

Postcards, Place, and Progress: Colonial Korea as a Touristic Commodity

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Abstract

Seeing acts as a person's grounding mechanism for determining what they know about the world around them. This thesis asserts the importance of visual sources to analyze empire maintenance in Korea during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), highlighting the specific utility of the postcard. Postcards are materially representative of mobility across space; they are sent from one geographical area to another to impart on the receiver the experience of the sender's movement. Postcards also represent temporal mobility; it takes real time for a postcard to be sent and received. In its reception, there is the understanding that it is symbolic of the past, and simultaneously representative of future mobility aspirations. This thesis argues that postcards of colonial-era Korea are a form of 'colonial kitsch': an emphasized cultural commodity that played into Japanese nostalgic desires for Korean tradition. Objects of colonial kitsch located a sense of Korean culture in the past, mediating how notions of Korean tradition were communicated through mass culture. As a visual historical medium representative of spatial mobility across the Japanese empire, examining postcards allows one to investigate the conflicts within the notion of imperial nostalgia and the commodification of Korean tradition during the colonial period. Multiple layers of consciousness are inherent in visual historical sources and their continued circulation and reproduction. Thus, the complex interactions of Japanese imperialism with tourism and commercialism can be decoded through an analysis of postcards. These discussions further allow for an exploration into the notion of place in history, elucidating how place can inform theories of imagined geographies and become intertwined with historical commercialism, as well as mobility and movement.

*This thesis follows the Revised Romanization of Korean system. All Korean to English translations in this thesis were made by the author, Lucie Crowley Duffy, with the help of Riley Tollett. All Japanese to English translations were made by Richard J. Barnes.

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Introduction

Seeing acts as a person's grounding mechanism for determining what they know about the world around them.¹ Seeing is reciprocal; it is constructive. This thesis investigates the commercialization of seeing under empire, specifically through the medium of the postcard and in reference to the period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea (1910-1945). When seeing is commercialized it is continually (re)produced, and in this process of (re)production seeing is shaped and molded by various embedded consciousnesses. Gillian Rose argues that the interpretation of visual materials, and therefore in turn the interpretation of seeing and being seen, must investigate "questions of cultural meaning and power."² This thesis argues that postcards depicting colonial-era Korea are illustrative of a specific set of spatial narratives emphasizing Japanese imperial modernity, whilst simultaneously locating Korean culture as something of the past. The juxtaposition of Korean culture to Japanese imperialism was integral in justifying colonial rule and is a common narrative across multiple instances of the Japanese empire. This thesis examines the conflicts within the commercialization of visibility in this period as it is transmitted through postcards of colonial Korea. In other words, it examines the inherent discrepancies that accompany consuming commercialized, colonized subjects under empire; feeling nostalgia for a produced history that is not one's own, and consuming a cultural past one has sought to erase in the present. Considering postcards as a visual historical medium representative of spatial mobility across the Japanese empire, I argue that postcards circulated during the Japanese colonial period form a key example of the commercialization of Korean tradition and culture. Furthermore, imperial spatial politics were inextricably bound up in the Japanese tourism industry's mediation of Korea as an imagined place in the mind of the

¹ John Berger. *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Classics, 1972), 7

² Gillian Rose. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 2

consumer public. The complex interactions of Japanese imperialism with spatial economies and historical mobility, namely through tourism and empire construction processes, can be decoded through an analysis of the postcard. Throughout this thesis, I investigate how the Japanese empire in Korea was constructed, upheld, and maintained through spatial means by evaluating historical postcards, providing an analytical model through which other instances of empire can be investigated vis-à-vis the postcard. As such, this thesis is not focused on the specific task of dating and contextualizing examples of postcards of colonial Korea, but rather on how they are representative of imperial understandings of Korea's past and produced narratives of Korea's future.³

Between 1600 and 1800, travel by European elites, and the touristic practices that accompanied this movement, was increasingly shaped and constructed as a visual practice in line with the ongoing tendency of Western societies to operate ocularcentricly.⁴ Judith Adler maintains that these travel practices later became based on a specific appreciation of spectacularisms in visibility, the emphasis of cultural artistic beauty, and the consumption of these elements through mass tourism.⁵ By the 1920s and 1930s, the pervasiveness of ocularcentrism in governing society and consumerism prevailed beyond the Western world – namely due to the impertinence of Western societies to assimilate the non-West into liberal and capitalistic governing structures through their own imperial projects. Attempting to follow the example of these expansive endeavors and simultaneously protect themselves from Western influence, Japan began consolidating its imperial project in 1895 following success against

³ The postcard examples examined in this thesis are unfortunately not always dated. For more on the dating of imperial Japanese postcards see Hyung Gu Lynn. 'Moving Pictures: Postcards of Colonial Korea,' IIAS Newsletter, 44 (2007): 8-9.

⁴ The pre-eminence and mass circulation of visual spectacularisms within an increasingly image-based cultural economy was in line with capitalistic developments in the West in this period. The development of photographic technologies, in combination with the increased hegemonic globalization that Western colonialism brought, contributed to this.

⁵ Judith Adler. 'Origins of sightseeing,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 16, (1989): 7-29

Qing China in the First Sino-Japanese War and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki.⁶ This treaty ceded a multitude of Qing territories to Japanese control, including Taiwan and the Penghu islands, and ensured that Qing China acknowledged the sovereign autonomy of the Korean peninsula. This subsequently ended Korea's tributary relationship in regard to China, and Peter Duus argues that the inclusion of this condition within the treaty demonstrates the initial aim of Japan's Meiji government to separate Korea from Qing influence.⁷ This further gestured towards Japan's desire to occupy the Korean peninsula as a Japanese satellite, ensuring their security interests in the region.

Formal Japanese influence in Korea was already established by the 1890s, such as through the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 which guaranteed extraterritorial rights to Japanese citizens and trade in Korea. Bolstered by the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and rival Russian colonial interests on the peninsula, Korea was declared a Japanese protectorate in the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905. Japan then formally annexed the Korean peninsula in 1910. The colonization of Korea now solidified; imperial rule would last there until the end of World War II in 1945. Japan's embracement of imperial expansion was accompanied by a significant reframing of their own national and cultural histories in the late 1800s, as well as of their historical relationship with broader notions of East Asian identity and the nationalities of their immediate geographical neighbors. Jeffery Paul Bayliss explains how scholarship on the early Japanese imperial project revealed that "the once widely held notion of [Japan] as a remarkably homogeneous, socially harmonious nation" was uncovered as a "historically constructed and carefully maintained fiction."⁸ The conceptualization of Japan as intensely homogeneous has

⁶ Mark R. Peattie. 'Chapter 5 - The Japanese Colonial Empire 1895-1945,' *The Cambridge History of Japan Vol. 6*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 220

⁷ Peter Duus. *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁸ Jeffery Paul Bayliss. *On the Margins of Empire: Baruku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan*. (Cambridge, U.S.A, and London: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2013), 1

pervaded into the modern era, demonstrating the ways in which their colonial legacy continues to shape how the nation is understood today. In a similar vein, Marilyn Ivy discloses that, “the image of Japan as a great assimilator arises to explain away any epistemological snags or historical confusions: Japan assimilates... retaining the traditional, immutable core of culture while incorporating the shiny trappings of (post)modernity.”⁹ Ivy demonstrates how Japan’s construction as a modern nation-state – defined through “urban energies, capitalist structures of life, and mechanical and electrical forms of reproduction” – was accompanied by intellectual fascination with what she terms as ‘cultural margins.’¹⁰ The nostalgia that marginalized traditions supplied, therefore, became the comparative basis for measuring Japanese (colonial) modernity.

