caloric intake decreasing from 1918 to 1936.⁴⁵ True, by the early 1930s, the innovations of the incipient Green Revolution finally kicked in with respect to consumption patterns.⁴⁶ However, beginning in 1930, too, the Great Depression and its depressing effect on food prices began to affect East Asia. Korean farmers were growing more food but no longer could count on the Japanese market. For a brief time at least, they were able to consume their own product.⁴⁷ A macroeconomic minus was in fact a plus for the health of the population.

By the end of the colonial period, nationalist ideology began to prevail over market principles as Japan shifted to a war footing. Korea was squeezed as tightly as other colonies and indeed, as tightly as the Japanese economy itself. This, too, was the time of the most intense pressures for cultural assimilation – the required recitation of the Pledge of Imperial Subjects in 1937, the Japanese-only language policy of 1938, and the name-change policy of 1940. Markets were in retreat worldwide in the 1930s as the Great Depression put a decisive end to the explosion of world trade that had begun at the end of the 19th century. Economic globalization suffered a hiatus. By the end of the 1930s, the Japanese were no longer interested in modernizing Korea or connecting the country to world markets. They were simply desperate to win the war, and Japanese collection of rice from Korea by 1943 rose to 63.8 percent of the country’s total production.⁴⁸ Koreans who speak of *chogun mokpi* or eating wild foods to supplement meager diets during the colonial period are likely remembering the war years.⁴⁹

⁴² Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “We Eat Each Other’s Food to Nourish Our Body,” in Grew, pp. 248-9.

⁴³ Mitsuhiro Kimura, “The Economics of Japanese Imperialism in Korea, 1910-1939,” *The Economic History Review*, vol. 48, no. 3 (August 1995), p. 562.

⁴⁴ Larry Burmeister, *Research, Realpolitik and Development in Korea: the State and the Green Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1988), p. 34.

⁴⁵ Mitsuhiro Kimura, “Standards of Living in Colonial Korea,” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 53, no. 3 (September 1993), p. 639. Also Suh, p. 87.

⁴⁶ Myung Soo Cha, p. 747.

⁴⁷ From 1936 to 1940, daily per capita calories from rice were 741, more than a 15 percent increase from the four preceding years. Overall caloric consumption was 2,033 compared to 1,182 for the preceding four years. Suh, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Shin (1996), p. 135.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Choong Soon Kim, *The Culture of Korean Industry* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), p. 17.

Another aspect of Japanese policy that has had lasting impact on Korean agriculture was the decision in the 1930s to pour resources into industrialization, particularly in the northern half of the peninsula. Until 1934, the south was producing the overwhelming majority of manufactured goods. Despite its shorter growing season and more mountainous terrain, the north served a major agricultural role as principal supplier of potatoes and Japanese millet to the empire.⁵⁰ By 1940, however, the south's share of manufacturing had fallen from 63 percent to 47 percent.⁵¹ The urban population in the north practically doubled from 1935 to 1940 (but still remained a smaller fraction of the overall population than in the south).⁵² While agricultural and industrial production was quite evenly distributed in the first decades of Korean modernization, a perception of the north as the industrial center and the south as the breadbasket became a fixture of later Korean culture and identity.⁵³

Finally, it must be added that Korean peasants did not always comply fully with Japanese designs. During the land survey, some Koreans claimed adjoining land not their own and managed to keep it out of Japanese hands.⁵⁴ They subsequently hid rice from the government collectors, switched to crops that the Japanese didn't want, and spread anti-Japanese rumors.⁵⁵ These "weapons of the weak" were deployed in ensuing decades, against the North Korean authorities during collectivization and the South Korean officials during the *Saemaul* movement, and much later still against the perceived forces of globalization.⁵⁶

Third Wave: Division

Although Korea was divided at mid-century, both halves essentially continued the Japanese model of agricultural modernization, with similarly top-down reforms and by similarly coercive means, though obviously under different labels. It was by no means a smooth transition from modernization by colonialism to modernization by national design. The Japanese, before departing, destroyed as much as they could, and some Koreans, too, took part in the destruction in an attempt to expunge all memory of the colonizers. In the livestock industry, for example, Koreans looted Japanese property, feasting on the cattle and destroying the facilities. Moreover, writes political scientist Daniel Pinkston, "anti-Japanese sentiments caused Koreans to reject a lot of the livestock

⁵⁰ Robert Burnett Hall, "Agricultural Region of Asia, Part VII—the Japanese Empire," *Economic Geography*, vol 11, no. 1 (January 1935), p. 51.

⁵¹ Suh, p. 137. According to the labor advisor to the commanding general of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea, more than two-thirds of manufacturing was located south of the 38th parallel in 1944, and this sector employed the majority of all workers. Stewart Meacham, "Korean Labor Report," prepared for the U.S. Secretary of Labor, November 1947, p. 2.

⁵² Suh, p. 135.

⁵³ For instance, one analyst writes in 1983 that "Traditionally, the North was the industrial center of the Korean peninsula, while the South was the bread basket." Tradition in this case, began only in the mid-1930s. Tai Sung An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1985), p. 128.

⁵⁴ Kang, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵ Shin (1996), p. 133.

⁵⁶ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

and dairy technology introduced by the Japanese.”⁵⁷ Agricultural extension work largely disappeared because, as one study concludes, “of its association with colonial rule.”⁵⁸ The Korean War turned the clock back even further by wiping out the few gains of the immediate post-liberation period. But eventually, after the cataclysms of 1945-1953, the second wave of globalization initiated by the Japanese – the incipient Green Revolution of the colonial period – took off on both halves of the divided peninsula. Whereas Japan had been boosting agricultural production at least in part to strengthen the empire, the two Koreas needed the surplus food for industrial workers and an increasing number of city dwellers.

There were two important differences between the agrarian experiences of North and South Korea after division, the first peninsular and the second global. At the peninsular level, land reform in both North and South targeted the landlord class that had largely collaborated with the Japanese. In diminishing the power of this elite, the redistribution paved the way for strong states on both sides of the DMZ. Also, these reforms, by removing conservative obstacles to change, created more opportunities for new agricultural techniques to be promulgated. But land reform in North Korea was merely a prelude to the rapid collectivization that took place after the Korean War. South Korean land reform, on the other hand, established a limit on landholding of 3 hectares that stayed in place well into the 1990s.

At the same time, the two countries pursued their modernization policies in very different global environments. According to many conventional analyses, the South’s state-led, export-driven development meshed with the global economy but departed significantly from the capitalist norm. It was a “miracle” born of a different model of economic organization.⁵⁹ While South Korea’s developmental experience was indeed a “miracle” and the state-bank-*chaebol* system different from Anglo-American *laissez-faire*, the country was not an anomaly. In many ways, South Korea was an ideal expression of the global consensus among industrialized countries in the aftermath of World War II, namely what John Ruggie has called “embedded liberalism”: state intervention to protect domestic agricultural and industrial sectors combined with participation in a liberal, multilateral system. In 1947, the “developed world” – as the rich and powerful countries came to be known in contrast to the “underdeveloped” countries⁶⁰ – created a fundamentally new international trading system. This General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was unlike the pre-World War I *laissez-faire* model in that it emphasized domestic stability over free trade. Capitalism demanded free trade; the Cold War demanded “national security” in more than just the military sense of the phrase. As an observer of the initial GATT negotiations remarked at the time, “There are few free

⁵⁷ Daniel Pinkston, “Vertical Product Differentiation as an Unorthodox Safeguard: The Institutional Role in the South Korean Beef Case,” dissertation manuscript, University of California – San Diego, 1999, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Penelope Francks (with Johanna Boestel and Choo Hyop Kim), *Agriculture and Economic Development in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 106.

⁵⁹ Alice Amsden, *Asia’s Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); *The East Asian Miracle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ The term “underdeveloped” appears for the first time in a public text in Point Four of President Truman’s inaugural address of January 1949. See Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp 71-72.

traders in the present-day world, no one pays any attention to their views, and no person in authority anywhere advocates free trade.”⁶¹ This observation applied with particular force to agriculture. When the GATT was being negotiated, the U.S. delegation pushed for the exclusion of agriculture, since the Senate would never have ratified any treaty that would lead to the substantial dismantling of U.S. agricultural supports.⁶² In the agricultural sphere, embedded liberalism gave rise to what Harriet Friedmann has called an “international food order.” Not only did the United States keep agriculture out of the GATT, it directed its enormous food surpluses abroad in the form of food aid, which saved war-ravaged Europe and Japan, created new markets for U.S. commodities, provided cheap food for new urban workers attracted from the countryside, and eroded the self-sufficiency of many “developing” countries.⁶³

Food dependency for the “developing” world and embedded liberalism for the “developed” world: with few exceptions, this was the post-war model. The South Korean “miracle” resided not so much in its model as in its ability to move from “developing” to “developed,” from food dependency to embedded liberalism. For centuries, geography worked against Korea. But in the Cold War era, South Korea was able to turn geography to its advantage, leveraging its position on the front-line against communism (both North Korea and Vietnam) into food aid and then entrée into the global economy on favorable terms. South Koreans, of course, worked hard and made innumerable sacrifices to bridge the development gap, but they had a geopolitical wind at their back, so to speak.

In the communist world, meanwhile, the Soviet Union presided over the construction of a system of international barter with itself as the center. In retrospect, the creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (COMECON) in 1949 and its spread beyond the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to Mongolia (1962), Cuba (1972), and Vietnam (1978) seems merely a failed attempt to construct an alternative global economic order. At the time, however, it managed to integrate to a limited degree the productive capacities of its members and, perhaps less successfully, influence the diets of citizens (I remember, for instance, the popularity of the Cuban restaurant *Havana* in Warsaw in 1989 and the ubiquity of Vietnamese shrimp crackers in Romania in 1990). North Korea, however, kept its distance from this alternative order, refusing to be a subordinate player and, after the Sino-Soviet split, effectively playing the two communist giants off one another. North Korea certainly accepted considerable help from both communist camps, from Chinese soldiers during the Korean War to East German engineers to rebuild the city of Hamhung. But it refused to become integrated into the communist production system and supply raw materials in exchange for products manufactured elsewhere. South Korea used its crucial geographic location to win a better deal in the global capitalist order; North Korea used its position to strengthen its own independent and in some ways unique economic system.

⁶¹ John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change,” *International Organization*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1982), p. 396.

⁶² Dale Hathaway, *Agriculture and the GATT: Rewriting the Rules* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1987), p. 103.

⁶³ Harriet Friedmann, “The Political Economy of Food,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 88 (1982), p. 251.

But before exploring this divergence between North and South in more detail, let's first look at the similarity in approach.

The continuity between the Japanese period and the postcolonial era on the Korean peninsula would not have surprised modernization theorists. According to many developmental models (Marx-Lenin, Rostow, Lewis), agriculture is simply the handmaiden to industrial revolution, providing the necessary labor for the factories and capital for entrepreneurs or the state.⁶⁴ Achieving agricultural surpluses is critical to the modernization process. Once its job is done, agriculture is then expected to become increasingly less important: contributing less of a share to GDP, employing fewer workers, retaining an ever smaller share of the population in the countryside. (Indeed, the success of these modernization models is measured by such indices as rural depopulation, much as increased rates of unemployment verified the success of “shock therapy” adjustments in the “transitional states” of the former Soviet bloc in the 1990s.) The “disappearance” of agriculture from the radar screens of economists and developmental theorists can be seen most vividly in the infamous World Bank report *The East Asian Miracle*, which devotes a mere five of its 350-plus pages to agriculture and this segment largely taken up with charts.⁶⁵ From the point of view of the peasant or farmer, such coercive pressure and subsequent indifference might seem like old wine in new bottles. After all, an expression common during the Tokugawa period in Japan was: “squeeze sesame seeds and peasants as much as you can.”⁶⁶ The state has all too often “seen” farmers, like the land itself, as commodities to be manipulated and then placed outside the field of vision.

Although the two sides had different patrons, adopted different economic systems, pushed through different land reforms, espoused radically different ideologies, and operated in different global environments, North and South Korea followed a similar trajectory in agricultural affairs well into the 1970s. And both countries managed to put considerable distance between themselves and the “developing” world. Agricultural yields, particularly in the early years of the Cold War, were not merely a sign of the success of the farming sector but a litmus test for the very legitimacy of the respective regimes. And in both countries, rapid industrialization largely benefited the agricultural spheres, reversing the usual equation. *Sanopi salaya nongopi sanda* – industry must live for agriculture to live – was the expression in the North for the dependency of the agricultural sector on industrial inputs of energy and machinery.⁶⁷ In the South,

⁶⁴ For a description of the Marxist-Leninist process of the “primitive accumulation of capital,” see Moishe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power* (New York: Norton, 1975). Walt Rostow’s five-stage developmental model can be found in W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). And W. Arthur Lewis’s classic description of agricultural surplus is in “Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour,” in A. N. Agarwala and S. P. Singh, eds., *The Economics of Underdevelopment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 433-4.

⁶⁵ *The East Asian Miracle*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels & Outcasts* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 269.

⁶⁷ L. Gordan Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003)

industrialization not only provided key inputs but also absorbed surplus labor and provided a market for agricultural goods.⁶⁸

The Japanese legacy of improved agricultural techniques seemingly survived the horrors of division and war, despite associations with hated colonialism. In the early 1960s, South Korea could boast of levels of gross value added per hectare that were three to four times higher than other Asian developing countries and even on par with top European agricultural producers.⁶⁹ The North, meanwhile, was able to exceed the South in agricultural production in the late 1950s. Its grain output, according to government figures at least, increased five fold from 1946 (1.998 million tons) to 1987 (10 million tons).⁷⁰ Chemicals played a major role in these successes. Fertilizer application on both sides of the DMZ was so extensive that the two countries became two of the heaviest users in the world behind only the Netherlands and, depending on the year, China and Japan.⁷¹ In the South, Park Chung Hee early on took a dim view of fertilizer, remarking at one point that “the more it is used, the more it is needed.”⁷² But the drive to boost production by all means necessary eventually overwhelmed his attempts to rely on compost in order to save critical industrial resources. In the North, too, compost and manure were more important for farmers at the beginning, but by the 1960s chemical fertilizers had become critical inputs.⁷³ Pesticide use increased dramatically, in part to make up for the diminishing returns from the maximal use of fertilizers.⁷⁴ Both states also continued the Japanese tradition of relying on the state apparatus for agricultural research to find new and improved seed varieties.

The experiences of North and South converged not only because of a common source in Japanese colonialism but because they were inscribed in much larger global trends. The Green Revolution was transforming agriculture the world over according to a new industrial template copied in part from the earlier Japanese model and based on a range of new seed varieties dependent on chemical inputs and considerable irrigation. There was the tenfold increase in fertilizer use from 1950 to 1990 and a consequent tripling of grain production.⁷⁵ But even before the adoption of the Green Revolution throughout the Third World in the 1960s, both capitalist and communist agricultural models had come to share a structural similarity: large-scale, centralized, mechanized production of standardized commodities. The “convergence thesis” that had a brief vogue among social scientists in the 1970s – by which capitalism and communism would converge at the distant horizon

⁶⁸ Burmeister (1988), p. 3.

⁶⁹ Francks (1999), p. 31.

⁷⁰ Nam Sung-woon, “Feeding the People: Possible Agricultural Normalization in North Korea,” *East Asian Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2002).

⁷¹ Heather Smith and Yiping Huang, “Achieving Food Security in North Korea,” paper prepared for LCNV conference, “Korean Peninsula: Enhancing Stability and International Dialogue,” Rome, November 19, 2001, p. 212; <http://www.mi.infn.it/~landnet/corea/proc/039.pdf>

⁷² Bernie Wideman, “The Plight of the South Korean Peasant” in Frank Baldwin, ed., *Without Parallel* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), p. 295.

⁷³ Mitsuhiko Kimura, “Conditions of Agricultural Production in North Korea in 1946-1949,” Discussion Paper, Asian Historical Statistics project (Tokyo: Hitotsubashi University, July 1996), p. 11.

⁷⁴ Kang and Ramachandran, p. 796.

⁷⁵ Gary Paul Nabhan, *Coming Home to Eat* (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 72

point of mass production and consumption – was in fact an accurate description of the agricultural sector from the 1920s into the Cold War period.⁷⁶ Just as Karl Polanyi could describe the ideological convergence around state intervention to control the unpredictable market as the “Great Transformation” of the 1930s, so too did capitalist, communist, and corporatist states alike agree that the state should facilitate the growth and eventual domination of industrial agriculture.⁷⁷ The similarities in approach to modernization between North and South, then, was over-determined by common roots in Japanese colonialism, shared attributes of Korean culture, and the homologous structures of industrial agriculture in both “East” and “West” during the Cold War.