Subsequently, Korean culture began to be viewed with “imperialistic fascination” in early 20th century Japan, and images of Korea became part of a commodification process endowed with conflicting nostalgic desires.¹¹ Nayoung Aimee Kwon defines this commodification as producing ‘colonial kitsch.’¹² Theorizations from the 1960s understand kitsch as a commercial product that can be mass produced, but which is dressed up as artistic or avant-garde.¹³ Kwon outlines *colonial* kitsch as “the devaluation and exoticization of elements of the colony’s culture becoming mass-produced objects for indiscriminate imperial consumption.”¹⁴ Kwon’s discussion of colonial kitsch centers around intangible cultural

⁹ Marilyn Ivy. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 4;

¹¹ Nayoung Aimee Kwon. ‘Conflicting Nostalgia: Performing “The Tale of Ch’unhyang” in the Japanese Empire,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 1 (2014): 115

¹² *Ibid*, 115

¹³ For more on the definition of kitsch, see: Clement Greenberg. ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch,’ *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. (Boston, 1961), 3-22; Hermann Broch. ‘Notes on the Problem of Kitsch,’ in Gillo Bell Dorfler [ed.] *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*. (New York: Universe Books, 1969), 49-68

¹⁴ Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 115; Colonial kitsch can be further defined as having “a specific vision, working to reproduce a set of values and figures that create and maintain the settler-colonial imaginary, mobilising nostalgia and sentiments of national belonging.” Melody Paloma. ‘Rupturing Colonial Kitsch,

products, such as Japanese theatrical adaptations of traditional Korean stories. However, this thesis departs from her analytical paradigm by applying the concept of imperial nostalgia, which was embedded in colonial kitsch items, to the visual and spatial realms these items engaged with; namely, to how Korea was represented, understood, and (re)produced as a place through the visuality of the postcard. The spatial reconfiguration of Korea through such material items was representative of the contradictory imperialistic rhetoric that shaped commodification processes in the period, grounded in colonial nostalgic desire for the unmodernized past. Renato Rosaldo understands imperial nostalgia as a mourning by the colonizers, and the people they represent, of what they themselves have transformed through their occupation and oppressive colonizing acts.¹⁵ The subject of imperial Japanese fascination, ‘Korean-style’ material items became representative of this complex form of nostalgia, whereby consumers inadvertently grieved the evolution of what the Japanese empire had societally reframed through colonialism; namely, Korean traditional and folk culture, art, dress, monuments, food, literature, etc..¹⁶ Furthermore, Japanese imperialism promoted the notion of a shared past between Korea and Japan through cultural products, such as postcards, contradictorily placing itself within the inter-Asian narrative it created.

Consistent with this perspective, Bayliss investigates how the Korean population in Japan during this period negotiated their minority position in society. He explores how they reacted to contradictory Japanese colonial ideologies, which emphasized shared cultural heritage between the two nationalities but refused to action these notions when it came to state minority assimilation efforts. This complex interplay of claimed inclusion within the ‘modern’ Japanese state with the continued discrimination against Koreans through imperial ideologies

Untangling Myth,’ *Meanjin Quarterly* (2021) <https://meanjin.com.au/review/rupturing-colonial-kitsch-untangling-myth/> [Accessed 14/04/2022]

¹⁵ Renato Rosaldo. ‘Imperialist Nostalgia,’ *Representation* 26, (1989): 107-122

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 108

became embedded in the social psyche of many Koreans, both those living in the metropole of Japan and on the colonized Korean peninsula. Bayliss argues that state policies which encouraged greater societal absorption “shaped the conceptions of minority identity that activists from within these communities reacted to in their own movements.”¹⁷ When we apply these discussions to ambivalent spatial and visual representations endowed within postcards, the complex nature of how people interacted with, and negotiated their place within, the Japanese empire is revealed. In reproducing ‘Korean-ness’ through material products, embedded with a sense of nostalgia, a selective image of Korea was sold that alleviated the guilt of the colonial consumer. This nostalgia aimed to subsume regional colonial particularities into a pan-Asian discourse led by Japan, whilst simultaneously devaluing colonized cultures as ‘kitsch’ objects through highlighting their peculiarities.¹⁸ This trend of conflictual nostalgic affect arrived hand in hand with the commodification of Korean culture through mass produced material items, such as postcards.

Scholars frequently dismiss postcards as being merely visual representations of how a place or tourist attraction appeared at a particular moment in time. Relegation of the postcard to this simple understanding, however, bypasses the temporal and spatial movement inherent in postcards as a visual historical source. Postcards emphasized the “fantasy” of travel, demonstrating to the viewer new technologies of physical mobility made possible by the modernity of tourism.¹⁹ Thus, postcards provide a unique mechanism through which to examine the commercialization of place, culture, and tradition in the setting of empire, as they are symbolic of historical mobility across specific geographies, both imagined and real. Their position at the material intersection between the Japanese tourism industry and the

¹⁷ Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire*, 12

¹⁸ Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 117

¹⁹ Lynn, ‘Moving Pictures,’ 8

commodification of Korean culture provides an ample opportunity to explore theories of spatial mobility in history, as well as notions of Korea as an imagined and consumable place in the minds of Japanese imperial subjects.

Postcards

The picture postcard as a visual historical source exists at the crossroads between modernity, mobility, and cultural tradition. Examining the reproduction of tradition through visual mediums, such as postcards, is key to understanding how people in the past understood their own temporality, decoding their relation to, and understanding of, their own past. However, it is pertinent to recognize that postcard images do not exist in isolation from their production, nor from the interplay of seeing and being seen outlined at the opening of this thesis. John Berger attests to the reciprocal nature of seeing: in viewing, one is accepting they can also be viewed. Images, as reproductions of this observation, reflect a further layering to seeing: “Every time we look at a photograph we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an affinity of other possible sights... The photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject.”²⁰ Multiple layers of consciousness are thus inherent in visual sources, and their reproduction, and this contention will form the underlying assertion of this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I examine several historical postcards from various archival sources. This thesis includes seven postcards from the Busan City Museum’s collection (South Korea), one postcard from the Yongsan History Museum’s collection (South Korea), three

²⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 10

postcards from the Japanese commercial collection *The Views of Keijo* (1925~33), two individual postcards from Choe Gil-seong and Urakawa Kazuya's seven volume collection, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 絵葉書で見る近代朝鮮* (*The Postcards of the Modern Korea*), one photograph from the National Mountain Museum (South Korea), one painting from the British Museum (United Kingdom), one tourist map image from *Terry's Japanese Empire* (1914), and one political illustration. In selecting my specific postcard sources, I relied on Choe and Urakawa's model for classifying postcard types. They outline eight types of historical postcards from the Japanese colonial period: news postcards, commemorative postcards, postcards of famous attractions, customary postcards, advertisement postcards, propaganda postcards, 'beauty' postcards, and 'other types.'²¹ The difference between commemorative postcards and postcards of famous attractions, although similar in visual presentation, is defined in this thesis by the postcard's intended purpose. Commemorative postcards (an example of which can be seen in Figure 1) were issued for celebratory purposes, such as imperial anniversaries or to promote the development of Japanese-led industry in Korea, whereas postcards of famous attractions (an example of which can be seen in Figure 2) tended to include both developed touristic monuments and general landscapes that detailed the geographical composition of Korean society under colonial rule.²² This thesis primarily utilizes

²¹ Urakawa Kazuya. "일본 그림엽서의 사료적 특성과 가치 (Historical Characteristics and Value of 'Japanese Picture Postcards')," in Choe Gil-seong. *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 絵葉書で見る近代朝鮮* (*The Postcards of the Modern Korea*), Vol. 1. Urakawa, Kazuya [ed.], (Chop-an Seoul-si: Minsogwon, 2017), 99-117

²² The postcards used in this thesis from the *Busan City Museum* were obtained through keyword searches within the specified period (1910-45) in their online database, including: 명소 (attraction), geographical location terms, 아이들 (children), and 여성/여자 (woman). The postcards used from Choe and Urakawa's seven volume collection, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 絵葉書で見る近代朝鮮* (*The Postcards of the Modern Korea*), were obtained directly from Vol. 2, which contains 명소엽서 (attraction postcards) of the 경성 (Gyeongseong) area in Seoul, and from Vol. 3, which contains 명소엽서 (attraction postcards) of the 경성 (Gyeongseong) area in Seoul, 인천 (Incheon), 경기도 (Gyeonggi-do), 대전 (Daejeon), 충청도 (Chungcheong-do), and 강원도 (Gangwon-do). Other photographs used in this thesis were obtained from the National Museum of Korea e-Museum online database (<https://www.emuseum.go.kr/>).

postcard examples that fall in the commemorative, famous attraction, and ‘beauty’ categories, in line with its focus on representations of Korea as an imagined geography.

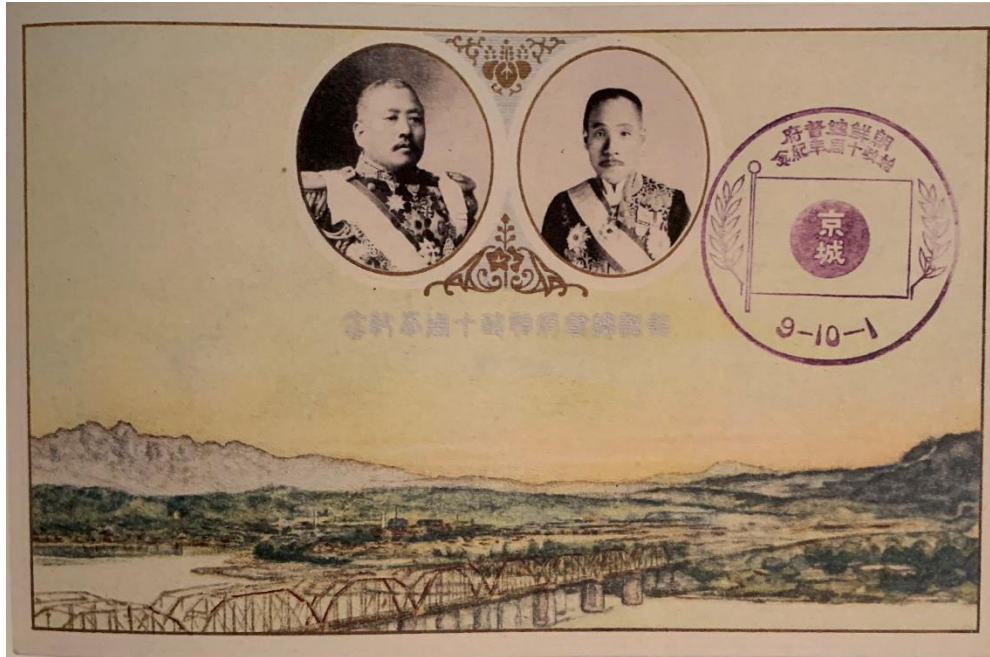


Fig. 1: Illustrated Postcard, 조선총독부 시장 10주년 기념 [인물 2인] (Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the municipal administration of the Japanese Government-General of Korea [2 characters]), (~1920)



Fig. 2: Photo Postcard, 조선 원산 전경 (View of Wonsan, Korea), ‘View of Genzan,’ (1910~1918)

The underlying narrative of this thesis demonstrates how the sociality of, in, and around places, and their visual reproduction, is what allows for the construction of narratives about these places themselves. To support this, I rely on both visual and narrative historical analysis grounded in an interpretivist ontology and a social-constructivist approach, maintaining that human subjectivity is at the core of interpretative modes of analysis. However, this thesis was limited in its scope of investigation due to the corresponding limitations of historical postcard archives. As postcards tend to be included in archives with only their pictorial side recorded, little could be interpreted regarding potential messages on the written side of the card. Thus, this thesis is limited to a visual analysis of postcard images and does not investigate the sentiments (or lack thereof) expressed through epistolary communication on postcards.

To critically decipher and comprehend visual images, narratives both embedded in, and influencing the production of, said images must be investigated.²³ Rose states that “images are never transparent windows on to the world. They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways.”²⁴ As narrative is one of the key categories of knowledge that people use to understand and organize their thinking about the world around them, the influence of rhetoric and narrative on the production of visual materials is inherent.²⁵ Rose advocates for maintaining a critical visual methodology when working with visual sources. She refers to this as considering the visual both in terms of cultural significance and regarding the social practices and power relations entrenched in images. Ways of seeing, for Rose, are articulated through, and produced by, broader power relations and social influences impacting the viewer

²³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 3

²⁴ *Ibid*, 6

²⁵ Roland Barthes. ‘Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,’ in *Image, Music, Text*, [trans. Stephen Heath] (University of Michigan, 1977): 79

and the conditions of the image's production. This thesis will implement such a critical visual methodology that Rose outlines, in combination with elements of content analysis, in its exploration of visual cultures under imperialism.

Place

Postcards are materially representative of mobility across space. In their very function, they are sent from one geographical area to another to impart on the receiver the experience of the sender's movement. Moreover, they visually represent the place that the sender has travelled to, or is travelling through, via photograph or illustration. In addition to this, postcards represent temporal motion. It takes real time for a postcard to be sent and received, and so in its reception, there is the understanding that the image on the postcard is symbolic of the past, both immediate and further reaching. Postcards are "conduits for mobility into the future," as well as illustrative of mobility in the past.²⁶ Thus, the 'place' denoted in postcard images complexly hangs in the balance between the spatial and temporal positions of the sender and the receiver.

To further explore this complexity in relation to colonial-era Korea, we must first establish an understanding of place in relation to processes of historical mobility. The notion of 'place' created through social practice is necessarily a notion in flux, and the spatial politics of place were intrinsic to Japan's maintenance of empire.²⁷ Tim Cresswell advocates for an understanding of place that recognizes its relationship with human agency and movement, never finished and constantly being shaped and transformed.²⁸ Cresswell identifies that place

²⁶ Lynn, 'Moving Pictures,' 8

²⁷ Tim Cresswell. *Place: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 62

²⁸ *Ibid*, 69

seemingly denotes a sense of stability, but subsequently argues spatial practices create and recreate places in a kinetic way. Mobilities that go beyond place or pass through it have the potential to threaten a static understanding of place, giving rise to concepts such as placelessness, non-place, and the space of flows.²⁹ The spatial practices that people partake in, however, are influenced by communal hierarchies and restraints of societal power structures. Cresswell maintains that as a result, human agency is reflected in the structures governing spatial practices, which in turn affects the internal rules governing places and how people consequently behave in said places.³⁰ Cresswell gives the example of a university as a conceived place. There are certain rules and limits on the things people can do within the spaces of a university that originate from the history of how things were done in said place. How one experiences education now is the result of hundreds of years of practicing education in a specific spatial manner.³¹ The spatial practices constituting place operate similarly, and thus places are always the result of unfinished, continual spatial processes, and should be understood as such.

“Places are never finished but always the result of processes and practices... As such, places need to be studied in terms of the “dominant institutional projects,” the individual biographies of people negotiating a place, and the way in which a sense of place is developed through the interaction of structure and agency.”³²

Cresswell's concept of place is pertinent to how people experience the internal structures of places as they exist in or pass through them. However, in order to consider how the postcard presents a particular narrative of place communicated between sender and receiver,

²⁹ *Ibid*, 62

³⁰ *Ibid*, 66

³¹ *Ibid*, 67

³² *Ibid*, 68

an external understanding of place must also be considered. Doreen Massey rejects the concept of an “introverted place”: an understanding of place taken solely from the interactions that occur within a given place, rather than upon a given place.³³ For Massey, place is a broader occurrence instead of a guaranteed ontological entity entrenched in authenticity. She explores the power geometry of space-time compression, critiquing claims that capitalism and its developments have determined the individual’s understanding and experience of place. Rather, Massey argues race and gender also greatly influence this.³⁴ Different social groups are positioned contrarily in relation to the interconnections of space-time compression, and how these groups subsequently navigate movement in relation to place is often out of their control. Similarly to Cresswell, Massey proposes a progressive concept of place, conceptualizing it in relation to the network of social interactions that constitute it.³⁵ However, Massey’s concept of place recognizes the mass of internal identity conflicts that occur within places and how these identities contribute to socialized place formation. Massey’s notion of place is constructed from the outside rather than the inside, and is particularly useful when applied to discussions of postcards as emblematic of commodified mobility. This thesis aims to incorporate aspects of both Cresswell’s and Massey’s approach to place, acknowledging Cresswell’s theory of place as unfinished and interacting with structure and agency, as well as Massey’s theory of place as influenced by social status. Applying such a notion of place, that recognizes the hierarchies structuring said place, to the commercial and material culture of Korea rests on the assumption that the meanings attached to the place – or the idea of the place – form the sense of Korean political struggle against colonialism. This sentiment is echoed by Jina E. Kim in her discussions of consumerism under Japanese colonial rule in Korea and Taiwan. Kim questions: “How could the colonized find his or her subjectivity through a colonizer’s commodities or

³³ As quoted in Cresswell, *Place*, 71

³⁴ Doreen Massey. *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 147-148

³⁵ *Ibid*, 155-156

“things” while at the same time condemning the very process that allows these things to be made available and enjoyed?”³⁶ Thus, the meanings attached through the lived experiences of colonial places to the visual representations of these places informed how Koreans experienced their colonial positionality, which in turn informed the social processes that constructed these places in the first instance.