There is perhaps no better example of this convergence on the Korean peninsula than the *Saemaul Undong* in the South and the *Chollima* program in the North. Both programs emphasized food self-sufficiency. Both built on the Japanese/Green Revolution model and cast a backward glance at “revitalization” movements of the colonial era. Both were top-down and authoritarian. And both, in achieving high yields early on, planted the seeds of their own demise.

North Korea launched its program for rapid growth – the “Horse that Flies a Thousand Li” movement or *Chollima* – in the late 1950s. Applied to both the industrial and agricultural spheres, *Chollima* was a brand of Stakhanovism that “encouraged” overproduction of the state plan. In the countryside, *Chollima* relied on the “rural technical revolution” of mechanization, electrification, chemicalization, and irrigation – all dependent, tellingly, on energy inputs and all based on the earlier Japanese model. Collectivization had enabled greater economies of scale, a key component of industrial-style agriculture, and the *Chollima* movement further reduced the number of collective farms from roughly 13,000 to around 4,000.⁷⁸ Also important for North Korea’s initial agricultural success were new seed varieties, which impressed the leadership enough to bestow (alternate) membership in the 6th Central Committee to their developer.⁷⁹ Not satisfied with simply increased yields, the North Korean regime aimed for full self-sufficiency. In February 1967, Kim Il Sung announced that it was imperative to increase the food supply to at least 10 million tons, thus enabling the country to export any surpluses.⁸⁰ The rural technical revolution was cranked up a notch. Between 1961 and 1977, for instance, the number of tractors grew by 7 percent a year, but then jumped to 14 percent from 1977 to 1984.⁸¹ As in the capitalist world, North Korean agriculture became even more dependent on energy and high-priced inputs. With these efforts, North Korea attained near self-sufficiency in grain, according to the CIA, at some point

⁷⁶ Scott (1998), p. 197.

⁷⁷ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

⁷⁸ Joungwon Alexander Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 196.

⁷⁹ Tai Sung An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1983), p. 129.

⁸⁰ Nam Sung-woon, “Feeding the People: Possible Agricultural Normalization in North Korea,” *East Asian Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (autumn 2002), p. 92. The numbers in the original quote in the text are off by a factor of ten, as is demonstrated by charts in the same article. I adjusted the numbers accordingly.

⁸¹ Heather Smith and Yiping Huang, “Achieving Food Security in North Korea,” get full citation

in the 1970s.⁸² Although North Korea claimed production of the fabled 10 million tons of grain at the end of the second seven-year plan in 1984, South Korean sources provided a more realistic figure of 6.26 million tons.⁸³

Chollima was conceived of as a bootstrap operation – a drawing upon indigenous resources to effect a monumental economic transformation. Self-sufficiency was central to North Korean philosophy: a nationalist rejection of both variants of globalization, U.S. and Soviet. While these global systems were in competition, North Korea could profit from its autarkic, independent position. When the United States and Soviet Union began to cooperate – for instance, with the huge grain deal of 1973 – the writing was on the wall for North Korea’s solipsistic brand of economics.

Influenced by the success of the *Chollima* program in the north, Park Chung Hee began to turn his attention to a topic he’d largely neglected in the early 1960s. Despite declaring an “agriculture first” policy in 1963, Park only began to address the modernization of the agricultural sector after mid-decade. In 1966, he gave a speech to the National Assembly saying that Korea was “preparing to transform the rural sector so that it could export products and provide resources for industry.” He was even willing to use money from the Japanese, secured in the 1965 normalization treaty, to modernize the rural sector.⁸⁴ But the full scope of the *Saemaul Undong* or New Village Movement, by most accounts, only took shape gradually. What started out as a distribution of surplus concrete for infrastructure improvements in the countryside eventually grew into a full-scale program for agricultural and spiritual renewal. It fulfilled a major strategic goal – “it furthered Korean autonomy and demonstrated to North Korea that South Korea was progressing” – as well as saving the government \$200 million in foreign exchange and boosting Park’s political fortunes in the countryside after his poor showing in the 1971 elections.⁸⁵

Like *Chollima*, the *Saemaul* program emphasized mechanization and energy-intensive inputs. In 1972, there were only 272 tractors in all of South Korea. Eight years later, the number had increased ten-fold (and reached 41,203 in 1990).⁸⁶ The centerpiece of the program was a new variety of rice that responded to greater applications of fertilizer. Introduced in 1971, with the politically significant name of *Tongil* (Unification), the new variety at least initially produced 20-30 percent greater yields, but met with a great deal of consumer and farmer resistance because of its taste and susceptibility to pests. This didn’t stop the government from forcing farmers to plant the variety. In a style reminiscent of the Japanese colonial administration, *Saemaul* officials even destroyed traditional variety seedbeds when necessary.⁸⁷ As sociologist Larry Burmeister concludes in his study of the experiment, “this type of official penetration into everyday affairs at the county and township levels, a legacy of Japanese colonial rule, is extremely

⁸² An, p. 128.

⁸³ *North Korea Business Fact Book* (Seoul: Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, 2001), p. 37.

⁸⁴ Pinkston, p. 41.

⁸⁵ David Steinberg, *Korean Agricultural Research: The Integration of Research and Extension* (Washington, DC: Agency for International Development, 1982), p. 1ff.

⁸⁶ Francks, p. 139.

⁸⁷ Burmeister (1988), p. 59.

intense by third world standards.”⁸⁸ The official penetration also resembled North Korean methods. The full-color *Saemaul* annuals produced by the South Korean government reveal many other similarities with the North. In the 1982 edition, for instance, Chun Doo Hwan performs “on the spot guidance” just like his counterpart in the North, Kim Il Sung. There are mass meetings, propaganda songs (“The Song of *Saemaul*”), the conferring of medals, an emphasis on law and order.⁸⁹ *Saemaul* also proved as flexible a concept as North Korea’s *juche sasang* (ideology of self-reliance), capable of being applied to factory, cities, schools, the military, and even nature preservation.⁹⁰ Finally, like *juche*, *Saemaul* was a much-vaunted export to Third World countries, which largely failed to impress given the crudity of the propaganda.⁹¹

And yet, for all of its political and technological defects, the *Saemaul* movement accomplished something quite dramatic. Throughout the developing world in the 1960s and 1970s, globalization in the form of the Green Revolution and increasing trade in agricultural products boosted production and depressed farming incomes, widening the split between urban and rural incomes.⁹² In South Korea, on the other hand, higher prices for agricultural produce and increased rice production narrowed the gap between rural and urban incomes.⁹³ From 1970 to 1975, rural incomes increased by 8.5 percent compared to the 2 percent increase for urban laborers.⁹⁴ By 1974, rural households had completely caught up with urban households.⁹⁵ At considerable cost, South Korea managed to achieve self-sufficiency in rice. Although the boost in rural incomes proved only a temporary departure from the “laws” of modernization – rural incomes began to slide in comparison to the cities after 1975⁹⁶ – South Korea for a time successfully followed the script of embedded liberalism. What was unusual was that other developing countries were not permitted such unorthodox policies. The key element of embedded liberalism was stability, and the United States needed a stable (and prosperous) South Korea for its larger Cold War strategy.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Saemaul in New Age* (Seoul: ROK Government, 1982).

⁹⁰ Mick Moore, “Mobilization and Disillusion in Rural Korea: the Saemaul Movement in Retrospect,” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Winter 1984-5), pp. 589-90.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 579. The Polish ambassador to South Korea concluded that *Saemaul* bore too great a similarity to the discredited Communist system that “had left Poland economically ruined.” Cited in Mark Clifford, *Troubled Tiger* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), p. 94.

⁹² Friedmann (1982), p. 260.

⁹³ Rice production grew from 1970 to 1977 at a rate of 4.1 percent. See Dong-Hi Kim and Yong-Jae Joo, “The Food Situation and Policies in the Republic of Korea” (Paris: Development Centre Studies--OECD, 1982), p. 26.

⁹⁴ Nancy Abelman, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 206-7. It is interesting to note that during this period, South Korea became a less egalitarian society, at least judging by the rise in the GINI coefficient from .33 in 1970 to .38 in 1976. Richard E. Barrett and Soomi Chin, “Export-oriented Industrializing States in the Capitalist World,” in Deyo, op. cit., p. 29. This decrease in equity contrasts to the record from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, when the ratio of the incomes of the top 20 percent compared to the bottom 20 percent fell from 15 to 1 to 5 to 1. James Grant, “Development: the End of Trickle Down?” *Foreign Policy*, no. 12 (Autumn 1973), p. 51.

⁹⁵ Anderson (1987), p. 13.

⁹⁶ Abelman (1996), op. cit.

In order to ensure South Korea's economic success, political stability, and military security, the United States pursued two consecutive strategies. First the U.S. government provided enormous amounts of essentially free grain under the U.S. Farm Surplus Importation Agreement or PL480. The U.S. farm sector, protected from competition, was producing huge surpluses, which the U.S. government absorbed both to subsidize agricultural production and to redirect for political purposes. Between 1961 and 1965, U.S. food aid accounted for more than a third of the world's wheat trade.⁹⁷ Korea's place in this new "international food order" was initially clear: dependency. The food aid provided "almost one-tenth of Korea's grain consumption and accounted for 90 percent of all grain imports in the 1950s and early 1960s," and not incidentally created markets for U.S. goods.⁹⁸ It was a windfall for companies like Cargill that had unrestricted access to the South Korean market, particularly for feed grains.⁹⁹ It created new tastes, such as wheat and bread, in a country that hitherto had no bakeries. It helped to increase industrial production both directly (through the supply of cotton to the textile industry) and indirectly (by allowing the government to redirect resources into manufacturing).¹⁰⁰ What PL480 didn't do, though, was provide much of an incentive for the South Korean government to boost its own production of food.¹⁰¹ Indeed, it was only as the United States signaled the end of the aid program in the late 1960s that Park Chung Hee saw the need for a new, government-financed rural policy of modernization.¹⁰²

The second strategy enacted on the heels of the PL480 phase-out was acceptance of South Korea into the consensus on embedded liberalism from which most other developing countries were excluded. In the two decades between the time South Korea joined GATT in 1967 and the trade wars of the 1980s, the United States permitted South Korea to build up export industries through state-led development, export incentives, and tariff barriers to protect infant industries. So, too, did Seoul's attempts to maintain grain self-sufficiency – and keep out imports – remain largely unchallenged until the 1980s.¹⁰³ The reports of international financial institutions accepted South Korea's push for self-

⁹⁷ Friedmann (1982), p. 264.

⁹⁸ Anderson (1987), p. 7.

⁹⁹ Mitchel Wallerstein, *Food for War-Food for Peace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1980), p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ John Cathie, *Food Aid and Industrialization* (Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Co, 1989), p. 128, 155.

¹⁰¹ Ban et al, p. 239.

¹⁰² The push for self-sufficiency did not preclude a parallel track of playing the "rice card" in influence-peddling in Washington. The *Saemaul* period coincided with the bribes distributed by the Korean government and the KCIA, assisted by Tongsun Park and the Unification Church, to acquire cheap rice from California and Louisiana, but more importantly cement the U.S.-ROK military alliance. In late 1969, for instance, Park suggested to his congressional contacts that the South Korean government would purchase 400,000 tons of rice from Japan, not the United States, unless Congress approved an additional \$50 million in military aid. Robert Boettcher, *Gifts of Deceit* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 75. Influence-peddling in Washington was only one small part of the corrupt practices of a succession of authoritarian South Korean regimes, with the ruling party estimated to have "at least 50 percent of all private projects receiving U.S. aid." See Stephan Haggard and Tun-jen Cheng, "State and foreign capital in the East Asian NICS," in Deyo, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁰³ While a preference for laissez-faire generally distinguishes Anglo-American from continental European economics, the neo-liberal position didn't harden in the United States until the late 1970s. Just as the South Korean state intervened in the economy throughout the 1970s, U.S. administrations also flirted with interventionism, such as Nixon's wage and price control policies.

sufficiency, at least in rice and barley.¹⁰⁴ During the height of the Cold War, the United States often placed geopolitical considerations above narrow economic gain. Food self-sufficiency for some key countries was more important than market opportunities for U.S. farmers. So, too, did the United States develop the Green Revolution for the more general purpose of diminishing radicalism among peasant populations in the Third World. Boosting yields in key countries such as India and Mexico was a linchpin in the strategy to deny the communists any foothold among the poor.¹⁰⁵ Given the record of radicalism among the South Korean peasantry, which was behind the civil conflicts in the South between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Korean War, successful agricultural development – as opposed to mere dependency on food aid – was critically important if the United States was to demonstrate the superiority of the capitalist model on the peninsula.

The *Saemaul* period, which corresponded to South Korea's entrance into the system of embedded liberalism, was thus an intriguing paradox of globalization. The South Korean government was promoting a global model of production in the countryside while, through its price policies, protecting farmers from the full force of world trade. At the same time, the country was participating in a truly global system in which all industrialized countries were protecting their agricultural systems even as they continued to build a multilateral trading order through the GATT. The political and economic compromises of embedded liberalism, made possible by the centrifugal force of geopolitics, could not hold indefinitely.

Although South Korea was sheltering the countryside during the *Saemaul* period, the global economy could still be felt even in the most remote villages. When Clark Sorenson began his field work in the remote village of Sangongni in the mid-1970s, it took him a full year to realize that he was not observing a truly isolated, traditional community. The migration to the cities had been more than simply a population transfer. "As I analyzed my data, I began to understand the tremendous scale and importance of off-farm migration," he writes. "When talk began of farm prices and the Japanese quota on Korean silk cocoons," I began to realize that the village was integrated into the world economy."¹⁰⁶ The movement from rural communities to cities, a facet of modernization, becomes a key component of globalization when relatives in urban areas serve as the conduits of global culture and intermediaries in the global economy for their family back home.

For both Koreas, the agrarian sectors in the Cold War period experienced the same compression of development experienced in the manufacturing sector. The transfer of population from the farms to the factories – the proletarianization of the Korean peninsula – occurred within a radically short period of time. In the South, from 1957 to

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, Parvez Hasan's report for the World Bank: *Korea: Problems and Issues in a Rapidly Growing Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 144. Also the OECD report by Dong-Hi Kim and Yong-Jae Joo, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ John Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 187.

¹⁰⁶ Clark Sorenson, *Over the Mountains are Mountains* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 37.

1980, 11 million rural inhabitants migrated to the cities.¹⁰⁷ In the 1960s, as in the Japanese period, Korean farmers sold rice and bought cheaper food. A young farmer from a rice-growing region told journalist Bernie Wideman that he was moving to Seoul, of all things, “so that I can eat rice.”¹⁰⁸ In the 1970s, South Korean universities came to be known as “monuments of cow skeletons,” for farmers would do anything to send their children to the cities for education, even to the point of selling their cows and their land and taking out loans.¹⁰⁹ By 1999, because of such countless sacrifices, the agricultural share of the labor force had fallen to 10 percent, just slightly behind Europe.¹¹⁰ And agriculture’s share in the GDP followed the expected trajectory of “developed” countries: 50 percent after World War II, 33 percent in 1965 and only 5 percent in 1997.¹¹¹ North Korea experienced a similarly industrial-strength version of industrialization, what Stalin called in another context the pulling of a country “kicking and screaming into the 20th century.” At least in the immediate post-Korean War period, a considerable number of North Koreans moved to the cities such that, by 1962, the urban-rural split in the two countries was comparable.¹¹² Thereafter, the population transfer in North Korea was not nearly as dramatic, for 29.4 percent were still working the land in 2001.¹¹³ Agriculture as a share of GDP has remained quite high at about 30 percent in 2000.¹¹⁴

This compression of development, because it is in the living memory of many Koreans, means that pre-industrial culture remains close to hand in ways not quite so widespread in other developed countries.¹¹⁵ In the South, rural culture permeates even the most metropolitan sensibilities. In the North, a traditional Confucian culture has survived to the present day and the rigid class structure of the feudal era can be seen as a palimpsest faintly visible beneath the current three classes of loyal, wavering, and hostile. Although many peasants moved up in society in the early period, judging by the records of the Workers’ Party, class structures have since calcified.¹¹⁶ According to a recent defector, once a farmer pretty much always a farmer.¹¹⁷ I will return below to the impact of this rural experience on contemporary Korean culture.