Tourism, through encouraging increased mobility for experiential and observational purposes, contributes towards the erosion of place into placelessness. Edward Relph’s notion of place connects this to a loss of a sense of authenticity. Throughout the early 20th century, as travel and tourism grew across East Asia and became an institutionalized industry, the authentic relationships people built with places began to diminish.

“An inauthentic attitude towards place is transmitted through a number of processes, or perhaps more accurately “media,” which directly or indirectly encourage “placelessness,” that is, a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience.”³⁷

However, Massey claims that there is no “authenticity of place” in the first instance.³⁸ She labels interpretations such as Relph’s as essentialist understandings of place that contribute towards considering place as static, and which rejects the social content of changes to said place. Tourism, thus, rather than solely eroding the sense of authenticity endowed upon a place, is simply one force affecting changes to place. This is not to say, however, that these changes occur equally between one place or another. Anna L. Tsing investigates how globalizing forces such as political ideologies engage with the “particularities of place” in the “sticky material of

³⁶ Jina E. Kim. *Urban Modernities in Colonial Korea and Taiwan*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 97

³⁷ Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness* (London: SAGE Publications, 1976) 90

³⁸ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 121

practical encounters.”³⁹ These globalizing forces are emphasized as objective, scientific, and universally applicable, and Tsing recognizes how they are modified by the specificity of places. The impact of these globalized concepts is not evenly distributed throughout the world, and therefore they inform and affect place differently, and inherently unequally. When we consider these contentions in relation to depictions of Korea as a place portrayed through Japanese imperial postcards, how tourism (as representative of globalizing capitalist forces) influenced the production of these visual sources becomes apparent. How empire interacts with tourism as a globalizing force can also be interpreted. Thus, postcards of colonial-era Korea contributed towards an unequal sense of place through advancing a specific narrative of locality in the minds of the consumer. This is further complicated due to the uneven way colonialism affected, and continues to affect, commercialization.

Progress

This thesis will examine several visual postcard examples analytically structured around moments of spatial significance in the development of the Japanese colonial project in Korea. Chapter One explores the potential of the postcard as a medium to investigate the intersection of temporal and spatial spheres when examining instances of empire in history. As part of this, I explore the background to the emergence of the postcard in connection to modernity and travel, and I examine the value of the postcard in comparison to other visual historical mediums. Chapter Two engages with historical postcards from colonial-era Korea that depict buildings and historical sites of note. Primarily, this chapter investigates these postcards as a form of

³⁹ Anna L. Tsing. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1

‘colonial kitsch’: an emphasized cultural commodity entrenched with narratives of colonial hierarchal power structures. In this chapter, I also consider the implied promotion of modernity and societal progress behind the making of postcards through an examination of their production in collection format, in turn symbolic of touristic commercialism in the early 20th century. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Three, engages with historical postcards of colonial-era Korea that depict people; in particular, women and children. This chapter analyses the perceptions engrained into the presentation of these subjects on postcards; a highly commercialized and spatially transgressing medium. In portraying feminized, sexualized, and infantilized Korean subjects on postcards, the narrative of Korea as a place taken from these visual sources is also feminized and immature. I relate this to the complexities surrounding the oppressed feminine colonial subject, and decode how gendered notions of modernity intersected with the Japanese colonial project.

Chapter One

It is easy to indulge in an overarching rhetoric of control and hegemony when analyzing the colonial experience, especially in relation to influences such as tourism and capitalism. Jun Uchida questions: “In what ways can we talk about colonialism without reducing complex local human interactions to relations of power?”⁴⁰ They assert that sentimental texts (memoirs, letters, etc.) are central to understanding colonial governance, and that these sources demonstrate how understandings of culture and identity were negotiated through everyday life, not solely through elite politics or relations of hegemonic power. Eric Evans and Jeffrey Richards further assert that the postcard is an effective historical source to achieve such an insight into everyday life, as postcards depict “fragments of people’s lives,” both in the images they show and the messages included alongside them.⁴¹ However, such insights into the sphere of everyday life have been gained by many scholars across historical discourses.⁴² Therefore, in this chapter, I highlight the uniqueness of the postcard in historicizing the imperial everyday. The postcard is an extremely effective visual historical source to specifically analyze instances of colonization and how the spatial sphere of everyday life under empire became critical in the broader maintenance of imperialism. Further, the postcard allows for this vein of conceptual investigation as it is both itself a product of imperial cosmopolitan commercial cultures, and a material object that visually depicts the oppressive impact of imperial modernity.

Following John Berger’s assertions that images used for publicity purposes express a sense of mobility (both spatial and temporal) in comparison to the static viewer, in this chapter

⁴⁰ Jun Uchida. ‘A Sentimental Journey: Mapping the Interior Frontier of Japanese Settlers in Colonial Korea,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2011): 706-708.

⁴¹ Eric J. Evans & Jeffrey Richards. *A social history of Britain in postcards, 1870-1930* (London & New York, 1980), 2

⁴² For more on investigating ‘everyday life’ in history, see William Templer. *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Alf Lüdtke [ed.], (Princeton University Press, 1995)

I investigate the postcard as a historical source for decoding movement and spatial politics under empire, providing an analytical model through which other instances of colonialism can be investigated.⁴³ I evaluate this contention in conversation with the postcard's inherent state as a visual spatial vessel for tourism and commerciality. This chapter will explore how the postcard is situated at the intersection of several moving theories and discourses; theories of place, and of places depicted through images, theories of historical mobility, and discourses surrounding the commercialization of tradition and culture for touristic practices. Essentially, this chapter will analyze the potentiality held within the postcard as a visual historical source to analyze these intersections and overlapping influences, with comparison made to other forms of visual and touristic historical sources, such as travel guides and photographs.

History of the Postcard

The first recorded postcard was printed and sent in Austria on 1st October 1869, “a plain card with a printed two-kreuzer stamp on one side and space for a message on the other.”⁴⁴ Many early postcards that emerged within Western postal services in the late 1800s bear little similarity to the postcards we are familiar with in our present. The trend of sending postcards began as a short-form way to send simple messages via post, and therefore did not often feature a pictorial side to the card itself in early historical examples. Alongside the development of photographic and communication technologies, as well as tourism and travel facilitated by Western empires, the visual postcard industry began to emerge and became standardized at the turn of the 20th century. In the mid-1910s, postcard collecting had become a popular imperialist

⁴³ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 130

⁴⁴ Evans & Richards. *A social history of Britain in postcards*, 3

hobby (six British magazines were dedicated to this pastime in 1914), and these collected cards constitute much of the current archives of postcards, rather than those that were actually posted.⁴⁵

It is a common trend to understand postcards as an inherently Western phenomenon, the popularity of which outside of Europe was the product of Western imperial influence.⁴⁶ For instance, postcards depicting French colonial-era Algerian women without their veils or posing nude were widely criticized as an example of the Western colonial gaze appropriating the religious history and objectifying the colonized women of Algeria.⁴⁷ Moreover, Pai cites the introduction of the portable camera as a key component of cataloguing and recording imperialistic ‘successes,’ allowing images to become empirical evidence in the “classification of the ‘Ethnographic Other.’”⁴⁸ If one considers the postcard as only a Western phenomenon, however, Japanese-produced postcards of colonial Korea become singularly representative of Japanese efforts to mimic Western colonial visual practices. This begs the question: how can the Japanese colonial gaze be interpreted through Western-originated visual technologies? While much of the compositional structuring, postal standardization, and photographic framing of postcards in this context do follow Western postcard examples, it is through the visual and spatial narratives constructed within, and by, postcards of colonial Korea that the nuances of the Japanese empire’s control and suppression of the peninsula, as well as the distinctions of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4; Lynn, ‘Moving Pictures,’ 9; The visual economy of collected postcards in comparison to mailed postcards as historical sources, and as preserved in historical archives, is imbued with a different sense of commercialism. The distinction between these two groups of postcard records would thus indicate different historical processes when examined. Unfortunately, an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon lies out with the bounds of this thesis, pending further research into sent/collected postcard archives.

⁴⁶ Jooyeon Rhee. ‘Beyond the Sexualised Colonial Narrative: Undoing the Visual History of Kisaeng in Colonial Korea,’ *Journal of Korean Studies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 44

⁴⁷ Malek Alloula. *Colonial Harem*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)

⁴⁸ Hyung Il Pai. ‘Travel Guides to the Empire: The Production of Tourist Images in Colonial Korea,’ in Laurel Kendall [ed.], *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 67; Elizabeth Edwards. *Anthropology and photography (1860-1920)*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992)

the Japanese colonial gaze, are revealed.⁴⁹ Each instance of empire examined through the postcard therefore must be considered in direct correlation to the mechanisms and structures that managed said specific context of imperialism.

By 1870 the postcard was in use in Japan, solely produced by the Japanese Government until the early 1900s, when homemade postcard issuance was legally permitted.⁵⁰ The first Korean postcard featuring a picture was issued in 1901, as postcards reached mainstream popularity as a form of mass media communication in East Asia between 1900 and 1905 due to the increased mobility facilitated by the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).⁵¹ Postcards were distributed and sold via hundreds of retail outlets in Korea by the 1930s, including the Japan Tourist Bureau (JTB) travel offices and South Manchuria Railway Company stations, important transport hubs, department stores, port cities, photographic studios, and souvenir shops.⁵² The colonial postcard industry had become multi-layered, the production of picture postcards traversing across numerous levels – from individual photographers, printing shops, colorists, to larger Japanese state issuers and conglomerate retailers.⁵³ All producers of postcards in colonial Korea followed the regulations on postcard production issued by the Japanese Ministry of Communication. The regulation of Korean-produced postcards during the colonial period by the Japanese imperial tourism administration underlies a key assertion of this thesis: that all postcards produced in the region in this period reflected the colonial

⁴⁹ For more detail on the compositional arrangement of Japanese postcards of colonial Korea, see: Choe Gil-seong, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 繪葉書で見る近代朝鮮 (The Postcards of the Modern Korea), Vol. 1.* Urakawa, Kazuya [ed.], (Chop-an Seoul-si: Minsogwon, 2017), 127-129

⁵⁰ Choe, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 繪葉書で見る近代朝鮮 (The Postcards of the Modern Korea), Vol. 1.*, 31

⁵¹ Lynn, 'Moving Pictures,' 8

⁵² Hyung Il Pai. 'Staging 'Koreana' for the Tourist Gaze: Imperialist Nostalgia and the Circulation of Picture Postcards,' *History of Photography* 37, no. 3 (2013): 303

⁵³ Choe, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 繪葉書で見る近代朝鮮 (The Postcards of the Modern Korea), Vol. 1.*, 33

restraints of their production and are embedded with imperial hierarchies, regardless of producer. Malek Alloula furthers this, stating:

“The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonist. It is at once their poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudoknowledge of the colony... It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision.”⁵⁴

Central to Alloula’s own analysis of postcards in colonized Algeria is this very sentiment: that postcards were the colonizer’s “pseudoknowledge” of the colonized land, yet simultaneously acted as a means to project colonial desires onto the places each card visually represented. When this understanding is applied to the Korean context, the hierarchy between the colonial consumer of postcards of Korea and the concept of homogenized ‘Korean-ness’ being consumed is thus apparent. This contention further underscores how the burgeoning postcard industry in this period must be considered through the unequal lens of the colonial context.

Visual and Touristic Imaginaries: A Comparison of the Postcard with Historical Travel Materials and Photographs

Tourism interacts with authenticity and place in multiple ways: it erodes a specific and local sense of authentic place whilst simultaneously promoting the gaining of this authentic local specificity. Examining tourism as a commercializing force allows for insights into how knowledge production concerning Korea as a place proliferated under empire, as well as revealing how social norms became embodied and internalized in the everyday lives of Koreans

⁵⁴ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4

living through this period.⁵⁵ Pai argues that the globalization of tourism was a marker of the “colonizing vanguard of modernity,” imbued in the sensationalization of place through the marketing of colorful images advertising “authentic cultural experiences.”⁵⁶ The popularity of postcards in the early 20th century can be partly attributed to their usage in demonstrating the gaining of such authenticity through travel, in turn implied to have been enabled by the mobility afforded from empire.⁵⁷ Tourism throughout the Japanese empire was further connected to imperial spatial politics; it constructed a “social imaginary” of colonized territories, such as Korea, that was “inseparable from its spatial imaginary.”⁵⁸ However, tourism, by nature, came hand in hand with commercialization. Photographic and postcard producing practices in Korea emerged alongside the consolidation of a bourgeois mass culture, consumed by both colonial elites and colonial subjects. Touristic practices were further (re)framed by the Japanese imperial administration during these processes of commodification, with tropes of exoticization and modernization coalescing in how tourism was structured and promoted.⁵⁹ In this section, I examine the value of historical touristic materials to investigate commercialization under empire in comparison to the postcard, exploring the durability of sources such as brochures and travel guides to understand the intricacies of the Japanese-Korean colonial hierarchy. I also consider other forms of visual sources in comparison to the postcard, and evaluate the role of photographic technologies in facilitating the commercial boom of postcards in the colonial period.

⁵⁵ Andrew Elliott & Daniel Milne. ‘Introduction,’ *Japan Review*, Special Issue: War, Tourism, and Modern Japan, no. 33 (2019): 4

⁵⁶ Pai, ‘Travel Guides to the Empire,’ 67; Orvar Lofgren. *On holiday: History of vacationing*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

⁵⁷ Dean MacCannell. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1976): 135-43

⁵⁸ Kate MacDonald. *Placing Empire: Travel and the Social Imagination in Imperial Japan* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 48

⁵⁹ Andrew Elliot. ‘“Orient Calls”: Anglophone Travel Writing and Tourism as Propaganda during the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941,’ *Japan Review*, no. 33 (2019): 117

In 1893, The Welcome Society of Japan was founded, Japan's first tourism board. This society aimed to facilitate the emergence of touristic practices, as seen through their 1908 Guidebook, which enabled tourists "to view objects of art and enter into social or commercial relations with the people."⁶⁰ Richard Butler and Wantanee Suntikul note that "tourism is generally regarded as a phenomenon that needs peace in order to flourish," but argue tourism and conflict are not mutually exclusive and can often occur simultaneously, contrary to many common assumptions.⁶¹ Under the violence of the Japanese empire, therefore, tourist practices continued to thrive. The Japanese Tourist Bureau (JTB) was subsequently established in 1912, opening an outpost in Korea shortly thereafter with the aim to recoup investments made on transportation infrastructure on the peninsula. The JTB facilitated the publishing of numerous Japanese-language touristic materials, such as pamphlets and maps, as well as postcards, along with the publication of more durable travel magazines.⁶² With the expansion of trade routes from Japan to Korea enabled and facilitated by Japan's hegemonic control of commerce, travel by ship from Shimonoseki and Nagasaki, in Japan, to Busan, in Korea, began to be advertised as a commercial tourist route in the early 1900s. From Busan, tourists were able, and encouraged, to further travel the Korean peninsula and other territories under Japanese colonial control, such as Manchuria and Taiwan, as is demonstrated by the red lines included on the map in Figure 3.

⁶⁰ Pai, 'Travel Guides to the Empire,' 74; Welcome Society of Japan (*Kihinkai*). *A guidebook for tourists in Japan*. 4th ed. (Tokyo: Chamber of Commerce, 1908)

⁶¹ Richard Butler & Wantanee Suntikul. *Tourism and War* (Routledge, 2013), 1-3

⁶² Pai, 'Travel Guides to the Empire,' 75



Fig. 3: Tourist map of the Korean peninsula, 'Korea (Chosen),' *Terry's Japanese Empire* (1914)

In the 1910s, English-language travel guides of these tourist routes began to be published by visiting Europeans and Americans. Structured as both a standardized guide of travel paths and a personal diary of the journey, this form of literature provided intense detail to the Western tourist; from which companies to contact for various tickets and geological surveys of the land, to personal anecdotes of encounters and experiences on the author's trip, often underlaid by racist caricatures and emphasized stereotypes. In *Terry's Japanese Empire* (1914), Thomas Philip provides such a review of his travels throughout Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan in the early 1910s. Describing the approach into Busan's port by ship, he states:

“The big bare island at the left is Deer Island (*zetsueitō*) and beyond it is *Chinhai Bay* (in the war zone). Some fantastic rocks start up near the entrance to the harbour (right) and produce a curious mirage effect. The white-clad Koreans always seen sitting in fatuous vacuity on the rocks at the head of the bay have been aptly likened to pelicans or penguins. – Passports are unnecessary...”⁶³

In this extract, Philip describes the local Koreans he observes in the bay as, “sitting in fatuous vacuity.” Embedded in Philip’s anecdotal description is the implication of Koreans’ supposedly lackluster attitude towards their colonial oppression, suggesting the necessity of Japanese colonization on the peninsula. As Busan was at the heart of Japanese imperial industrialization of the Korean peninsula, Philip further promotes the idea that the Korean people (emphasized homogeneously) are indifferent to the ‘benefits’ they gain through colonial modernization. Homogenous generalization of the Korean population during this period worked to suppress any form of individual identity, instead portraying the colonized populace as one whole; a common mechanism used to devalue the plurality of colonized identities under empire, contributing to the maintenance of Japanese imperial rule through descriptive narrative. Yet, uniqueness of a place is not taken solely from its specificity, but from the wider social relations that inform the context in which we experience that place. Considering Massey’s understanding of place as socially governed from the external, in simultaneously commenting on Korean people’s disposition homogeneously *and* referencing the geographical surroundings of the bay, Philip’s homogenizing narrative is additionally imposed onto Korea as a spatial imaginary. This, in turn, would have influenced how Korea was understood as a conceived geographical and social entity in the minds of Western readers, to which such literature was aimed at.