¹⁰⁷ Hagan Koo, “From Farm to Factory,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 55, no. 5 (October 1990), p. 675.

¹⁰⁸ Wideman, p. 297.

¹⁰⁹ Cho Young-rae, *A Single Spark: The Biography of Chun Tae-il* (Seoul: Dolbegae Publishers, 2004), p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Fred Gale, Agapi Somwaru, and Xinshen Diao, “Agricultural Labor: Where are the Jobs?” in Fred Gale, ed., *China’s Food and Agriculture: Issues for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 2002), p. 44.

¹¹¹ Catherine Moreddu, Carmel Cahill, and Kyung-Tae Oh, *Review of Agricultural Policies in Korea*, (Paris: OECD, 1999), p. 29.

¹¹² In 1962, 40.6 percent of the population in the North was urban compared to 40.8 percent of the South. Jungwon Kim, p. 200.

¹¹³ Food and Agriculture Organization statistics; <http://www.ffa.org/library/stats/2003/02.html>

¹¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization statistics; <http://www.ffa.org/library/stats/2003/21.html>

¹¹⁵ Dennis Hart, *From Tradition to Consumption* (Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Company, 2001), no page number.

¹¹⁶ For information on the early composition of the Workers’ Party, see Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution: 1945-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁷ “In North Korea, the children of peasants are destined to remain peasants. They are systematically prevented from climbing the social ladder and can only advance by joining the army or by greasing a lot of palms.” Kang Chol-Hwan, *Aquariums of Pyongyang* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 164.

Fourth Wave: World Trade

As the Cold War advanced, both North and South Korea slowly came to the realization that the global systems to which they were affiliated were shifting beneath their feet. In 1967, South Korea became an official member of the GATT, but this decision initially held little importance for the farming sector. During the 1970s, Korean agriculture remained protected. It wouldn't be until 1986 that the liberalization of agriculture fell within the auspices of GATT (the Uruguay Round) and the South Korean farming sector faced an increasingly neo-liberal trading regime. As one analyst correctly predicted at the time, the Uruguay Round agreements indeed marked "symbolically at least, the beginning of the end of the distinctive systems of agricultural support and agricultural policy that have characterized the adjustment process in East Asia."¹¹⁸ The systems were not, as I've argued, quite so distinctive as they were characterized at the time. And South Korea gradually discovered that membership in the club of embedded liberalism came with obligations as well as privileges.

The era of embedded liberalism – combined with the globally supported and transmitted Green Revolution – served U.S. purposes admirably during the Cold War. By the late 1970s, however, advocates of free trade began to regain their ascendancy. They lamented the growth of protectionism in advanced industrial states and its spread to middle-income countries.¹¹⁹ The entire trade system, in fact, was reputed to be in "crisis," particularly agricultural trade since it lay outside the GATT. Free trade advocates urged countries to move from – and this is a telling expression – "national economic *coherence* to national economic competitiveness."¹²⁰ (This suggests in a perverse reading that there was something fundamentally *incoherent* about international trade, perhaps because it further exposed farmers to the "cobweb cycle" of inversely related prices and production but this time on a global basis.¹²¹)

Whether the trade system was in crisis or not, the United States certainly was. Beginning in the 1970s, the U.S. government faced ever larger trade deficits accompanied by what would become in the 1980s huge budget deficits. After the 1973 U.S.-Soviet wheat deal, the United States boosted its agricultural production under the celebrated "fencerow-to-fencerow" policies. Rather than give away the surplus food in the quantities of the 1950s and 1960s, the newly neo-liberal U.S. government wanted to facilitate the expansion of farm sales into overseas markets. The sheer costs of the Cold War – the Marshall Plan, the Vietnam War, the arms race with the Soviet Union, and the acceptance of allies'

¹¹⁸ Francks (1999), p. 44.

¹¹⁹ Kym Anderson and Rodney Tyers, *Global Effects of Liberalizing Trade in Farm Products* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 4.

¹²⁰ Philip McMichael and Chul-Kyoo Kim, "Japanese and South Korean Agricultural Restructuring in Comparative and Global Perspective," in Philip McMichael, ed., *The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 22. Emphasis added.

¹²¹ The "cobweb cycle" refers to increased production – as a result of the Green Revolution and other innovations – leading to lower prices and, in the next season, lower production, which in turn prompts a rise in prices, stimulated production, and another turn of the cycle. Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 237.

protectionist policies for national security reasons – had shifted the calculus. As Farm Belt Senator Rudy Boschwitz put it, “if we do not lower our farm prices to discourage these developing countries from aiming at self-reliance now, our world-wide competitive position will continue to slide.”¹²² Under the Reagan administration, the U.S. government supported the structural adjustment of the economies of other countries – the removal of trade barriers, elimination of government subsidies, privatization of state sector industries – designed to facilitate the increase of U.S. exports and the reduction of the U.S. trade deficit. Since it was maintaining one of the most protected agricultural sectors in the world, South Korea was near the top of the list. Even in 1990, for instance, Korea’s nominal protection rate for agriculture remained 151 percent, compared to 116 percent for Japan and 54 percent for the European Community.¹²³

In the mid-1980s, then, the United States pursued two tracks to address its own budget and trade problems as well as the “crisis” of protectionism in world trade: applying pressure bilaterally to open specific markets and rallying support for including agriculture in the Uruguay Round of GATT in 1986. By the late 1980s, the U.S. government dusted off an old bilateral tool to discipline the “protectionists” who labored under the misapprehension that the system of embedded liberalism was still in force. This was Section 301 trade law, which had been enacted in 1974 to give the U.S. government the power to slap sanctions on countries using “unfair trade practices.” The decision of the United States not to play by the multilateral rules and negotiate give-and-take trade policy prompted even free-trade advocates like economist Jagdish Bhagwati to accuse Washington of “aggressive unilateralism.”¹²⁴ From the U.S. government point of view, though, it was necessary to resort to Section 301 because the GATT had become unworkable.

With these two strategies – Section 301 and bringing agriculture into the GATT – the United States effectively revived the laissez-faire approach of the late 19th century but this time within a multilateral system of presumed neutrality. East Asia and Europe were the strongest capitalist challengers of the United States. While the U.S. government lacked the muscle and the political will to take on the European Community, it went after both Japan and South Korea with a vengeance.¹²⁵ These two countries used similar arguments about food security in their battles with the United States in the 1980s, but perhaps because of latent mistrust did not forge a united front.¹²⁶ The failure to stand up

¹²² Quoted in Kristin Dawkins, “U.S. Agriculture Policy and the Uruguay Round,” in Vandana Shiva and Gitanjali Bedi, eds., *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 214.

¹²³ Masayoshi Homma, “Japan’s Agricultural Policy and WTO Negotiations,” in *Some Key Issues for the East Asian Food Sector*, Pacific Economic Papers, no. 305 (Canberra: Australia-Japan Research Centre, July 2000), p. 1.3.

¹²⁴ As Bhagwati argued at the time, the 301 tactic is “characterized by the (wholly distinct) fact that it enables the United States to unilaterally make demands for trade concessions by others without offering any matching, reciprocal concessions of its own that others might demand in turn.” Jagdish Bhagwati, “Introduction,” in Jagdish Bhagwati and Hugh Patrick, eds., *Aggressive Unilateralism: America’s 30 Trade Policy and the World Trading System* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 5.

¹²⁵ Helen Milner, “The Political Economy of US Trade Policy” in Bhagwati and Patrick, p. 178.

¹²⁶ Francks (1999), p. 96.

to the United States, as Europe did, led to considerable problems for Korean agriculture, as I'll discuss in the next section.

Changing Korean agriculture necessarily meant a change in consumption. But this was slow to come. Throughout the *Saemaul*/Green Revolution period, the South Korean government focused on production and restricted consumption as much as possible. Self-sufficiency required belt-tightening. As Larry Burmeister relates, "the government mandated 'rice-less' days for restaurants and public institutions, forbade the use of rice in the brewing of traditional Korean liquors, decreed the use of smaller rice bowls in restaurants to cut down on food waste, and stipulated the serving of a fixed rice/barley mixture in restaurants and other institutional settings."¹²⁷ It wasn't only rice. With much of its production slated for export, South Korea maintained only the barest outlines of a consumer culture at this point. Compared to today, it was a great deal more difficult to distinguish between Seoul and Pyongyang in the 1960s and 1970s, in terms of consumer culture not to mention the political sensibilities of the regimes. Multinational corporations had a rather limited presence in Seoul. For a taste of the "foreign," residents of the larger cities went out for *jajangmyen* and *tangsuyuk* at Korean-style Chinese restaurants.¹²⁸ McDonalds didn't open its first location until 1988 in the fashionable Apkujung section of Seoul. Coca-Cola, although present in South Korea from 1951, was too expensive and, at that time, strange-tasting to be ubiquitous. Globalization was transforming Korean production but had yet to make significant inroads into Korean consumption.

In contrast to the South, North Korea rejected all forms of economic globalization, of both the capitalist and communist varieties. By a combination of reverse engineering and indigenous ingenuity, North Korea built its own heavy manufacturing and light industry sectors. By the 1970s, in part as a reaction to the US-Chinese détente, North Korea made several half-hearted attempts to participate in the global economy by soliciting loans from Western governments and banks. In 1984, it instituted its first joint-venture law. Rising energy costs and a declining ability to generate hard currency revenues led to North Korea's defaulting on the loans; relatively few businesses took the country up on its joint venture offer. More critically, because of its relative isolation from the world capitalist economy and even from the more advanced COMECON economies of East Germany and Hungary, North Korea's eroded technological capacity led to a rapid decline in the industrial sector in the 1980s. Because of the intimate connection between industry and agriculture, North Korean farming, too, began to slip backward.

It wasn't only the capitalist world that was changing its food policies in the 1970s and 1980s. North Korea, too, found that its policy on self-sufficiency was diverging significantly from its putative allies. From 1960 to 1980, a global shift in agricultural trade was taking place in which the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe went from net exporters of food to net importers. The Soviet bloc was pushing for improvements in

¹²⁷ Burmeister (1988), p. 93.

¹²⁸ Kim kwang-ok, "Contested Terrain of Imagination: Chinese Food in Korea," in *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia*, David Wu and Tan Chee-beng, eds. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001), p. 207.

living standards: consumer products not just machine tools, meat fed with imported grain and not just home-grown bread. At this time, too, Japan and developing countries greatly increased their share of imported food.¹²⁹ To meet the rising need, the United States and Western Europe – along with Canada and Australia – were dumping food on the global market, and a portion of these surpluses crossed the Iron Curtain. Perhaps sensing that the shift of the Soviet bloc countries from exporters to importers doomed their economies to a fatal dependency on global capitalist markets, North Korea continued to stress self-sufficiency. So even as it was trying to attract joint ventures, North Korea continued to “cultivate its own garden” with its own version of a Green Revolution that was running out of energy.

Because of the technological decline of its industrial sector, the rising costs of energy, and this global transformation of agricultural trade, North Korea’s reverse-engineered Green Revolution sowed the seeds of the crisis to come. Meanwhile, South Korea’s approach to globalization – greater integration first into the system of embedded liberalism and then into an increasingly neo-liberal regime – generated its own brand of crisis.

The Crisis of Production

According to conventional thinking on agriculture on the Korean peninsula, the North got things wrong and South got things right. The evidence of the famine in the North and the general economic success of the South would seem to bear out this conclusion. South Korea had the advantage not only of large amounts of U.S. food aid, but the opportunity to reap the benefits of the global economy while remaining protected at least initially from its “creative destruction.” When the time came to join a new neo-liberal food order, South Korea’s international position was strong enough to weather any blows to its agriculture. North Korea tried to go against the grain of global economic trends – first *contra* the communist bloc and then the emerging global market – and failed.

Examined at a somewhat deeper level, however, the two Koreas by the mid- to late-1980s were facing a similar crisis in their agricultural systems. The chief difference was that South Korea had what North Korea didn’t: globally competitive industrial and service sectors.

Let’s take a closer look at this general crisis in agricultural production. As with East Asia more generally, both Koreas suffer from a lack of arable land (14-16 percent in North Korea, 17-20 percent in South Korea). Mountains and hilly terrain prevent large-scale farming on the peninsula, unlike the vast, uninterrupted plains of the United States or even the stretches of land available in China. Perhaps most critically, both countries have few indigenous energy sources, a dependency that puts them at the mercy of one of the most volatile global markets of all.¹³⁰ Additionally, in their attempts to modernize at top

¹²⁹ Hathaway, pp. 8-17.

¹³⁰ South Korea is the world’s tenth largest energy consumer, depends on imports for 100 percent of its oil needs, spends \$25 billion annually on oil alone, and just recently began pumping liquefied natural gas from its first gas field off the coast near Ulsan. “South Korea to Pump Natural Gas,” *KBS Global*, November 11,

speed, neither country paid much attention to the environment. As a result of their industrial and agricultural practices, both countries score extremely low on the 2002 World Economic Forum index of environmental sustainability: South Korea ranks 135 out of 142 countries while North Korea is only a few slots from the bottom at 140.¹³¹ For environmental, geographic, and economic reasons, then, agriculture on both halves of the Korean peninsula is not competitive in world markets and thus is under threat of being globalized out of existence.

The crisis in North Korean agriculture has been invariably described as a combination of political ineptitude and meteorological bad luck. Without discounting these two factors, I want to look at how globalization aggravated the country's agricultural problems.

First of all, North Korea's food crisis didn't simply strike in 1995 with the first floods. The timing is critical for understanding the impact of global conditions. The evidence suggests that North Korea's food problems began to accelerate in the mid-1980s, around the time that the Soviet Union was embarking on its own reforms and distancing itself from its erstwhile ally. For instance, a foreign resident of Pyongyang in 1987 reported that "apart from grain, there is not much else to eat."¹³² The 1987 allocation of wasteland for rural factory workers to use for private farming and the increased frequency of farmers' markets in the late 1980s (from once every ten days to daily) both suggest that the public distribution system was losing its capacity to meet basic needs.¹³³ Heavy flooding in 1990 prompted North Korea for the first time to appeal to international aid organizations and cut daily food rations nearly in half.¹³⁴ The "let's eat two meals a day" campaign, which was clearly a euphemism for greater scarcity, began in 1991. According to defectors, food riots in 1991 led to the mobilization of 4,000 People's Army troops and when the soldiers joined the rioters, 3,000 political security troops.¹³⁵ Interestingly, in response to the government request for aid, the UN World Food Program visited the country in 1991 and found no grounds for humanitarian relief.¹³⁶ It is tempting to speculate that the government invited in the aid agency for economic reasons but couldn't show them the real conditions for political reasons. By 1992, Kim Il Sung announced in his New Year's Address that the year would be one of "put-greater-efforts-

2004. North Korea is similarly dependent, but unlike the South has no nuclear reactors and its hydroelectric capability was reduced severely during the torrential rains and floods of the mid-1990s.

¹³¹ "Environmental Sustainability Index, 2002 Rankings," Global Leaders for Tomorrow Environment Task Force, World Economic Forum; <http://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/indicators/ESI/rank.html>; accessed 10/30/04.

¹³² Andrew Holloway, *A Year in Pyongyang*, http://www.aidanfc.net/a_year_in_pyongyang.html; accessed 10/30/04.

¹³³ Jae Kyu Park, *North Korea in Transition and Policy Choices: Domestic Structure and External Relations* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1999), pp. 115, 118.

¹³⁴ Marina Ye Trigubenko, "Economic Characteristics and Prospect for Development: With Emphasis on Agriculture," in Han S. Park ed., *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 156.

¹³⁵ Jae-Jean Suh, "North Korea's Social System," in Tae Hwan Ok and Hong Yung Lee, eds, *Prospects for Change in North Korea* (Seoul: Research Institute for National Unification, 1994), p. 247.

¹³⁶ Andrew Natsios, *The Great North Korean Famine* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute for Peace, 2001), p. 166.

into-agriculture.”¹³⁷ In 1993, cold weather reduced the food supply by 500,000 tons. Hail damage in 1994 caused a 1.2 million ton reduction.¹³⁸ This time, according to Andrew Natsios, North Korea asked for food aid from the United States but was told that only conditions of famine would release any shipments.¹³⁹ When the heavy rains and floods hit in 1995, a problem compounded by a bad harvest in China that year, famine indeed struck the country.

The weather cataclysms wreaked havoc on an agricultural system that was already in bad shape. Political incompetence certainly played a role. But the North Korean government also made mistakes that were routine for other governments. In fact, North Korea made precisely the misjudgments that plagued the promoters of the Green Revolution: that oil would remain cheap and that environmental considerations were immaterial.¹⁴⁰ In other words, North Korea believed in industrial agriculture even when material conditions should have shaken its faith.

North Korea’s agriculture was fatally dependent on energy inputs. Energy was needed to run machines, to produce fertilizer and pesticides, to keep the food distribution system working. This dependency began to produce strains in the 1970s, when energy prices rose around the world, but the real crunch came in the late 1980s.¹⁴¹ Oil imports, the coal supply, the supply of electricity, and total energy consumption were all halved between 1990 and 1996.¹⁴² Without cheap energy from China and the Soviet Union, both of which were demanding payment in hard currency in the early 1990s, North Korea simply couldn’t afford to run its farms. North Korea’s tractors alone required 140,000 tons of oil per year. In 1990, it was consuming almost what it needed at 120,000 tons, but as the decade progressed, tractor fuel consumption dropped to roughly 25,000-35,000 tons.¹⁴³ Domestic fertilizer production fell by 80-90 percent between 1990 and 1995.¹⁴⁴ North Korea’s industrial agriculture had been exposed to global market conditions almost overnight. Unlike the Soviet bloc countries’ experience of shock therapy, North Korea did not opt for such a rapid exposure and was even minimally prepared for it. Nor did it have China’s advantages of a more secure resource base and the space of time necessary to accomplish a gradual harmonization with the global economy.

North Korea’s disregard of the environment, another example of convergence between capitalist and communist systems, also proved fatal. Visiting agronomists have noted the exhaustion of the soil as a result of over-fertilization. In a desperate attempt to boost

¹³⁷ Andrea Savada, ed., *North Korea: A Country Study* (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1994), p. 139.

¹³⁸ Nam, op. cit.

¹³⁹ Natsios, p. 141.

¹⁴⁰ Ignacy Sachs, “Toward a Second Green Revolution?” in Bernhard Glaeser, ed., *The Green Revolution Revisited* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 193-4.

¹⁴¹ On energy problems in the 1970s, see *North Korea Business Fact Book*, p. 36.

¹⁴² James Williams, David von Hippel, and Peter Hayes, “Fuel and Famine: Rural Energy Crisis in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” Paper PP46, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, 2000, p. 6.

¹⁴³ Meredith Woo-Cumings, “The Political Ecology of Famine: The North Korean Catastrophe and Its Lessons,” unpublished paper, p. 43.

¹⁴⁴ Williams, von Hippel, and Hayes, p. 7.

yields in the early 1990s, the government authorized farmers to farm pretty much anywhere they could, which resulted in crop cultivation on marginal lands, deforestation, and the erosion of top soil. This decision to “privatize” cultivation came at precisely the time when the government could have intervened more deftly in the system. Here too, in ignoring soil quality, North Korea was part of a larger trend: one-third of the world’s arable land has been lost to erosion in the last forty years.¹⁴⁵ As in other parts of the world, industrial agriculture made North Korea particularly vulnerable when bad weather hit. In a comparable situation, after Hurricane Mitch hit Central America in October 1998, conventional farms suffered 60-80 percent more soil erosion and crop damage than conservation-oriented farms.¹⁴⁶ The bad weather, too, was not just a local problem but a larger, global phenomenon. Economist Meredith Woo-Cumings has argued that the global effects of El Nino, which may have exacerbated the famine conditions that sparked the Tonghak Rebellion, also contributed to North Korea’s food crisis of the 1990s.¹⁴⁷

North Korea has recently decided to try to control the impact of globalization on its economy by implementing market reforms. The arrival of the “market” in North Korea has eased the crisis for some, accentuated it for others. The economic reforms of 2002, which raised grain prices by 40-60,000 percent and wages by only 1,000 percent or so, have reportedly created considerable disparities in what was once, except for the elite and the victims of the labor camp system, a relatively equitable society. The spread of farmers’ markets – now simply “markets” – has put a wide variety of foods on display throughout the country though few can apparently afford the higher ticket items. Department stores in Pyongyang have been privatized; Family Mart – South Korea’s version of 7-11 – is slated to open a store next year in the Kaesong industrial zone.¹⁴⁸ Since the market in “transitional economies” tends to favor industrial agriculture – to be competitive in world markets or to satisfy consumer demands for new tastes such as McDonald’s French fries – these market reforms may only reinforce the underlying problems in the North Korean countryside. In short, North Korea’s agricultural crisis – which stems from the drawbacks of the Green Revolution, its own rapid modernization program, and its failure to create a technologically competitive manufacturing sector – threatens to persist whether under “socialist” or “market” conditions.

Most South Koreans have plenty to eat, and the press contains considerably more debates about food waste than food scarcity. But South Korean agriculture is experiencing its own crisis, for some of the same reasons as the North. South Korea has also been heavily dependent on energy, particularly for its fertilizer and pesticide applications. Its rate of 231 kilograms of chemical fertilizer per hectare in 1990 was the highest in the world

¹⁴⁵ West Jackson, “Farming in Nature’s Image,” in Andrew Kimbrell, ed., *The Fatal Harvest Reader* (Washington: Island Press, 2002), p. 68.

¹⁴⁶ Jason Clay, *World Agriculture and the Environment* (Washington: Island Press, 2004), p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ On Tonghak, see Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 91-2, 124-5; on North Korea see Woo-Cumings, op. cit.

¹⁴⁸ “FamilyMart to Open Outlet in Gaesong,” *Joongang Ilbo*, November 9, 2004.

except for The Netherlands.¹⁴⁹ It too largely ignored the environmental consequences of rapid industrialization and now faces considerable water, air, and soil pollution.¹⁵⁰

There are some important differences as well. South Korea's rural sector is fragmented. Although the government lifted the 3-hectare limit on farm size in 1996, the average farm in 1997 was still only 1.3 hectares, thirteen times smaller than the European average and about 140 times smaller than the United States.¹⁵¹ The government's push for farmers to continually modernize has shouldered them with an enormous debt burden. And South Korean farmers have been additionally vulnerable because, unlike in Japan, they derive most of their income from their farms rather than from side occupations.¹⁵²

But the chief crisis facing South Korean agriculture today results from the pressure of free trade. The trade battles between the United States and South Korea had been going on for some years over fibers, footwear, color televisions and the like, but by the late 1980s, food products became increasingly the locus of tension. In 1988, the United States responded to industry appeals by using Section 301 to open up the cigarette and wine markets in Korea.¹⁵³ Ultimately, though, the focus of U.S. attention came down to beef and rice. In addition to being key elements of the Korean diet, beef and rice were inextricably linked to what it meant to be Korean, as I'll discuss in the next section. Much as U.S. rural ideology revolves around saving the family farm, protectionism in Korea has been justified in terms of ensuring a steady supply not simply of beef and rice, but *Korean* beef and rice.

In 1989, the U.S. government threatened to employ Super 301 over beef. One day before the sanctions were due to be imposed, Korea buckled. Despite pressure from its own livestock producers, the Korean government realized that it had more to lose from retaliatory tariffs on its manufactured goods. During the 1990s, however, through various complicated mechanisms, the Korean government continued to limit the access of U.S. beef to the Korean market, particularly in the high-end market.¹⁵⁴ Health concerns over BSE outbreaks in 1996 and E. coli in 1997 provided another justification for import restrictions. The financial crisis of 1997, however, provided the wedge that many exporters and governments were waiting for, even though consumer demand was dropping in Korea and the *won* declining in value. The IMF-sponsored bail-out plan required the Korean government to remove many of the restrictions that had long characterized the protectionist economy. Foreign capital flowed into the country in the form of products, services, infrastructure, and controlling interests in Korean companies.

¹⁴⁹ Morredu et al., p. 62. Smith and Huang estimate South Korea's fertilizer application at 415 kilo per hectare, which includes nitrogenous, phosphate, and potash fertilizers. Smith and Huang, p. 212.

¹⁵⁰ Norman Eder, *Poisoned Prosperity* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1996).

¹⁵¹ Moreddu et al., p. 12.

¹⁵² Between 1985-87, Japanese farmers derived 86 percent of their income from off-farm work compared to 38 percent for Korean farmers. See Larry Burmeister, "South Korea's Rural Development dilemma," *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, no. 7 (July 1990), p. 712.

¹⁵³ Aie-Rie Lee and Yong U. Glasure, "The Political Dynamics of Trade Negotiation: The Korea-US Experience between 1960 and 1990," in Walter Jung and Xiao-bing Li, *Korea and Regional Geopolitics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁵⁴ See Pinkston, pp. 103-124.

The United States replaced Japan, briefly as it turned out, as South Korea's leading provider of imports.¹⁵⁵ In the beef industry, imports rose dramatically after 1998, from 125,000 Carcass Weight Equivalent (CWE) to 444,000 CWE in 2003.¹⁵⁶ As a result, the Korean beef industry now faces a stark choice. It can become competitive by relying on cheaper inputs or looser health, safety, and environmental standards. Or it can wither away except for a few producers targeting a high-end specialty market.

In terms of agricultural commodities, Korea's rice market remains the last hurdle before its market is, at least formally, fully liberalized. As laid out in a ten-year global trade agreement signed in 1994, South Korea managed to limit imports to 4 percent of domestic consumption. Facing domestic pressures – 15,000 rice farmers clashed with police in Seoul in November 2004 – the government managed to win another ten-year extension for its tariffs but only in exchange for doubling the percentage of foreign imports (parliament will consider the pact later in the spring). One common argument in South Korea is that the government opened up agricultural markets before Korean farmers had become “internationally competitive.” But this argument is belied by the fact that even after a ten-year adjustment period for rice producers, during which they intensified their mechanization and increased the size of their plots, they still can't compete against China or the United States.¹⁵⁷ As if these pressures were not enough, South Korean rice producers face other pressures of globalization. According to a 2004 report from the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, Asian rice producers face a significant risk from global warming. For every one degree centigrade increase in temperatures at night, IRRI expects a 10 percent decline in rice yields.¹⁵⁸

Across the board, from tobacco to beef, South Korea caved in to demands by the United States and other countries to liberalize its agricultural sector, which has “had devastating effects on Korea's food self-sufficiency by reducing the self-sufficiency ratio from 65 to 14.”¹⁵⁹ Part of the reason for sacrificing self-sufficiency lay with the need of South Korea's industrial sector to export freely to the rest of the world. Another reason was that South Korea had already showed signs of liberalization, which raised expectations for further moves. Free trade advocates within the South Korean government also welcomed the outside pressure – what the Japanese call *gaiatsu* – so that they could shift the blame for the changes to foreign actors.¹⁶⁰ And indeed, whereas before, critics

¹⁵⁵ Marcus Noland, “Bilateral Trade Relations Not as Contentious as Before,” *The Korea Times*, May 12, 2003.

¹⁵⁶ “Republic of Korea's Beef Situation,” Federation of American Scientists Online; <http://www.fas.usda.gov/dlp/countrypages/ksbfsit.html>; accessed 10/29/2004.

¹⁵⁷ See, e.g., Su Hwan Lim, “Liberalization of South Korean Agriculture and State Policies,” *Korea Observer*, vol. 34, no. 2 (summer 2003).

¹⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, instead of calling for governments to commit to regulations on carbon dioxide production, IRRI calls for research on new rice varieties that can tolerate the warmer temperatures. See “Asia's Rice Crop Under Threat,” *Asia Pulse*, October 28, 2004.

¹⁵⁹ Lee and Glasure, p. 25.

¹⁶⁰ Chulsu Kim, “Super 301 and the World Trading System” in Bhagwati, op. cit., pp. 253-4. Also C.S. Eliot Kang, “Segyehwa Reform of the South Korean Developmental State” in Kim, op.cit., pp. 85-6.

blamed the *Saemaul* movement for the widening disparity of urban and rural incomes, they now blamed free trade.¹⁶¹

Despite all of these changes, many economists and U.S. government officials still were not satisfied. In 2003-4, the average bound tariff on agriculture in Korea remained 62 percent (that is, Korea made a commitment at the WTO that its tariffs would not exceed this level) and quantitative restrictions remained on rice (that is, Korea was still protecting its rice production with non-tariff methods such as quotas). Food prices for Korean consumers remained two and a half times the world level.¹⁶² Critics of Korean “protectionism” – the residual commitment of the state to the old model of embedded liberalism – accused the Korean government of using health and safety mechanisms as a non-tariff barrier to trade. At the WTO level, in what are known as disputes over Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS), the first three allegations of violations came from the United States against South Korea. As of 2002, South Korea was responsible for one-fifth of the alleged violations.¹⁶³ In 2003, the U.S. government further complained that the South Korean government was imposing unequal treatment by insisting that importers pay for the mandatory testing of all agricultural products while the South Korean government covered the cost of the random tests of the products of domestic producers.¹⁶⁴

Health and safety concerns extend as well to the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMO). South Korea maintains rather strict guidelines on GM imports, including labeling at a 3 percent threshold (compared to Japan’s 5 percent and Europe’s .9 percent). So far it does not permit the planting of any GM varieties.¹⁶⁵ The GMO issue intersects with globalization in two major ways. GM proponents bill it as a second Green Revolution that has the capacity of remaking agriculture the world over. But GM is also

¹⁶¹ The debate over *Saemaul* is fierce. While one analyst goes so far as to praise the movement for integrating “local experience with centralized expertise,” (Bray, p. 168), critics have charged that “South Korea is a good example of a country that has experienced substantial economic growth without widespread sharing of its benefits among the rural populace and without decentralization of power to local government” (William Boyer and Byong Man Ahn, *Rural Development in South Korea* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), p. 22). For the more contemporary arguments, see, e.g., Choi Sei-Kyun, who writes that, “[o]ver the past 10 years, major agricultural-export countries, the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade, and the Uruguay Round have all served to apply pressure on Korea to open its agricultural markets. As a result, the income of farming households currently stands at only about 73 percent that of their urban counterparts.” See Choi Sei-Kyun, “Onset of FTAs and Korea’s Agricultural Sector,” *Korea Focus*, March-April 2004, vol. 12, no.2 (originally: *The KyungHyang Shinmun*, February 19, 2004). Also Hwang Su-cheol, “Government Tasks to Reform Korea’s Agricultural Policy,” *Korea Focus*, May-June 2003, vol. 11 no.3 (originally a paper presented at a seminar organized by the Seoul Institute of Economic and Social Studies, Seoul, March 14, 2003).

¹⁶² Marcus Noland, “The Strategic Importance of U.S.-Korea Economic Relations,” in *The United States and South Korea: Reinvigorating the Partnership* (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2004), p. 88.

¹⁶³ World Trade Organization website; http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e/sps_agreement_cbt_e/c5s2p1_e.htm; accessed 10/30/04.

¹⁶⁴ Nan Fife, “US-Republic of Korea Economic Relations in 2003: A Washington Perspective” in *Korea’s Economy 2004*, vol. 20 (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2004), pp. 56-7.

¹⁶⁵ For more on GMO in Asia, see John Feffer, “Much Depends on Asia,” *Yale Global Online*, forthcoming.

a way of reversing the declining global value of agricultural products by “adding value” – Vitamin A rice or additionally fortified vegetables – to boost prices. The United States and other GM producers such as Canada and Argentina have applied considerable pressure on the undecideds to make up their minds. So far, at least, South Korea has resisted. But the ubiquity of GM products (as well as the lower prices of the unenhanced varieties) will ultimately exert greater pressure than bilateral or multilateral U.S. threats, and may overwhelm South Korea’s current adherence to the “precautionary principle.” (North Korea, desperate for improved seed varieties and particularly those that promise the use of fewer pesticides, is apparently more willing to experiment.¹⁶⁶)

This issue of health and safety standards cuts both ways. They can also be used *against* Korea. New standards on health and safety, transparency, and environmental protection have put additional pressures on all agricultural producers, but particularly smaller ones. Meeting these standards costs money, and larger producers (countries, farms) are able to distribute the costs over greater output. The International Fund for Agricultural Development views this trend as hazardous to smaller farms: “Such agricultural globalization can undermine their economic advantages.”¹⁶⁷ The same can be said for smaller agricultural producing countries that don’t have the state resources to help their farming sectors make the adjustment.