⁶³ Thomas Philip. *Terry’s Japanese Empire: including Korea and Formosa: with chapters on Manchuria, the Trans-Siberian railway, and the chief ocean routes to Japan: a guidebook for travelers*. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 694

It is important to note the particular lack of durability of touristic materials more generally. By their very purpose, brochures, maps, pamphlets, and other materials, are designed to be used only for short periods of time. That is, whilst the tourist remains in the relevant locality. Pai argues that due to the disposable nature of much touristic materials, pocket-sized guidebooks remain a common historical source through which to measure touristic practices – other tourist literature simply has not survived to reach the present-day archive.⁶⁴ This has a significant impact on our understanding of the touristic past, as it mediates our perception of tourism’s potential to commodify place. The untenability of touristic historical sources to examine how tourism and empire interacted beyond the elite-level sphere is therefore underscored by the disposable nature of materials produced with the everyday person in mind. This ultimately places limits on the scope of analysis possible in examining these processes of commercialization through written guides, such as in the example given previously.

Comparatively, postcards as a historical source are primely positioned to understand how contentions within marketizing Korean culture impacted perceptions of Korea as a colonial territory, by both the colonized and the colonizing mass public. Alloula denotes how for colonialists, the Orient became both a “glittering imaginary” and a mirage.⁶⁵ He positions photography as the mechanism through which this imaginary was constructed, and the postcard as the window into this imaginary for non-elite members of the colonizing society. Urakawa further argues that the popularization of postcards following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) in Korea cannot be understood without considering the development of photographic technologies and the consolidation of photography as a commercial industry on the peninsula.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 73

⁶⁵ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 3

⁶⁶ Urakawa, “일본 그림엽서의 사료적 특성과 가치 (Historical Characteristics and Value of ‘Japanese Picture Postcards’),” 69

Photographic technologies entered the Korean societal sphere in the 1860s, after its introduction from diplomatic relations with the elite courts of Qing China.⁶⁷ Photography was already a burgeoning industry in Japan by this decade, having been introduced through trade with Dutch researchers in the 1840s.⁶⁸ By the 1880s, several Korean photography artists (such as Kim Yong-won, Ji Un-yeong, and Hwang Cheol) had opened photo studios, although the first photography art exhibition was not held until 1929, once Korea was already under direct Japanese colonial control.⁶⁹ Photography became a solidified commercial industry, as well as a prominent aspect of elite social life, under Japanese imperial control, becoming the example and providing the technology for the proliferation of the postcard industry. Rhee delineates:

“The circulation, collection, and exchange of postcards at the beginning of the twentieth century were a form of the burgeoning international commercialization of photography, which travelled “far beyond any simple journey between colonial sender and metropolitan receiver.”⁷⁰

Nonetheless, photographs as a historical source provide different insights into the commercialization of seeing under empire than postcards. Historical photographs depict the experience of life under colonial rule, but postcards are indicative of the colonial hierarchies and structures governing these lives. Although both forms of historical visual source contain multiplicities of consciousnesses layered into their production, the postcard’s engagement with capital, commerciality, and mobility results in a varied layering of subjectivities that go beyond

⁶⁷ Choe Injin. *한국 사진사, 1631-1945* [History of photography in Korea]. (Seoul: Nunpit, 1999), 138-146

⁶⁸ Urakawa, “일본 그림엽서의 사료적 특성과 가치 (Historical Characteristics and Value of ‘Japanese Picture Postcards’),” 71

⁶⁹ Do Jae-gi. ‘한국 사진사를 다시 본다... 1920~70년대 대표작들 한자리에 (Revisiting the history of Korean photography... representative works from the 1920s to 1970s),’ *경향신문* (*Kyeong Hyang ShinMun*), 18th

January, 2023: <https://m.khan.co.kr/culture/culture-general/article/202301181412001#c2b> [Accessed 02/25/24]

⁷⁰ Rhee, ‘Beyond the Sexualised Colonial Narrative,’ 45; Saloni Mathur. *India By Design* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2005), 115

its production conditions; this includes negotiating broader realms of material consumption practices, encountering tourism economies, and – in the case of postcards of colonial-era Korea – aligning with the rhetoric of the Japanese imperial state. Postcards are key examples of the commodification of Korean culture that occurred due to Japanese imperial nostalgia in the period. Yet, it is their contribution to the visual economy of empire and vast availability to numerous sections of society that primely positions them as conduits to investigate the exploitative aspects of imperial tourism and the commodification of place. Alloula explains, “The postcard does it one better; it becomes the poor man’s phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams.”⁷¹ Given the great availability of postcards in shops, transport stations, post offices, etc., as well as their distancing of consumer from place visually represented, postcards worked to objectify place, taking it out of its specific geographical context and limiting the social aspects of place to specific visual temporalities. Such can be observed in Figure 4, which depicts photographic images of the Korean city of Busan accompanied by vibrantly colored illustrations of fish in the ocean.



Fig. 4: Photo and illustration Postcard, 부산 정거장과 부산 전경 (Busan station and View of Busan), Yongsan History Museum (1910~1945)

⁷¹Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4

As a major industrial and commercial port between Japan and Korea, the fishing industry was central to maintaining Busan's local economy, explaining the inclusion of these visualities together. Yet, the positioning of the photographs within the overall postcard image and their small size in comparison to the illustrated fish, in combination with the fishes' comical expressionism and the use of vivid color, works to distance the consumer from the lived realities of Busan as a place. Alloula further outlines, "Travel is the essence of the postcard... It straddles two spaces: the one it represents and the one it will reach."⁷² Deemed a material emblem of the commodifying processes of touristic practices, postcards can be further considered through Berger's publicity image outline. When publicity images depict place, they create a sense of distance between consumer and product: "The more convincingly publicity conveys the pleasure of bathing in a warm, distant sea, the more the spectator-buyer will become aware that he is hundreds of miles away from that sea..."⁷³ Postcards operate in a similar fashion, and can thus be considered as publicity images and a commercialized emblem of mobility. Therefore, in comparison to other written and visual touristic historical sources, postcards are more indicative of imperialistic commodification processes. In viewing other touristic materials, the consumption of Korea as a commercialized place is constructed variously into narrative through language, implication, or metaphor, often remaining critically unchallenged by the consumer. Yet, the postcard as a historical source does not only represent the past as a relic or an artifact might, but it interacts with the viewer's perception of time and of history in a manner that written guides or photographs lack. Therefore, postcards contain inherent contradictions as a historical source that, when examined, help us to understand the contradictions within Japanese imperial governance.

⁷² Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4

⁷³ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 132

An alternative visual source comparable to the postcard are self-portrait photographs, in that these photographs were posed and purposeful just the same as postcards, but were not the result of an attempt to simply document one's travels, as might have been the case with travel photograph collections. The production of these '*cartes de visite*' (calling cards) in Europe demonstrated the materiality of the middle classes in the nineteenth-century, as well as revealing the specific values encoded in their production and the emphasis placed on the ease of their exchange.⁷⁴ However, despite the rapid increase in usage of photography technology in Korea during the colonial period, photographs differ from postcards in historical source value due to their varying connections to commerciality.