Of course, U.S. imports are not the only threat to Korean growers. A free trade agreement with Chile threatens Korean fruit growers. Indeed, of the several agreements that Korea is considering, only the one with Japan would have any positive impact for Korean farmers.¹⁶⁸ The most significant and growing pressure comes from China, which has been liberalizing its economy rapidly after WTO accession and has expected its neighbors to follow suit. In 2003, China replaced the United States as South Korea’s leading trading partner. A large proportion of the imported produce available in Korea now comes from China. In 2000, the Korean government responded to complaints from farmers over cheaper imports by applying a 315 percent tariff on Chinese garlic. When China slapped trade restrictions on mobile phones and polyethylene, Korea backed down.¹⁶⁹

An even more contentious battle is shaping up around kimchi, a product that makes up, according to one estimate, 12.5 percent of the Korean diet.¹⁷⁰ The first round of the battle involved Japan, which controlled 80 percent of the kimchi trade outside of Japan and Korea. Emboldened by its global market share, the Japanese even had the temerity to lobby the Olympic Committee at the Atlanta games in 1996 to name its version of the product -- *kimuchi* -- as an official Olympic food. South Korea fought back by bringing

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Randall Ireson, American Friends Service Committee, Stanford, CA, October 12, 2004.

¹⁶⁷ Rural Poverty Report 2001, International Fund for Agricultural Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.10-11.

¹⁶⁸ Choi Sei-Kyun estimates that such an agreement would boost Korean exports to Japan by \$58 million annually. Choi Sei-Kyun, “Potential Impact of FTAs on Korea’s Agricultural Sector,” *Korea Focus*, January-February 2004, vol. 12., no 1 (originally: KDI Monthly National Economy, December 2003).

¹⁶⁹ “China, Korea Discuss Garlic Trade Dispute,” *People’s Daily*, June 30, 2000.

¹⁷⁰ Korean Food Research Institute; http://kimchi.kfri.re.kr/html_en/html/industry_01.htm; accessed October 30, 2004.

the case to the highest possible food arbiter: the Codex Alimentarius. In 2000, the vegetable sub-committee of the Codex ruled that the Korean name should hold sway (*kimchi*, not *kimuchi*) and that the Korean recipe be designated the international standard. In 2001, the Codex general session supported this decision.¹⁷¹

Winning the battle at the level of global standards, however, did not guarantee that Korea could make inroads in the global kimchi trade or even control its own market. Cheaper Chinese kimchi flooded the Korean market in 2003, part of a 60 percent increase in kimchi imports that year.¹⁷² It turned out to be cheaper to import Chinese kimchi than to import the cabbage to make it domestically. If the tradition of making kimchi at home still prevailed – aided perhaps in the modern era by new kimchi refrigerators – the issue of Chinese imports would be moot. But it is the eating of kimchi rather than making of kimchi that is gradually becoming the more salient aspect of Korean identity. Still, South Korea has come up with a novel if temporary solution to the problem. By 2005, two South Korean firms – G-Hanshin and Kyoungpyong International – are slated to begin producing kimchi in North Korea, 60 percent of which will then be exported to the South.¹⁷³

The growing economic muscle of China only accentuates the problems facing Korean agriculture. Neither South Korea nor North Korea can compete with its huge neighbor. South Korea can no longer protect its kimchi market. And as Seoul National University agricultural economist Lee Taeho explained to me pithily in an interview, “If North Korea can do something, China can do it much better.”¹⁷⁴ Even with organic farming, which some hold out as a potential comparative advantage for North Korean farms, China is several steps ahead, as a green agricultural exposition in Liaoning province in 2003 demonstrates: Chinese farmers in the three northernmost provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang are specifically targeting what would be North Korea’s natural markets of Japan and South Korea.¹⁷⁵

The waves of globalization that have washed over the peninsula have stimulated and aggravated the agricultural crises in North and South. Both countries suffer from the ills of industrial agriculture as it was promulgated first by Japan and then separately by the two authoritarian regimes in the post-war period. Both countries are over-dependent on energy to grow food and have largely ignored the environmental costs of their agricultural methods. Today, both countries face the challenge of growing food that can compete against foreign producers who are supplying cheaper products to the Korean market. As such, Korean agriculture is caught between the scissor blades of the globalizing strategies of the past (the industrial model of agriculture) and the globalizing strategies of the present (free trade).

¹⁷¹ John Feffer, “Food Fight,” *Gastronomica*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer 2001).

¹⁷² Yoo Soh-jung and Lee Chae-eun, “China invades local kimchi market,” *Korea Herald*, May 31, 2004.

¹⁷³ “Made-in-NK Kimchi to Be at Table,” *The Korea Times*, March 22, 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Prof. Lee Tae Ho, Seoul, October 6, 2004.

¹⁷⁵ “Northeast China Builds ‘Green’ Grain Base for Asia,” *Xinhua News*, February 11, 2003.

The crisis of agricultural production is also related to the notion, increasingly popular after the breakdown of the system of embedded liberalism, that food should be treated like any other commodity. But agriculture is not like a manufactured good. No longer uncompetitive in the production of 3-D chips, a factory can shift to the production of DVDs. Workers are retrained; the manufacturing capability is retained. But the citizens of the country do not need 3-D chips three times a day. The production of 3-D chips is not intimately connected to the contours of the land or the health of the air, water, and soil. It is not so easy or so wise to shut down the countryside. This is the dilemma that faces all countries with currently uncompetitive agriculture, North and South Korea included.

For the most part in this discussion, I've treated farmers as rather passive in the process of restructuring. "Most discussions of post-Korean War agriculture neglect farmer consciousness and resistance," anthropologist Nancy Abelmann has written. "This absence is in part due to the optimistic portrayal of agriculture in South Korea, which has been described as 'a country where the trickle down [of industrial development to the agricultural sector] did work.'"¹⁷⁶ The full story of farmer activism in the North has yet to be written. In the South, however, particularly after the income equalization of 1970-75, farmers have increasingly fought back against the looming threats to their livelihoods. They invoked older traditions such as the Tonghak rebellion. They rallied around newer concepts such as *minjung*, the philosophy that the people are actors using their historical suffering to shape their destiny. From the Sweet Potato incident of 1976 through the beef import protests of the mid-1980s to the rice import actions of the early 1990s, farmers staged demonstrations locally and in Seoul to air their grievances. They formed the National Farmers Association in 1987 to strengthen their local organizing efforts. They played an important role in the democratization movement and, on occasion, stiffened the government's backbone in trade negotiations (largely in rice).¹⁷⁷

Farmer activism continues today in South Korea, as the recent rice protests bear out. But two transformations in Korean consciousness have proven as challenging as the WTO or U.S. trade negotiators. *Minjung* activism has largely been displaced by *simin sahwa* (civil society organizations or NGOs). And there has been a considerable shift in attention in South Korean society from production to consumption. Some Korean commentators have used the phrase "no consumption, no production" to highlight the reversal in relationship between farmer and consumer.¹⁷⁸ The Korean farmer is expected to plant only what the consumer wants to buy and, increasingly, this consumer lives somewhere other than Korea. In the age of globalization, agriculture has become an increasingly faceless operation that merits fewer and fewer mentions in the media, in scholarship, and in the policy world, while consumption becomes not only the primary relationship that people have with food but a major constituent of identity at a local,

¹⁷⁶ Abelmann (1996), p. 202.

¹⁷⁷ For more information on farmer organizing, see Abelmann (1996), pp. 208-227.

¹⁷⁸ Hwang (2003) uses the phrase "no consumption, no production"; Jung-Il Kang and Song-Soo Lim, concur: "the orientation of agricultural markets will shift from producers to consumers." Jung-Il Kang and Song-Soo Lim, "Korean Agriculture into the New Millennium," in O. Yul Kwon and William Shepherd, *Korea's Economic Prospects* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2001), p. 196.

regional, and national level. Consumption is no longer experienced as a stage of agriculture, but something removed from it.¹⁷⁹ It is this that separates the two Koreas more than anything else. Food for North Korea continues to mean production, while for South Korea it increasingly means consumption.

The Crisis of Consumption

Globalization is not simply a set of forces that have shaped the production of goods on the Korean peninsula since 1492. Globalization has also transformed the way food is consumed: the ingredients, preparations, distribution and sale of commodities, and the role that eating plays in the ongoing transformation of Korean identity. As described above, globalization has precipitated a crisis in agricultural production in both North and South Korea. So, too, has globalization created a crisis on the consumption side, as Koreans struggle to maintain a coherent national identity in the face of an influx of non-Korean food and food habits (or, in the case of North Korea, a potential influx).

To understand this crisis of consumption, I will examine the changes in Korean diet, the methods by which change has occurred, the resistance to this change mounted by farmers and consumers, and the consequent impact on Korean identity. In the South, consumers have, to a greater or lesser extent, embraced the hybrid forms of culture that globalization has created, sacrificing a measure of “pure” traditional identity in the process. North Korea, meanwhile, remains deeply suspicious of hybridity, preferring to adopt some aspects of globalization and not others. While North and South continue to follow the Japanese script on agricultural production, they differ in their reading of the American script on food consumption.¹⁸⁰

Before examining the changes in Korean diet, I want to look at how globalization itself, as a phenomenon, is “consumed” on the Korean peninsula.

In the North, the government has permitted the import of foreign products such as Coke, worked closely with multinational corporations such as Fiat and Loxley, seems generally willing to liberalize its economic and financial sectors, and has even expressed interest in joining multilateral financial institutions. North Korean students and government officials have traveled to other countries for courses in market economics, while at home English has largely replaced Russian as the indispensable *lingua franca*. At the non-elite level, the food crisis stimulated more migration than at any other time since the Korean War, breaking the government’s monopoly on information flow. Although generally embracing the production side of globalization, the North Korean government has expressed disapproval of the consumer culture and the greater freedom of communication that accompany globalization. The rapidity with which average North Koreans have taken

¹⁷⁹ “Eating is an agricultural act,” writes Wendell Berry. “Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture.” Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in Deane Curtin and Lisa Heldke, *Cooking, Eating, Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 374.

¹⁸⁰ The “Japanese script” has now become the general model of industrial agriculture; the “American script” has become so thoroughly globalized as to be “postmodern” rather than national in origin.

to the expanded domestic markets suggests, however, that they at least are more willing to embrace the new mores.

In the South, meanwhile, globalization or *seggyehwa* was at the heart of the first democratic government's plans in the early 1990s – a “unique concept” by which South Korea was to reach the level of advanced nations.¹⁸¹ As a late developer, South Korea was well-positioned to leap-frog over its competitors by exploiting the technologies of globalization: computer chips, cell phones, and the Internet. To facilitate global communication, English has gone from being a required subject to an assumed capability. A large Korean diaspora connects the country to key markets in Japan, China, the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Membership in global institutions accelerated in the 1990s as South Korea joined the United Nations in 1991 and the OECD in 1996. South Korean culture – movies, TV shows, and music – have become popular exports, particularly in Asia. In short, South Korea has been well-poised to become a globalized country on the order of Sweden or The Netherlands even if it means sacrificing its agricultural sector to do so. If adherence to the East Asian model of development helped the country outpace other developing nations, the embrace of globalization can help South Korea take the next step: closing the gap with Japan and joining the very top ranks of the global economy.

In the South at least, polls can give us access to how “ordinary” Koreans think. So, for instance, a 2004 poll reveals that 81 percent of South Koreans believe globalization is generally good for the country (compared, for instance, to only 64 percent of Americans who feel the same way). When probed, however, this figure reveals a more ambivalent picture. For instance, a majority of South Koreans (52 percent) want their government to refuse to comply with unfavorable WTO decisions (compared to only 24 percent of Americans). And only 28 percent of Koreans believe that U.S. trade policies toward their country are fair, which suggests a lack of faith in the “level playing field” of international trade. The only truly positive sub-indicator of globalization is Korean support for international organizations, with the World Health Organization and the United Nations topping the list. (Indeed, despite the 1997 financial crisis, Koreans even rate the International Monetary Fund more warmly than do Americans.¹⁸²) One sociologist has gone so far as to assert that Koreans view globalization as a “dissolution of human ties” and thus evil.¹⁸³ This seems somewhat far-fetched and based on a rather non-representative sample. Even if globalization falls short of being evil in the Korean worldview, however, it is still often associated with an externally imposed hegemony that challenges “pure” Korean-ness, first in the form of Japanese colonialism and subsequently in the guise of American cultural and economic dominance.

¹⁸¹ Samuel Kim, “Korea and Globalization (Seggyehwa),” in Samuel Kim, ed., *Korea's Globalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁸² “Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), pp. 13-15.

¹⁸³ C. Fred Alford, *Think No Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 145.

Both North and South Korea are struggling to balance integration in the world market with adherence to national traditions. Both countries are in a continuous process of identifying what is essentially Korean and thus not subject to compromise with global economic rules and global food culture. As such, this dilemma is a restatement of the classic challenge posed by Japanese reformers in the Meiji era when they attempted to import “Western machines” while at the same time preserving “Eastern thought.” North Korea took this dichotomous approach to an extreme by absorbing outside technology to mechanize its agriculture beyond even the East Asian norm while attempting to keep out anything that might corrupt its neo-feudal culture. It continues to attempt to import the *techne* of capitalism stripped of its dangerous “spirit.” South Korea spent several decades absorbing both the ghosts and the machines of the “West,” but more recently has enjoyed, as I’ll discuss below, a revival of “Eastern thought.”

It is tempting to group all of the recent changes in food culture in South Korea – and to a lesser extent, North Korea – as modernization. Since this term implies a certain teleological development, I prefer to use Joseph Tobin’s expression “domestication.”¹⁸⁴ As in its technical meaning in the agricultural realm, domestication here implies not simply an identical reproduction but the taming of the unpredictable and the creation of something fundamentally new. From the 1980s on, Koreans domesticated global culture: Korean action-adventures in the Hollywood mode, Korean hip-hop, and Korean versions of global food such as kimchi burgers and *bulgogi* pizza.

To understand this process of domestication, I want to explore how global tastes have been “sold” to Koreans and how Koreans have preserved a measure of traditional identity, as well as the hybrid forms that have been created in between these two somewhat artificial positions. This discussion will necessarily focus on South Korea, given the lack of information available about consumer culture in the North, but I will draw parallels and contrasts whenever possible.

Let me start with three dishes that exemplify the three categories: Coca-Cola (the global), *poshintang* (the traditional), and *budae chigae* (the hybrid).

Coca-Cola is one of the first products of the most recent age of globalization to make it to Korea. The drink became an integral part of the lives of U.S. soldiers during World War II, who in turn spread the drink like so many global Johnny Appleseeds. The U.S. army encouraged the trend. “Incredibly,” Mark Pendergrast writes, “it appears that technicians who installed Coca-Cola plants behind the front lines were deemed as vital as those who fixed tanks or airplanes.”¹⁸⁵ What was once viewed as inextricably linked to U.S. values – one soldier explained in a letter home that he was fighting “as much to help keep the custom of drinking Cokes as I am to help preserve the millions of other benefits our country blesses its citizens with”¹⁸⁶ – became more a global brand than a specifically American product. In the sense that its national origin is effectively erased at both ends

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Tobin, “Introduction,” in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Remade in Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 4.

¹⁸⁵ Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola*, (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), p. 202.

¹⁸⁶ Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), p. 28.

of production and consumption, the drink has become the quintessential globalized product. As a Coke marketer explains, “people in remote corners of the world who don’t even know the names of their own capital cities know the name Coca-Cola” because “we’ve been able to infiltrate Coca-Cola into the minds and hearts and lives of everyone everywhere.”¹⁸⁷ As such, Coca-Cola is a timeless and changeless entity that attempts to defy categorization according to something so vulgar as national origin.

The company’s branch offices have a great deal of leeway when it comes to adapting certain products. The recipes for Fanta and Powerade can be changed to suit local tastes or to accommodate local regulations. In Korea, for instance, the bottled water Soon Soo doesn’t have the usual mineral packet of the Dasani label because, according to Korean regulations, the water has to come from a spring. The whole Coke portfolio can be altered – “glocalized” to use the recently coined term – with the exception of Coca-Cola. “We can’t play with Coca-Cola,” the head of public affairs and communications department for Coca-Cola in South Korea explained to me, and this unchanging drink can be a challenge to market in a society that is constantly changing.¹⁸⁸ The marketing side has similar strictures, though it has somewhat more flexibility in designing advertising thought to appeal to a Korean audience. “Let’s Dynamic,” for instance, uses an English word often applied to Korean society. “Stop Thinking. Feel It” is meant to offer consumers a way of escaping a highly regulated social environment. A web-based marketing campaign aimed at the “lost boys” who get their information almost exclusively from the Internet rather than TV or print media, is part of a new shift from 360 degree marketing (coming at the consumer from all sides and “making you buy a Coke even if you hadn’t known that’s what you wanted”¹⁸⁹) to integrated marketing communication (IMC), which relies on stories that actively engage the consumer. As a global product, “we have to be everywhere and have relevance to everyone,” the communications director told me, but without any change to the product itself. As such, Coca-Cola resists domestication: it remains a free-floating signifier, a mysterious yet ubiquitous substance, the Holy Ghost of food products. It is, to use Koichi Iwabuchi’s evocative expression, a product increasingly free of “cultural odor” with respect to its origins.¹⁹⁰ Or, to use George Ritzer’s somewhat less evocative expression, Coca-Cola is “nothing,” that is, a generic, timeless, dehumanized product stripped of all locality in order to appeal to the greatest number of people in the largest number of countries.¹⁹¹ Though not an indigenous product, Coca-Cola is a Korean food because it is produced and consumed in Korea, just like sweet potatoes, *tongpaechu kimchi*, and raw fish. It has been absorbed, not domesticated, while remaining a global food that is identical in Korea, Kenya, and Kalamazoo.

At the opposite end of this local-global spectrum is *poshintang* or dog soup, a traditional Korean dish that is virtually immune to being globalized. Particularly popular in the

¹⁸⁷ Pendergrast, p. 373.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with John Gustavson, Seoul, October 5, 2004.

¹⁸⁹ Constance Hays, *The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 24-8.

¹⁹¹ George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004).

summer, during the dog days of the Chinese calendar between July 19 and August 18, *poshintang* is alleged to make men more “vital.” Even putting a drop of the soup on your foot is supposed to make you stronger. The dish is inextricably linked to Korean culture. Its “cultural odor” is strong. In its post-war struggle to make a place for itself at the global table, the Korean government has tried to transcend *poshintang*. While dog is usually listed as the fourth most popular meat in Korea after beef, pork and chicken, it is not necessarily easy to find. Around the time of Korea’s debut as a global country when the Olympics were held in Seoul in 1988, the government was so concerned about international reaction to dog meat consumption that it banned sales of all “foods deemed unsightly” so as not to give tourists the wrong impression of Korean culture. International reaction to dog soup spiked around the time that Korea again appeared prominently on the world sports stage – the World Cup in 2002.¹⁹² Despite official condemnation from the Korean government, *poshintang* restaurants hang on. Unregulated and unrepentant, these restaurants provide a glimpse of an older Korea that has somehow managed to survive Japanese colonialism, World War II, the Korean War, several dictatorships, and the latest wave of globalization sweeping Korean culture. They are a potent reminder of countryside culture, but not the sanitized *makkoli* joints with their mini-waterwheels and kitschy rural landscapes, the Korean equivalent of Cracker Barrel.

Poshintang serves as a marker of Korean identity, but interestingly more in the city than in the country. Frank Janelli, who did field work in both a small village and at a Seoul *chaebol*, notes that “[t]o villagers *posint’ang* was a food, not a national symbol.”¹⁹³ In the city, *poshintang* also serves as a balm for the ills of the *ppali ppali* rush to keep ahead of the curve.¹⁹⁴ Many Koreans, even those who wouldn’t touch the stuff, defend dog soup against the onslaught of Westernization: it may not be good soup, but it is *our* soup. As one historian of cuisine argues, food provides comfort during periods of rapid change, and in a country where a Samsung advertising campaign proposes that you “change everything but your wife,” *poshintang* certainly serves as a mast in the hurricane of globalization.¹⁹⁵ (Interestingly, McDonald’s serves the same purpose, not only for Americans who don’t want to be surprised in foreign countries but also Japanese tourists on vacation in Hawaii.¹⁹⁶)

Like Coca-Cola, but for opposite reasons, *poshintang* can’t be fiddled with. It is not for tourists. It’s not for all or even most Koreans, and yet because it is not-American, not-Japanese, not-Chinese, even not-Korean diaspora, *poshintang* somehow stands in for the part of Korean culture that has not been homogenized through contact with a wider world. That *poshintang* borrows a great deal from Chinese culture, particularly its

¹⁹² For a longer analysis of *poshintang*, see John Feffer, “The Politics of Dog,” *The American Prospect*, vol. 13, no. 10 (June 3, 2002).

¹⁹³ Roger Janelli (with Dawnhee Yim), *Making Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 186.

¹⁹⁴ June J.H. Lee, “Discourses of Illness, Meanings of Modernity: A Gendered Construction of *Songinbyong*,” in Laurel Kendall, ed., *Under Construction* (Honolulu: Univ of Hawaii Press, 2002), p. 73.

¹⁹⁵ Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (London: Cambridge, 1982), p. 152.

¹⁹⁶ See George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996); Tobin, op. cit.

purported medicinal attributes, is as immaterial as the fact that Coca-Cola once contained cocaine. Like all foods, they have changed over time. But they have both become, in their own ways, mythic in their symbolic immutability.

Much if not most of Korean food falls in between these two immutable quantities, Coca-Cola and *poshintang*. Food culture, after all, is all about hybridization – it’s not a question of “if” but only “when.” One of the more interesting food hybrids in Korea today is *budae chigae*, whose origins are betrayed by its name of “battalion stew.” During the Korean War, which destroyed crops and the Korean capacity for self-sufficiency, many citizens came to depend on what U.S. soldiers left behind. In Ahn Junghyo’s novel *Silver Stallion*, which draws from his memories of growing up in Korea in the 1950s, the C-Rations stand in for the rich but dangerous temptations of the American military. A young Korean woman, raped by American soldiers and ostracized by her community, is attracted to the *bengko* (big nose) community by a meal prepared from cans: “she had never tasted anything so delicious in her whole life.”¹⁹⁷ Her son falls in with a gang of children who scavenge from the garbage dump outside the soldiers’ encampment. Before setting off on a mission, the gang leader announces, “I hope we find some meat again today... Do you boys remember what I found in a can last time? My uncle said it was ‘ham.’ It really tasted good when my mother made a piggie stew with it.” Another child asks what piggie stew is. “You collect everything you can eat from the *bengko* garbage – meat and cheese and chicken bones and everything – and boil them together in a pot.”¹⁹⁸

Today piggie stew generates no such contradictory feelings among contemporary Koreans. Made from Spam and/or Vienna sausages along with a mix of different vegetables and noodles – but certainly no garbage scraps – *budae chigae* is a popular dish enjoyed by couples and groups at middle-class restaurants. Its new name of battalion stew suggests the nourishment of warriors, not scavengers. Even today, according to *Spam: the Cookbook*, South Korea is “one of the most rapidly expanding markets” for the canned product.¹⁹⁹ What was once salvaged from garbage dumps has now become part of expensive gift packs exchanged at holiday time. A terrible memory of war and deprivation has been thoroughly domesticated; a global product like Spam has been incorporated into a thoroughly Korean dish. As with the incorporation of Hideyoshi’s red pepper, the *han* or suppressed collective sorrow embodied in *budae chigae* has been transformed into a safe, consumable form. Like manioc or blowfish, its poison has been neutralized, though perhaps it still retains, for the historically minded, an occasional capacity to sting. (As Koreans domesticate such foods as Spam, so do foreigners domesticate Korean food: kimchi-flavored beef and rice bowls in Japan, Korean-style doner kebabs in Germany).

These three food items have very different resonances in North Korea. As it had done in China, Coca-Cola entered North Korea prior to the normalization of relations with the United States. This is appropriate since Coca-Cola has positioned itself as a global brand rather than a symbol of American economic power and thus dependent on the good will

¹⁹⁷ Ahn Junghyo, *Silver Stallion* (New York: Soho, 1990), p. 122.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁹⁹ Marguerite Patten, *Spam: The Cookbook* (New York: Hamlyn, 2001), p. 9.

of the American government. After debuting in 2000, Coca-Cola maintains a low profile: the volume of sales is low and the company doesn't do any advertising.²⁰⁰ Presumably it is the drink of the new rich who can afford it and have encountered the taste on trips abroad. There are no ideological prescriptions against the drink in North Korea, for Coke is now a global beverage and not a symbol of American imperialism (in the same way that English in North Korea has become a global language, not a tool of U.S. linguistic hegemony). Coke is simply waiting for the day when either the current regime gives it a more enthusiastic endorsement or a consumer culture arises from below and clamors for the product.

But by letting the drink into the country, North Korea has sent a powerful signal to the global community that it wants to end its decades of isolation. The *South China Morning Post*, bringing together news of Coca-Cola's breakthrough with the summit between the leaders of the two countries, editorialized: "Can a country that imports Coca-Cola be all bad? Presumably not, for the desire to consume that omnipresent soda (and perhaps Pepsi as well) suggests that at least some of its citizens share tastes common to people all around the globe. They should not be thought of only as hostile denizens of a weird and dangerous place."²⁰¹ However spurious the argument – and it is at least as spurious as Thomas Friedman's similar claim that countries with McDonald's don't go to war with one another – the editorial reveals an interesting cultural supposition: North Koreans, by drinking Coke, become somehow less North Korean, for "Coke" is normal and "North Korea" is not. That Coke might be both weird and dangerous (the Coca-Cola archives are full of stories of people's first, unpleasant encounters with the drink and the newspapers are full of stories of the link between soft drinks and obesity) would never occur to the editorial writers.

There are no debates within North Korea about the cultural appropriateness of *poshintang*. At a time of need, all food is appropriate. The soup is in fact a luxury item, and there are several restaurants in Pyongyang that serve it. When Kim Jong Il officially encouraged the spread of these restaurants in 1994, procurement officers ranged around the country to acquire the dogs. For one such officer, at least, this was a path to great wealth as he used his traveling privileges to set up a business exchanging Chinese-made fatigues for gold.²⁰² Ironically, then, *poshintang* was a route to the global market. Also interesting to note is that my North Korean guides were eager and proud to bring me to a *poshintang* restaurant in Pyongyang and thought of the meal as a proper part of North Korean cuisine. I've traveled to South Korea many more times and enjoyed many meals with Korean friends and colleagues, but have had to eat my *poshintang* alone.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Interview with John Gustaveson.

²⁰¹ *South China Morning Post*, June 23, 2000. The logic here is questionable. Would the *South China Morning Post* argue that a mass murderer didn't commit his crimes because he liked to drink Coke and thus shared tastes with non-homicidal people around the world? This is the ironic reverse of the infamous "Twinkie defense": the junk food didn't derange the aggressor but rather proved his innocence.

²⁰² Kang Chol-hwan, "Legion of 'Nouveaux Riches' Emerges," *Chosun Ilbo*, August 7, 2002.

²⁰³ This might have something to do with *poshintang*'s association with men and with non-middle class values – most of my friends in Korea are middle-class women.

There is no such thing as *budae chigae* in North Korea for, although U.S. troops probably left behind their C-rations during the Korean War, a taste for Spam never developed in the country. Indeed, this kind of hybridization of Korean food would likely symbolize for a North Korean, at least officially, everything that is dependent, slavish, and *sadaejui* (flunkey-ish) about South Korean culture. Hybridity is still a questionable process in a country that has banished Chinese characters from the language and frowns upon mixed marriages. Without many global products or food items altered by the most recent wave of globalization, North Korean cuisine has acquired a reputation for being more traditional than Southern cooking. It is, like the North Korean language, the natural environment, and the preserved Confucian value system, somehow more “pure Korean.” Even when it applies the latest scientific advances to its food – such as new techniques for brewing rice wine (*makkolli*) – it manages to improve “the brewing method... established by the ancestors” without altering or hybridizing the product.²⁰⁴

Diets are, by all accounts, stubborn things. Food historian Harvey Levenstein, in his survey of the transformations of the U.S. diet, cites a study of U.S. prisoners of war in China and Korea during the Korean War and how some of them died of malnutrition rather than eat what were foreign but otherwise nutritious rations.²⁰⁵ And yet, as should be clear from the preceding, diets do change, if slowly. The methods by which globalization has recently changed the Korean diet – or has been actively domesticated – range from the imperial model (transformations guided from above) to the hegemonic model (whereby consumers believe that they are voluntarily choosing the new tastes) to the truly grassroots (in which consumers and cooks innovate).

The South Korean government employed the imperial model to change the diets of the citizenry at several points during the authoritarian era (and thereby, consciously or not, followed the example of colonial administrators who tried to get Koreans to eat Japanese food). During the days of cheap American imports in the 1950s, for instance, the government encouraged wheat consumption by providing free bread for lunch and thus building a new taste among schoolchildren.²⁰⁶ Another example would be the 1988 Olympics when the Korean government deliberately looked into ways that the tastes of foreigners could be accommodated. “One point of discussion centered around the need to provide western-type foods for foreign guests,” relates Larry Burmeister. “The Horticultural Experiment Station was then directed to start work on the production of vegetables agreeable to western palates, such as potatoes suitable for French-frying.”²⁰⁷ The opening of the first McDonald’s coincided with these efforts. As part of the democratization process, however, such top-down efforts quickly evaporated only to reappear in a new guise: no longer promoting outside tastes, democratic Korean governments have concentrated on preserving traditional Korean cuisine.

The grassroots model can be seen in the creation of a “Pyongyang” and a “Hamhung” tradition of cold noodles (*naengmyen*) in the South during and after the Korean War, as

²⁰⁴ “Production of Makkolli Put on Scientific Basis,” KCNA, December 1, 2004.

²⁰⁵ Levenstein, p. vii.

²⁰⁶ McMichael and Kim, p. 33.

²⁰⁷ Burmeister (1988), p. 96.

refugees from the conflict set up stalls in the markets of Seoul to sell the “taste of the north” to those who could no longer travel there. In the 1990s, a new wave of North Koreans came to the South to establish *naengmyenjip*. *Naengmyen* is now a global product, consumed in Beijing, Tokyo, Los Angeles, London as well as Seoul and Pyongyang. The taste of *naengmyen* has consequently undergone a transformation, based on the decisions of cooks and the preferences of diners, and there are now several versions of, for instance, Pyongyang cold noodles. At *Jindallae* restaurant in Seoul, dancer Shin Young Hwae and her banker husband, who arrived in Seoul from the North in the 1990s, have adapted their recipes to suit South Korean tastes (substituting beef for pork in the broth and using Alaska pollard instead of skate for their *hwae naengmyen*). Interestingly, her husband acquired his recipe for *naengmyen* from Pyongyang’s famous *Onghnyugwan* restaurant, not in the capital city but at the restaurant’s branch in Vienna where he worked for North Korean financial services.²⁰⁸ As a result of these changes in the recipe for *naengmyen*, there is much debate over which is the most authentic version – the dish prepared by North Koreans who came in the 1950s, those who arrived in the 1990s, or those who still live in Pyongyang. So globalization – in the form of human migration as well as changes in the availability and price of ingredients – has exerted its influences on traditional Korean dishes from below, as it were.

Perhaps the most dramatic impact on Korean tastes, however, have come hegemonically, through advertising and other activities of food corporations. Advertising promises to link Koreans to the world outside through consumption. To eat Japanese or Chinese or Vietnamese food emphasizes that Korea is firmly in Asia, part of a larger rice culture, for instance. To eat Western food, advertisements suggest slyly by including Western actors and using English, allows consumer to become Westernized, a powerful message in Korea where many undergo surgery to enlarge their eyes.²⁰⁹ As the type of English used in advertising demonstrates, the messages are not directed simply at those who already speak the language fluently and have connections to global culture. Advertising is about stimulating desires. So the English used in Korean advertisements has been domesticated. Rudimentary or even grammatically incorrect phrases offer those without command of the language a global connection that they wouldn’t ordinarily have.²¹⁰

These techniques offer consumers an opportunity to participate in a larger narrative (assessing various claims and acting on these judgments in the store or restaurant) and to voluntarily engage global forces instead of having these changes forced upon them. Or so the advertisers would like consumers to believe. This process can be seen most vividly in the way fast food restaurants and advertisers target children.²¹¹ Ads on TV invite children into the world of consumption. Children rejoice in the opportunity to choose their own food at these restaurants, to become active consumers, and will often

²⁰⁸ Interview with Shin Young Hwae, Seoul, June 2001.