In summary, colonial-era tourism was inherently contradictory. The postcard as a historical source in this geographical context is less a marker of Western influence on the peninsula, and more a marker of the complex way tourism interacted with Japanese imperial efforts. Japan was attempting to assimilate Korea into its empire; to 'Japanize' it and naturalize it as a territorial extension of Japan. At the same time, Korea's tourism industry (administered by the Japanese) sought to emphasize travel to Korea as an opportunity to experience a different culture.⁷⁵ In order to do this in alignment with assimilationist ideology, Korean culture was constructed as historical and traditional, and therefore worthy of visiting. This construction of Korean culture as something 'of the past' allowed for the propagation of narratives implying that Korea was in need of modernization through colonialism. Practices of Japanization through assimilation and exoticization through tourism were therefore two sides of the same "colonial

⁷⁴ Deborah Poole. *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 112

⁷⁵ Kenneth J. Ruoff. *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 106

coin.”⁷⁶ Analysis of postcards effectively demonstrates the complexity of this, and how the ambivalence between cultural exclusion and assimilation contributed to understandings of Korea as a commodified and consumable place.

⁷⁶ Tessa Morris-Suzuki. ‘Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century,’ in Sharon A. Minichiello [ed.], *Japan’s Competing Modernities*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 159-161

Chapter Two

The underlying contention of this thesis concerns the spotlighting of visual historical sources to investigate conditions of empire. The visuality of the postcard cannot be investigated without discussion of how notions of temporality inform relations of power that, as Rose states, “produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging.”⁷⁷ How the postcard interacts with perceptions of temporality is central to understand how the imperial economy of visuality mediated colonial interactions in Korea. The temporal positioning of Korean geography as characteristic of a pre-modernized society in relation to imperial Japan through visual means is consequently the focus of this chapter. As Saloni Mathur argues; “The postcard is... both a cosmopolitan form and a constant reminder of the imperial conditions that establish the basis for modern cosmopolitanism.”⁷⁸ This is implicit in the surface level reading taken of the postcard, but also by investigating the spatial imaginary the postcard creates of the place depicted on its pictorial side. Hence, in this chapter, I engage with historical postcards from colonial-era Korea that depict buildings and historical sites of note. Archaeologic efforts to categorize and preserve aspects of a colonized society on the part of the colonizer underscores the deliberate positioning of the colonized society as un-modern. This is apparent in the immense efforts of imperial Japan to transform Korean historical sites into museums, botanical gardens, and other forms of visitable tourist attractions.⁷⁹ Investigation of these practices as represented by the postcard further demonstrate how contradictory nostalgic affect influenced these practices, illuminating how the archaeological structuring of Korea’s history contributed to the upholding of Japanese rule on the peninsula. Alloula further iterates:

⁷⁷ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 3

⁷⁸ Mathur, *India By Design*, 115

⁷⁹ For more on the archaeological structuring of Korea’s history, see: Hyung Il Pai. *Constructing “Korean” Origins*. (Harvard University Press, 2000)

“Today, nostalgic wonderment and tearful archeology (Oh! those colonial days!) are very much in vogue. But to give in to them is to forget a little too quickly the motivations and the effects of this vast operation of systematic distortion. It is also to lay the groundwork for its return in a new guise: a racism and a xenophobia titillated by the nostalgia of the colonial empire.”⁸⁰

Alloula additionally argues that postcards contain the ideology of colonialism. Following this contention, this chapter explores postcards as a form of ‘colonial kitsch’: an emphasized cultural commodity entrenched with narratives of colonial hierarchal power structures.⁸¹ This chapter considers the implied promotion of modernity and societal progress behind the making of postcards, through an examination of their visual production, individually and in collection form, in turn symbolic of touristic commercialism in the early 20th century.

Korean Historical Sites as ‘Colonial Kitsch’

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, ‘colonial kitsch’ refers to the commodification of conflictual nostalgia through mass produced material items or advertisements, such as postcards. Objects of colonial kitsch produced under the Japanese empire located a sense of Korean culture in the past, mediating how notions of Korean tradition were communicated through mass consumption. Kwon argues:

“In the case of Japan’s imperialist nostalgia for colonial kitsch, this assumed familiarity with the “lost” object is in fact an illegitimate and imaginary relationship to Korea’s bygone days based not

⁸⁰ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 4-5

on an actual memory but on the present colonizing desire to subsume even a past prior to colonization.”⁸²

Postcards depicting colonial era-Korea can thus be considered as an example of ‘colonial kitsch,’ as they demonstrate the devaluation of Korean culture and the exoticization of Korean subjects, whilst at the same time portraying Korean custom as a nostalgic relic of the past. In reaction to the preeminence of Japanese imperial nostalgic rhetoric within material cultures of the period, the cultural realm of Korean society in the late-1930s took on increasing symbolic importance for Koreans themselves. As Japan’s assimilationist policies intensified, Korea’s cultural creations became a metaphor for national identity in the face of threats to its governmental sovereignty. In line with this, traditionalism underwent a revival in Korea, and in response to assimilationist imperial pressures (from both Japan and the West) there were calls for the preservation and archiving of cultural artefacts.⁸³ Nevertheless, this preservation process, specifically what aspects of Korean traditional culture were valued and what aspects were not, was inherently influenced by the colonial relationship and power dynamic on the peninsula in the period.

“...the Korean peninsula was the only colony where the Colonial Government-General of Korea Office sponsored more than four decades of continuous archaeological and historical surveys in order to collect documents, register artifacts, and excavate buried objects, which were later exhibited in Colonial Government-General of Korea museums at major historical destinations throughout the peninsula.”⁸⁴

⁸² Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 118

⁸³ Jong-yon Hwang. ‘Significance in literary history of the classics revival movements of the 1930s,’ *Hanguk munhak yeongu*, 11 (1988): 217-260

⁸⁴ Pai, ‘Travel Guides to the Empire,’ 69

Japanese assimilationist policies are intrinsic to understanding the commodification of Korean traditional culture under imperial rule, for their role in substituting Korean culture with Japanese culture typifies the “trauma” of Korea’s colonial experience.⁸⁵ Manipulation of Korea’s past was a key cultural strategy the Japanese used to justify their superiority and subdue Korean nationalism. Yet, this mediation of the past was not limited to the production of postcards, and we can examine other instances of cultural commodification to understand how the construction of ‘colonial kitsch’ operated to mediate temporal perceptions of Korea in relation to Japan. For example, the rhetoric of modernization embedded within the interpretation of Korea’s past as a nostalgic commodity is apparent in Japanese retellings of Korean folklore during the colonial period. Nationalized narratives in the retelling of folktales over time are linked to the espousal of colonial hierarchies and concepts, and folklore performances under Japanese colonial rule worked to shape perceptions of Korea’s past.

The Tale of Chunhyang is undisputedly the most common and favored of Korea’s national folktales, and in both contemporary North and South Korea it continues to be reinterpreted and re-performed in diverse artistic forms.⁸⁶ It is a central part of Korea’s folk heritage.⁸⁷ Kwon details a 1938 kabuki-style, Japanese performance of the play as the fundamental case study for theories of ‘colonial kitsch’ in action. The play was commissioned and performed in Japanese by the Shinkyō Theatre Troupe, and Kwon argues it represented a moment of colonial interaction where Korea’s literary folklore history was co-opted by the Japanese for entertainment means.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Roger L. Janelli. ‘The Origins of Korean Folklore Scholarship,’ *The Journal of American Folklore* 99, no. 391 (1986): 28

⁸⁶ Sol Seongyeong. *The Mystery of Chunhyang jeon*. (Seoul: Taekkakyo Chulpanbu, 2001)

⁸⁷ Richard Rutt & Kim Chong-Un. *Virtuous Women: Three Classic Korean Novels*. (Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1979), 238

⁸⁸ Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 114; For detailed account of the performances, see Shirakawa Yutaka. *Shokuminchiki Chosen no sakka to Nihon [Colonial Korean Writers and Japan]*. (Okayama: Daigaku kyoiku shuppan, 1995)

Considered as ‘modernist’ within the Japanese theater industry, this version of *Chunhyang* was significantly influenced by Japanese performance traditions of kabuki. The hybridization of pansori with kabuki in this performance positioned Korean traditional performance as needing Japanese traditional performance in order to be considered as ‘modern’ theatre, but also in order to be popular within the Japanese empire. Thus, in this stage adaptation of *The Tale of Chunhyang* – the promotion of which we can consider a form of ‘colonial kitsch’ – Korean traditions are fixed and static, but Japanese traditions hold within them potential for new forms of theater production.⁸⁹ This implication further positions Korean traditional pansori performances as a historical artifact, bypassing the ability for this performance style to be recreated in a contemporary temporality. Moreover, it places Japanese traditional kabuki performances as a modernizing force, despite both traditions originating prior to the 20th century.⁹⁰ This is merely one example of how the kitsch-ifying of Korean cultural identity contributed to the maintenance of empire through rhetorical means, demonstrating how these commercialization processes were not limited to tangible materials. With this understanding of ‘colonial kitsch’ in mind, let us now turn to the postcard.