²⁰⁹ Advertising can be a subtle art, full of nuance and suggestion. Only occasionally do the purveyors of the new tastes reveal their cards, as when the owner of the first McDonald’s in Tokyo told the press, “If we eat McDonald’s hamburgers and potatoes for a thousand years, we will become taller, our skin will become white, and our hair blonde.” Love, p. 426.

²¹⁰ Dennis Hart, *From Tradition to Consumption: Construction of a Capitalist Culture in South Korea* (Seoul: Jimoondang Publish Co., 2001), p. 155.

²¹¹ John Love, *McDonald’s: Behind the Arches* (NY: Bantam, 1986), p. 245.

draw their otherwise unwilling parents into the new experience. Because of the compression of development, Korean adults are still close enough to the privations of the past – hunger in the 1950s or the lack of McDonald’s prior to 1988 – to experience a “compensation syndrome.” They want their children to have what they didn’t have, not only in terms of quantity but in terms of connection to a global world.²¹²

The influences of government programs, widespread advertising, and the innovations of cooks and consumers have all had a profound impact on Korean tastes. The transformation of consumer culture has been all the more rapid for coinciding with political democratization and economic prosperity. Austerity economics and import substitution, authoritarian diktats, and the depression of wages have all seemed to melt into the air to be replaced by a profusion of goods to choose from in the market. Global products like Coke are available alongside “pure Korean” items and hybrid offerings. While all things seem equally available, however, the Korean diet is nevertheless moving in a particular direction.

One indicator of this direction is rice consumption, the rates of which have dropped considerably. A 1988 Yonsei University study reported that 86 percent of housewives “frequently substitute instant food items for rice in their menu.”²¹³ The entrance of women into the workforce in large numbers during the period of rapid modernization encouraged this reliance on fast food, a trend momentarily slowed but not significantly reversed by such innovations as the automatic rice cooker and the kimchi refrigerator. Indeed, as Seoul National University professor of agricultural economics Kim Wanbae told me, the rate of rice consumption has declined rapidly from its high point of 137 kilos per person in the late 1970s to the present rate of around 80 kilos per person.²¹⁴ Since the Japanese rate, once 116 kilos, has stabilized at 60 kilos, Kim predicts that the Korean rate will stabilize at 70 kilos (“because kimchi is hot and spicy,” he said, “we need more rice than the Japanese”).²¹⁵ While Koreans are eating less rice – and fewer vegetables – they are consuming more quantities of meat.²¹⁶ What was once a special meal – *sollongtang* (beef soup) on the day to promote a good harvest, for instance – has become an everyday possibility. What was once reserved for special guests – *bulgogi* (beef barbecue) for the out-of-town visitors – has become a more frequent family treat. Eating meat is a sign of prosperity. Eating beef is a sign of *Korean* prosperity, and Korean beef producers have certainly encouraged this trend.²¹⁷

²¹² Bernadine Chee, “Eating Snacks, Biting Pressure” in Jun Jing, ed., *Feeding China’s Little Emperors* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), p. 60.

²¹³ Hart, p. 104.

²¹⁴ Kim Sung-Hoon notes that consumption had dropped from 120 kilos per capita per year in 1990 to 94 kilos in 2000. Kim Sung-Hoon, “Appreciating the Intrinsic Value of Agriculture,” *Korea Focus*, vol. 9, no.5 (September-October 2001). The average American, by comparison, consumes less than 10 kilos per year. Clay, p. 389.

²¹⁵ Interview with Kim Wanbae, Seoul, October 6, 2004.

²¹⁶ Vegetable and grain intake declined from 90 percent of total food intake to 81 percent. Meat consumption went up from 8 percent to 19 percent. Chang Y. Lee, Ehrl-Ho Lee, and Tai-Wan Kwon, “Future of Foods: Harmonization of Eastern and Western Food Systems,” Institute of Food Technologists, <http://www.worldfoodscience.org/cms/?pid=1000947>, accessed November 8, 2004.

²¹⁷ In Korea, as in many countries, beef is also gendered. While kimchi is “female” because it is traditionally prepared by women who pass down the recipe from mother to daughter (or daughter-in-law),

As a result of the more widespread consumption of meat and Western-style fast food, there has been an upswing in added fat intake, with calories from fatty foods rising from 13.3 percent in 1980 to 25.5 percent in 2000.²¹⁸ The prevalence of the overweight and the obese has risen, particularly among young children. In the last ten years, for instance, the body-mass index (BMI) rose 11-12 percent among 10-year olds.²¹⁹ But overall, despite the changes in diet and indeed the whole structure of Korean agriculture, Koreans continue to have relatively low rates of obesity: according to a 2000 article in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, approximately “half of what would be expected for a country at its level of economic development.”²²⁰

This relatively low incidence of obesity – as well as relatively low levels of circulatory disease – is often explained with reference to the nature of Korean food: the fresh vegetables, the fermented pickles, the relative lack of oiliness. Another popular explanation is that food and health have long been associated in Korean culture, so consumers are much more conscious about what and how they eat. These explanations are true, but the same can be said for many “native” diets that have been subsequently transformed by colonialism, westernization, modernization, and now globalization. The original diet of the Native Hawai’ians, to take one example, was once quite healthy, but today the native population suffers from one of the highest rates of obesity in the world.²²¹ So the sheer healthiness of a diet is not a sufficient explanation for its longevity.

The Korean diet has endured at least in part because it has been supported by political and social movements dating back to the turn of the 19th century. There has been, in other words, a long tradition of *resistance* to outside pressures to eat different food. In 1909, for instance, a “Love Korean products” movement began in Pyongyang.²²² It wasn’t until after the May 1st uprising, however, that this movement gained force. Under the leadership of Cho Mansik, the Korean Products Promotion Society represented a concerted effort by Koreans to preserve indigenous production and modes of consumption from the onslaught of Japanese influences. “Beginning with trivial daily merchandise, Japan’s capitalistic economic invasion has now ravaged our very centre,” Cho Mansik declared in 1922. “The way to block this invasion is to increase production of native goods and to develop and elevate products to a high level of excellence. These

beef falls into the “male” sphere for the cows are traditionally raised and slaughtered by men, and the meal is ordered in restaurants by men (though served by women). Writes anthropologist Pat Caplan, “It is not uncommon, cross-culturally, to find this association between masculinity and meat-eating. In Britain, as elsewhere (but not of course everywhere) real men need meat.” Pat Caplan, *Feasts, Fasts, Famine: Food for Thought* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 17.

²¹⁸ Hwang (2003).

²¹⁹ Chang, Lee, and Kwon.

²²⁰ Barry Popkin, Sue Horton, and Soowon Kim, *The Nutritional Transition and Diet-Related Chronic Diseases in Asia*, FCND Discussion Paper no. 5 (Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, March 2001), p. 46.

²²¹ Michael Fumento, *The Fat of the Land* (New York: Viking, 1997), p. 101.

²²² Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1990), p. 142.

goods must then be constantly patronized in order to promote further production.”²²³ Even at this early date, consumption and not simply production was highly politicized. To eat Korean food was to engage in a patriotic activity.

Although several generations separate the anti-colonial movements from the anti-globalization movements, many of the same themes resonate. For instance, production and consumption remain closely linked. The recent campaigns against non-Korean food initially have gone hand in hand with farmer protests. So, while farmers were protesting on the beef issue in 1985, 14 students took over the U.S. Chamber of Commerce office in Seoul to protest U.S. pressure to increase imports.²²⁴ In the late 1980s, when the United States was pushing hard for a market opening for American cigarettes, there were signs at stores that read “customers who smoke foreign cigarettes are not welcome” and “those who smoke foreign cigarettes are traitors to the nation.”²²⁵ In 1989, when 200,000 farmers gathered in Seoul to protest aggressive U.S. trade policy,²²⁶ the Citizens Movement Against Over-Consumption declared a boycott of American goods because they led to excessive consumption.²²⁷

But it was really in 1991 that Cho Mansik’s words found their loudest echo in the “Buy Our Agricultural Products” or *uri nongsanmul aeyong* campaign launched by the Korean Agricultural Cooperative (KAC). As Larry Burmeister points out, the verb used in the campaign – *aeyong* – was chosen very deliberately, for *ae* conveys a sense of “love” and even “patriotism” (*aegukjui*). The slogan “connoted an emotional, affective rationale for frequent use of Korean agricultural products.”²²⁸ The campaign’s 1991 initiative to protest the opening of the Korean rice market generated an astounding 13 million signatures, practically a third of the entire population. The KAC also popularized the expression *sint’obulli* – “the land and the body are one.” In a comic book distributed to all elementary schools, the KAC explained the origin of the expression with a story from the Three Kingdoms period when Korean soldiers, to re-energize themselves during a battle against foreign aggressors, drank a mixture of water and Korean earth.²²⁹

A strong subcurrent in these campaigns has been the healthiness of the Korean diet and its capacity to combat the modern diseases afflicting, especially, Korean men: modernization disease (*hyundaebyeong*) and adult disease (*songinbyong*). Korean men work hard and drink hard and have sought refuge in a variety of health drinks on the market as well as traditional soups to cure hangovers and restore vitality. In the 1990s, as anthropologist June Hye Lee points out, the promotion of the traditional Korean diet as essential for preventing modern diseases sometimes required a creative re-imagining of the past. “Thanks to this balanced diet, Korean ancestors did not fall victim to chronic

²²³ Ibid., p. 143.

²²⁴ Gi-Wook Shin and...Asian perspective, forthcoming.

²²⁵ Janelli, pp. 75, 78.

²²⁶ Nancy Abelman, “Minjung Movements and the Minjung,” in Kenneth Wells, ed., *South Korea’s Minjung Movement* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p. 152

²²⁷ Pinkston, p. 193.

²²⁸ Larry Burmeister, “Culture Against Globalization in a Transitional Organization: The Korean Agricultural Cooperative’s ‘Buy Our Agricultural Products’ Campaign,” unpublished paper.

²²⁹ Ibid.

degenerative diseases that are apparently epidemic among modern Koreans,” she writes.²³⁰ “These idealizing discourses about Korean ancestors’ diets are, however, totally oblivious to the short life expectancy, malnutrition, and infectious diseases that Koreans widely suffered just a scant generation ago. Also neglected was the yearning of Koreans-in-the-past to eat “white cooked rice with side dishes made of meat to one’s heart’s content (*huin ssalbak e kogibanchan silkot mokopota*).”²³¹ Such historical myths nevertheless reached deep into Korean society, and I have frequently encountered them in conversations in Korea. Modernization (read: globalization) might well be causing disease among urban workers and progressively removing Korean farmers from their land, but a healthy diet of Korean food is sufficient antidote. Consumption is thus believed to be capable of transforming production.

The Korean government tacitly endorsed these campaigns. In the 1980s, it treated the Olympics as an opportunity to introduce Koreans to foreign flavors and, in such measures as the banning of the sale of dog meat, to eliminate certain indigenous flavors from the diet. By the 1990s, however, a newly democratized Korean government reflected populist demands to preserve the Korean diet. Although caving in at the trade level, the government nevertheless sought to compensate by promoting Korean foods and preparations. The Rural Living Science Institute, with funding from the Rural Development Administration, has offered trainings throughout the country on traditional cooking preparations (rice, *kimchi*, the fermented soybean paste *teonjang*). The KBS show *Six O’Clock My Village* has promoted the consumption of traditional dishes.²³² The Korean school lunch program began to encourage rice and kimchi several years ago. In the 1990s, the government reversed its 1964 ban on the use of rice in alcoholic beverages and sponsored various campaigns to counter the declining rates of rice consumption by promoting recipes for rice pizza, rice bread, and rice noodles.²³³

These campaigns by the government and civic organizations have tapped into the deep rural roots of Korean identity. For many opposition intellectuals in the colonial period, because modernity was associated with the Japanese oppressors, “Koreanness” was by definition connected to the land, to the peasants, to the countryside.²³⁴ In the 1970s and 1980s, the Korean democratization movement revived the *minjung* ethos of the colonial period – as well as reviving cultural features of rural life such as *p’ansori* (folk songs), shamanism, and drumming – to emphasize their authenticity in contrast to the authoritarian governments in Seoul.²³⁵ In the 1990s, slogans such as *sin’tobulli*

²³⁰ Prof. Kim Wanbae, for instance, related to me that “Now many Koreans are suffering from obesity, heart ailments, diabetes and realize that this is a result of Western food. At the grassroots, people are saying, ‘Let’s go back to our original diet.’ Korean food is mostly slow food, fermented food.” Interview with Kim Wanbae, op. cit.

²³¹ Jung Hye Lee, “A Quest for Health in Korea,” dissertation, University Of Hawai’i, December 1998, pp. 10-11.

²³² Popkin et al., p. 47.

²³³ Interview with Kim Wanbae, op. cit. On the reversal of the ban, McMichael and Kim, p. 39.

²³⁴ Sorenson (1999), p. 309.

²³⁵ Cho Hung-youn goes so far as to suggest that a decline in traditional Korean food culture is linked to the overall decline in shamanism in society, because Korean food is a “by-product of the various festivals and ceremonies held for gods and ancestors based on traditional shamanist beliefs.” See Cho Hung-youn, “Traditional Way of Life in East Asia,” *Korea Focus*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January-February 2001).

emphasized the local/national over the global/foreign. The shamanistic ritual of *kosa* and the offering of food to the deities of the workplace preserve a countryside tradition even in the factory environment.²³⁶

As modernization radically whittled away at the countryside, South Korea generated a “compensatory myth” similar to what has taken place in other countries, whether *Heimat* in Germany or *dush* in Russia.²³⁷ In Japan, the compensatory myth has taken two forms – the militaristic and nationalistic *nohonshugi* of the early 20th century and the benignly romantic *furusatokai* of the contemporary era. The former is a reminder of the importance of “land” in fascist thinking. The *furusatokai*, on the other hand, points to one possible Korean future where, as in today’s Japan, urban Koreans become “honorary villagers” and receive care packages of traditional goods that are no longer available in urban markets.²³⁸ Relatively untouched by capitalist modernization and cultural globalization, North Korea does not yet seem to have developed its own compensatory agrarian myth, though it has certainly created a nationalist myth – involving such elements as the mythic founder Tangun – to compensate for the attenuation of communist ideology.

In North Korea, from what we can tell, the average diet has largely been untouched by the latest wave of globalized food. In 2000, Kim Jong Il introduced a campaign to promote *gogigyeopbbang* – hamburgers – saying that “I’ve made up my mind to feed quality bread and french fries to university students, professors and researchers even if we are in (economic) hardship.”²³⁹ It is striking that he chose to provide this food to the intelligentsia, as though only a sector of society already in contact with the world of ideas could appreciate such global cuisine. Regardless of official pronouncements about Kim Jong Il joining the soldiers for a meal of potatoes, the diet of the elite has certainly been globalized.²⁴⁰ In 1999, I attended an official banquet in Pyongyang that consisted entirely of Western food, largely French influenced. When an Italian chef prepared his authentic pizza for the North Korean elite, a North Korean chef prepared to reverse-engineer the product by not only gathering all the information about how to assemble the ingredients but even counting the olives on the top and measuring the distance between them.²⁴¹ Recent reports from those who cooked for Kim Jong Il demonstrate that he has a global palate. His Japanese chef traveled to northwestern China for melons and grapes, Thailand for durians and papayas, the Czech Republic for beer, Denmark for pork, Iran for caviar, and Japan for sea food.²⁴² It is tempting to

²³⁶ Choong Soon Kim, p. 203.

²³⁷ Tony Judt cited in Clive Potter, *Against the Grain: Agri-Environmental Reform in the United States and the European Union* (Wallingford, UK: CAB international, 1998), p. 108.

²³⁸ On *nohonshugi*, see Hane, pp. 66-68; on *furusatokai*, see John Knight, “Sharing Suzuki’s Rice,” in Michael Ashkenazi and John Clammer, *Consumption and Material Culture in Contemporary Japan* (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000).

²³⁹ “Kim Jong Il Introduces Hamburgers to North Korea as ‘Quality’ Food,” *Yonhap*, July 7, 2004.

²⁴⁰ James Brooke, “Kim Jong Il’s ex-chef lifts lid on ruler’s fancy tastes,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2004.

²⁴¹ Ermanno Furlanis, “I Made Pizza for Kim Jong-Il,” *Heartland*, Aug 4, 2001.

²⁴² Kenji Fujimoto, “I was Kim Jong Il’s Cook: True Stories from the Dear Leader’s One-time Chef,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Jan/Feb 2004.

compare Kim Jong Il's tastes to those of the Japanese imperial family, which has been, since the Meiji period, at the forefront of promoting foreign flavors.

So far, though, these foreign tastes have not been married to Korean ones. In the North, the two spheres remain distinct – not *bulgogi* pizza but a precisely rendered Italian one; hamburgers for those who have already been partially globalized but not for the “authentic” masses. In this way, traditional Korean cuisine can remain untouched and North Korea can maintain its essentialist ideology, at least for the time being. The government can claim that, unlike the South, its culture remains “pure Korean” with only a few modern additions. The hamburgers, pizza, and Coke have been imported but without their ideological baggage. The *techne* of foreign food culture has been absorbed but not its corrupting spirit, represented by rampant consumerism and hybridity. Globalization has yet to touch North Korea, for the process of domestication has not yet taken place to any significant degree.

As in the earlier discussion of hybrid dishes like *budae chigae*, it is important to avoid in this discussion of identity a polarization between the eternal traditional and the fluctuating global. Indeed, at least in the South, globalization has allowed for overlapping and multiple identities: a traditional Korean breakfast followed by a fast food hamburger snack for lunch and a dinner of *kalbi* from Australian beef and kimchi made in China. And just as the globalized products are domesticated, so are the global processes themselves. In Beijing, McDonalds is a place to hang out compared to the “fast food” of the street vendors.²⁴³ Japanese buy bulk quantities of food at Costco in Tokyo but, unlike Americans, divide up the goods among friends and family.²⁴⁴ The question remains, however, whether these domestications, as defiant assertions of the local, are permanent features of the cultural landscape or a temporary transition on the way to homogeneity and the erasure of culture.

Conclusion: Implications for Reunification

This essay has moved along four vectors – from production to consumption, countryside to city, diversity to homogeneity, and local knowledge to global standards. As the South Korean countryside empties out of farmers, interest in agriculture has shifted perceptibly toward interest in food. Farmers associations have given way to consumer federations. Although various compensatory myths have kept the countryside firmly in the imagination of consumers – whether in the form of restaurant decorations or protest slogans or references in advertising campaigns – globalization is changing the very character of Korean land and the identity that derives from it. When asked about the Korean diet twenty years hence, Prof. Lee Taeho predicted a traditional Korean diet but with imported rice and imported vegetables.²⁴⁵ Korean consumption is preserved, but Korean production is sacrificed. The Korean countryside is restructured, and the memory of traditional ways is cherished most in the city. Celebration of a national diet

²⁴³ Yunxiang Yan, “McDonald's in Beijing” in James Watson, ed., *Golden Arches East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 55.

²⁴⁴ Interviews with Costco shoppers, Tokyo, October 2, 2004.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Lee Taeho, op. cit.

compensates for a viable, authentic agricultural identity connected to growing food rather than a memory of growing food. Koreans become eaters of kimchi rather than makers of kimchi, eaters of rice and beef rather than producers of rice and beef.²⁴⁶

We tend to associate globalization with an expansion of choice. Supermarkets in South Korea now offer a far greater range of products than fifty or even twenty years ago, and perhaps one day Korean consumers will, as in the United States, confront as many as 12-15,000 new food products a year.²⁴⁷ Urban Koreans can choose from among Italian, Vietnamese, and American fast food restaurants. Whereas average South Koreans once eked out the winter with rice and kimchi and worried about the upcoming “barley hump,” all but the very poorest now can eat a range of different foods from around the world even in the dead of winter.

But Alfred Crosby offers a sober reminder that the first wave of the Columbian Exchange destroyed ecosystems and caused the extinction of people, animals, and plants: “The Columbian exchange has left us with not a richer but a more impoverished genetic pool. We, all of the life on this planet, are the less for Columbus, and the impoverishment will increase.”²⁴⁸ Indeed, as a result of the Green Revolution, one study concludes that “2 billion people consume diets that are less diverse than 30 years ago, leading to deficiencies in micronutrients, especially iron, vitamin A, iodine, zinc and selenium.”²⁴⁹ Another study notes that the decline in genetic diversity over the course of the 20th century has meant the loss of 93 percent of lettuce varieties, 96 percent of sweet corn, and 95 percent of tomato varieties.²⁵⁰ The GM revolution, in further encouraging monocropping, will inevitably lead to a further winnowing out of variety. And some day, perhaps, instant ramen or Campbell’s soup will elbow *poshingtang* completely out of the Korean diet, for the latter will simply have no place in a global country (just as the eating of cat has disappeared from Spain, horse from Yorkshire, and dried dog meat from Switzerland, all in the last few decades).²⁵¹

Globalization has occasioned a shift from local ways of doing things to global standards that must be met in order to participate in world trade. The Codex Alimentarius now regulates the form kimchi must take as an export. The Korean government can no longer protect its beef industry with tariffs because it must meet the global standards of the WTO. Seed varieties developed in areas far from Korea – and according to the requirements of an evolving global standard for industrial agriculture – are introduced on

²⁴⁶ In the same way that economic life has been termed an “exchange of sacrifices” – one sacrifices something in order to get something that is in turn being sacrificed by another person – globalization can be expressed as an exchange by which Koreans give up something (agriculture) for something they want (cheap imported food) while “outsiders” sacrifice the “national origin” of their products in order to gain access to the Korean market. The question remains whether the exchange is an equal one. See, e.g., Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction” in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3-4.

²⁴⁷ Dennis Henderson, “Contemporary Trends and Developments in the Agro-Processing Sector in Industrialised Countries,” in *The Agro-Food Processing Sector in China* (Paris: OECD, 2000), p. 47.

²⁴⁸ Crosby, p. 219.

²⁴⁹ Helena Paul and Ricarda Steinbrecher, *Hungry Corporations* (London: Zed, 2003), p. 11.

²⁵⁰ Kimbrell, p. 24.

²⁵¹ See, e.g., Carl Schwabe, *Unmentionable Cuisine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979).

both sides of the peninsula. The local, which was already largely coopted by the national, has once again been superceded by the global.

These trajectories are not inevitable. Let's turn to North Korea to understand another possibility for the Korean peninsula.

North Korea has yet to become a consumer society, and a large portion of the population still resides in rural areas. Although the worst of the famine appears to be over – and reportedly even the food availability in the labor camps has marginally improved²⁵² – malnutrition rates remain high, particularly among the most vulnerable. Despite good weather in 2003, North Korea still experienced a shortfall of 900,000 tons of grain needed to feed its population.²⁵³ Although the international community has had unprecedented access to the country over the last decade, it is difficult to assess the extent to which this presence has had an impact on the thinking of the citizenry. One thing is clear, however: international aid has been almost exclusively humanitarian with almost no development assistance.²⁵⁴ International organizations have been reluctant to be seen supporting the current regime, but at a deeper level, are reluctant to commit funds for development if they don't have control over the process. The North Korean elite, while ideologically agnostic these days about market reforms, remains convinced of its need to maintain control over the process, largely in order to ensure its own survival.

This crisis of North Korean agriculture is neither permanent nor unfixable. Indeed, because there is, relatively speaking, a developmental vacuum in the country, an opportunity presents itself to restructure the agrarian sector along sustainable lines. Agricultural specialist Randall Ireson, who has traveled many times to North Korea, suggests that “with relatively modest changes in current farming practices, the country could in a few years be nearly self sufficient in carbohydrate and vegetable protein production. It is the last ten percent of calories and protein that is difficult (and thus expensive) to produce in the DPRK, and which should be purchased through trade.”²⁵⁵ These relatively modest changes would include the replacement of chemical fertilizers with green manures to boost grain production, the substitution of better quality soybean seeds, and the provision of portable threshers to reduce post-harvest losses. Combined with a recapitalization of farm machinery such as tractors and trucks, Ireson's plan would cost a little over \$400 million, which compares favorably with the price tag for food aid.²⁵⁶ It is precisely because North Korea's energy-dependent agriculture bottomed out that a shift to bio-fertilizers is possible.

In order for the North's agricultural sector to survive globalization, however, South Korea will need to place a much higher priority on preserving the countryside there. The

²⁵² *North Korea Today*, Research Institute for the North Korean Society, October 2004.

²⁵³ “Despite Bigger Harvest, Millions Still Need Food Aid,” Food and Agriculture Organization, November 23, 2004.

²⁵⁴ Thomas McCarthy, “The Management of Economic Development Assistance in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,” *Asian Perspective*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2002), p. 149.

²⁵⁵ Randall Ireson, “Agriculture in the DPRK: Not Just about Food,” presentation to Symposium on North Korea's Engagement with the Global Economy, University of Wisconsin, April 2002, p. 6.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Randall Ireson, op. cit.

same energy that goes into memorializing a livelihood that has largely disappeared in the South can, at least in theory, translate into preserving “real, existing” countryside in the North. If an organic sector were to emerge in the North – and there is considerable interest among agricultural researchers and ministry officials for such reforms²⁵⁷ – the South would have to be willing to pay extra over the price of comparable Chinese products. Sustainability in the North, as in the “buy Korean products” movements of the 1920s and the 1980s, could be justified on the nationalist grounds of preserving traditional Korean culture. And, by a twist in the WTO rules, the two countries could even achieve their goal without riling the technocrats of the global trade regime. Government subsidies that promote environmental protection and sustainability are sheltered from trade liberalization by the “Green Box” in current agricultural negotiations. By promoting sustainable agriculture, as the South Korean government has done with the Sustainable Agriculture Promotion Act of 1998 and direct payments to farmers who use environment-friendly practices, North and South can together resist globalization’s erasure of the countryside.²⁵⁸

Sustainability also requires a move away from the economics of scale embraced by communist and capitalist systems alike. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that smaller farms, as they have existed in the South since land reform, are more productive. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the gross output of South Korean farms declines rather precipitously as farm size grows from under 2 hectares to 4 hectares.²⁵⁹ In addition to smaller farms, sustainability should encourage a shift from an export orientation toward local production. The lessons concerning the dangers of an over-reliance on energy inputs in agriculture applies as well to the costly transport of goods. The costs of subsidized energy, environmental degradation, and the increased health risks of industrial agriculture on farmers are generally not factored into the price of food. As a result, factory-produced U.S. beef is cheaper than Korean beef. Such a philosophy of sustainability – built on organic production, smaller farms, and a “buy local” spirit – could merge North Korea’s *juche* with South Korea’s *sin’tobulli*, combining nationalism and environmentalism.²⁶⁰

Reunification of the Korean peninsula faces the major challenges of growing political and economic disparity between the two countries. Whereas the two Koreas were similarly authoritarian and committed to certain versions of top-down autarkic economic policies

²⁵⁷ Interview with Kim Sung-Hoon, former ROK Minister of Agriculture, Seoul, October 6, 2004.

²⁵⁸ Kwon and Shepherd, p. 193. For information on organic farming in South Korea, see “OTA Market Overview: South Korean Organic Market,” Landry Consulting, LLC, April 2004.

²⁵⁹ Output recovers a little for farms between 4 and 5 hectares before declining again as farm size increases beyond 7 hectares. Chart in Vandana Shiva, “Globalization of Agriculture,” in Shiva and Bedi, p. 57. At the same time, Jason Clay offers the important rejoinder that small farmers are probably responsible for the bulk of the environmental degradation of the land. However, because “this damage can result from farming marginal land, not having efficient equipment (or the money to buy it), or not having good information about better practices,” and South Koreans at least farm relatively efficiently this proviso only applies to the North. See Clay, p. 8.

²⁶⁰ Such a spirit of sustainability is not part of Gyeonggi Province’s recent suggestion of a joint venture rice farm with North Korea. It would be large (98 hectares), farmed with traditional fertilizers, and grow conventional rice. See “South Korea proposes first joint farm in North Korea?” *The China Post*, January 26, 2005; http://www.chinapost.com.tw/i_latestdetail.asp?id=25969

during the 1970s, today the peninsula has a very prosperous democratic half and a poor authoritarian half. The differences in agriculture would appear at first glance to only accentuate the political and economic disparities.

But, as I've argued, the agricultures of the two Koreas in fact share many of the same problems and thus a "we're in the same boat" mentality could reinforce commonality. Whatever differences exist between the two countries are dwarfed, at least on agricultural matters, by the gap between both Koreas and the U.S. wheat and soybean sectors or the Chinese corn and cabbage sectors. More critically, the preservation of traditional values in the North Korean countryside, however distorted by the current regime or mythologized by those in the South, can provide a measure of equity in the reunification equation. If northern agriculture can be revived along sustainable lines, then North Korea can bring its Green virtues to the table along with its other assets, such as a highly trained and literate workforce.

This is not an uncomplicated process. Let's return to the example of *naengmyen*. The dish is an example of a vibrant tradition that North Korea can offer to a reunified country. But the way *naengmyen* is "consumed" in the South reveals the great disparity between the two countries. There are many jokes in South Korea about the number of North Korean defectors who have traded on their one marketable skill and opened *naengmyenjip*.²⁶¹ As one advocate of the defectors put it, "They can have their cold-noodle shops, but people here don't expect any more from them than that."²⁶² Since cooking is so often considered a female occupation, North Koreans are subtly "feminized" and, in the patriarchal Korean culture, thus devalued. Anthropologist Roy Richard Grinker relates how South Korean textbooks, statues, and popular culture depict North Korea as the younger brother of the more advanced South Korean older brother.²⁶³ Given the cultural associations of *naengmyen*, wife to husband might be the more appropriate analogy. A recent *JoongAng Ilbo* Photoshop cartoon reinforces this sexist gloss on inter-Korean relations by depicting South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun dressed as a Choson-era husband with Kim Jong Il as his bride.²⁶⁴

The "we're in the same boat" mentality may only go so far. Agriculture is a relatively small part of the economies of North and South, and food is only one of the many constituent parts of Korean identity. A common fear of outside forces like globalization may not be powerful enough to overcome all that continues to divide the two Koreas.

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²⁶¹ History repeats itself: North Korean refugees in the 1950s often carried with them little more than their mother's recipe for cold noodles. Interview with Moon Seong Hoon of Ojang-dong Naengmyen, Seoul, June 2001.

²⁶² Han Ki-Hong, director of the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, quoted in George Wehrfritz and Hideko Takayama, "Riding the Seoul Train," *Newsweek International*, March 5, 2001.

²⁶³ Roy Richard Grinker, *Korea and Its Futures* (New York: St. Martins, 1998), p. 117.

²⁶⁴ <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/200410/21/200410211818272309900092309231.html>; accessed November 14, 2004.

In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott urges a return to local knowledge and intuition (*metis* in Greek) in order to restore a measure of humanity to the modernist vision of cities and countrysides.²⁶⁵ Farmers have a pool of knowledge at their disposal that agricultural economists or even rural extension agents, trafficking as they do in larger abstractions, cannot hope to acquire. The farmer knows from experience what varieties do best in what conditions. This, too, is the principle at the heart of organic and sustainable agriculture.

While local knowledge is necessary, it is clearly insufficient, if the examples of the fall of the Easter Island and Mayan cultures tell us anything.²⁶⁶ A global perspective – even a global cosmopolitan perspective – is useful to maintain alongside *metis*. Agriculture is dependent, for better or worse, on global variables and requires global efforts, such as the Kyoto treaty on carbon dioxide emissions, to create an appropriate overall environment within which local farming can thrive. The problem today, however, is that the balance has shifted far too much away from the local and toward the global, from production for local consumption to profit gained from the global market. Restoring the farmer’s knowledge to the center of agricultural practice would temper as well the worst qualities of the four trajectories outlined in this paper – strengthening local knowledge against international standards, valuing the countryside as much as the city, maintaining interest in the methods of production and not just the styles of consumption, and embracing diversity at a time of increasing uniformity.

Globalization has transformed the Korean landscape and the Korean identity in myriad ways. Perhaps North and South can manage to create a new approach to agriculture and sustain a distinct (though subtly hybridized) Korean food culture. By serving as an inspiration for other countries facing similar dilemmas – in a way that *Saemaul* and *juche* never did – Koreans may then have an opportunity to transform globalization in turn.

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²⁶⁵ Scott (1998), p. 313.

²⁶⁶ “There is ample evidence that parts of the Andes, Mesoamerica, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, South and Southeast Asia, New England and even the Great Plains (to name but a few) were overfarmed to the point of degradation or collapse using ‘traditional’ forms of agricultural production.” Clay, p. 4.