Figure 5 shows a common example of a colonial era-postcard that depicted historical tourist sites in Korea. The English caption on the postcard reads: “The grand sight of the beautifully painted Saisho Hall on the top of Botandai Hill, Heijo.” *Heijo* was the Japanese colonial name for what is currently Pyongyang, in North Korea, and Botandai Hill overlooked the Taedong River near the city.⁹¹ Information on the current state of this monument is difficult

⁸⁹ Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 129

⁹⁰ There is evidence of kabuki performances occurring in Japan from the early 1600s. Pansori is similarly said to have originated in Korea in the 17th century. For more on the roots of kabuki performance, see: Francils Haar. *Japanese Theatre in Highlight: A Pictorial Commentary*. (Westport: Greenwood, 1971)

⁹¹ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2015-3006-28 [Accessed 10/04/2022]

to attain due to the lack of access to historical materials on North Korea. However, a 1940 print by artist Hiratsuka Un'ichi also depicts Botandai Hill, as seen in Figure 6.



Fig. 5: Photo Postcard, 평양명승, 모란대정상 (Pyongyang Scenic Spot, Peony Summit), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)



Fig. 6: Heijo Botandai (colour woodblock print), Hiratsuka Un'ichi, *One Hundred Views of New Japan* (1940)

Historical sites such as these were preserved and sponsored as tourist sites by Japanese colonialists to create a 'timeless' image of Korea. Various archaeological sites were highlighted by the Japanese tourism industry in Korea; the emphasis of 'ancientness' meant to remind visitors of Japan's role in preserving Korea's history through modern archaeological work.⁹² The standardization of Korean historical sites through Japanese preservation efforts thus constructed these sites as consumable. When further represented vis-à-vis the postcard, the Japanese colonial gaze was solidified in material form, available for mass circulation within the commercial imperial economy. Thus, postcards of these sites were constructed as 'colonial kitsch,' whilst simultaneously exemplifying emblematic encouragement of touristic mobility. Robert Young delineates an interpretative framework that argues empire operates "not only as a mechanism of capitalist expansion for wealth and profit, but also as a mechanism that generates desire through collective fantasy."⁹³ Furthermore, Anne McClintock discusses feelings of ambivalence in social interactions not simply between the colonizer and the colonized, but amongst imperialists themselves. She identifies this as a crisis in masculine colonialist identity torn between "a fantasy of conquest and a dread of engulfment."⁹⁴ In examining the development of material cultures commercialized through imperialist hierarchies, how this materialism influenced the desires and aspirations of both colonized and colonizing subjects becomes complicated when said given material culture comes to represent place, and can further influence the consumer's spatial imaginary of a given place. In other words, the colonial exploits of the Japanese empire, when presented to a consumer through a visual medium such as the postcard, became attractive to consumers and represented the mobility possibilities that the Japanese imperial project was granting its citizens. These

⁹² Pai, 'Staging 'Koreana,' 301, 309

⁹³ Robert Young. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 174

⁹⁴ Anne McClintock. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Colonial Contest*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27

colonial desires were then further imposed onto the social and spatial imaginary of Korea as a place through the colonial postcard.

Whilst both images in Figures 5 and 6 were produced for consumption purposes, the narrative of the postcard is markedly different from the narrative of the print due to the traversal functionality of the postcard and its commercial value. The postcard shows a historical Korean site, the preservation of which was made possible by Japanese archaeological initiative. Additionally, the postcard locates the monument as being a historical relic within the recent past, visitable and sharable as a commodified souvenir. The painting, however, locates its portrayal of Korea as a place not in the immediate past, but as an artistic representation of the past. Thus, the postcard demonstrates a sense of place that is bound up in narratives of modernity, whereas the print (due to its artistic elements) does not infer this. The communication of this on a postcard, across geographies and temporalities, was similarly made possible due to commercial travel, also a result of Japanese modernization. Thus, the postcard image is coded with the perception of Korea as being in the past, and Japan as being in the present.



Fig. 7: Photo Postcard, 부산 경상남도산업장려관, 변천 (Busan Gyeongsangnam-do Industry Promotion Center, Transformation), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)



Fig. 8: Photo Postcard, 부산부청과 부산대교 (Busan Provincial Office and Busan Bridge), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)

In examining many instances of the commercialization of Korean traditional culture for Japanese consumption, one could read these efforts as indicative of a contemporary blending of Korean and Japanese cultures. However, it is important to understand the relationship between Japanese producers of these Korean cultural products and their Korean cultural subject matter through the “lens of the uneven colonial encounter” it represented.⁹⁵ Additionally, Japanese postcards of colonial Korea emphasized the ‘triumphs’ of their modernization achievements on the peninsula, specifically concerning industrial advancement. This is apparent in postcards of Busan, Korea, such as those in Figures 7 and 8, as the city was a key port connecting Korea to imperial Japan, and the recipient of historical Japanese presence and industrialization under empire. The postcard in Figure 7, presented together alongside an illustration of an old Korean man painting traditional Korean pots (presumably *옹기* [Onggi]), is supplemented by Japanese descriptions. The title “溢れる活気” (Overflowing with Vitality) is accompanied by written text, which reads;

“各種に亘る商業を奨励並に指導し、當路者の熱心な努力に依って近時益々発展を見つ、あるは喜ばしき現象である。(It is a joyous phenomenon that we have been able to encourage and guide various types of commerce, and due to the dedicated efforts of the officials, we have seen more and more development in recent years.)”⁹⁶

The postcard in Figure 8 is framed similarly. Titled, “偉容を誇る” (Proud of One’s Grandeur), it is also accompanied by written text, which reads;

⁹⁵ Kwon, ‘Conflicting Nostalgia,’ 128

⁹⁶ The Japanese on these postcards is written in the right-to-left reading style common to the pre-WW2 period. I have presented it in my text reversed in left-to-right reading style for clarity.

“寫真は半島唯一の大貿易都釜山府政の中根たる釜山府政の偉容にして、其堂々たる建築より受ける感じ明朗そのもの、向前方に見えるは跳開せる釜山大橋である。(This photo shows the grandeur of the prefectural office in Busan, the only major trading center on the peninsula, which is the root/centerpiece of the Busan Prefectural Government. The surrounding architecture gives off a bright and cheerful feeling, and what you can see off in the distance is the (raisable) Busan Great Bridge/Ohashi.)”

In these descriptions, Japanese pride over the industrialization of Busan is demonstrated. The placing of these postcard images' descriptions, the cards themselves depicting the physical manifestations of Japanese presence in Busan, alongside illustrations of old Korean men engaging in traditional Korean craft culture further interacts with the temporality bound up in 'colonial kitsch.' The emphasized success of the imposition of Japanese modernization on Busan's landscape is placed in direct contrast to the illustrated depiction of traditional Korean culture. If we are to understand these visual depictions as representative of imagined geographies concerning Korea and Japan as abstract places, this comparison thus encourages the viewer to express nostalgia over how Korea is depicted, but awe over the depiction of Japanese industrial advancement. The commercialization of these conflictual narratives through the postcard further solidifies colonial-era postcards of Korea as a form of 'colonial kitsch,' as it demonstrates how mass consumer understandings of empire were temporally and spatially mediated. Moreover, it facilitates the 'Othering' of the Korea's traditional culture by defining it through imperial understandings of modernity.

Palimpsestic Narration in Postcard Collections: Gyeongbok Palace, Gyeonghoeru, and The Japanese Government General Building

The processes behind the production of ‘colonial kitsch’ were representative of two contradictory agendas typical of Japanese imperialism: emphasizing Korean cultural history as something to be preserved whilst attempting to repress Korean cultural peculiarities through assimilation policies such as *Naisen ittai* (One body, Japan and Korea).⁹⁷ If postcards of historical sites in Korea located Korean tradition as in the past, then necessarily postcards depicting sites of Japanese colonial progress located Japan (or at the very least, its imperial influence in Korea) as in the contemporary, moving to the future through modernization. The postcards seen in Figures 9, 10, and 11 were all taken from the collection, *The Views of Keijo*, a 32-piece postcard set depicting various landscapes of colonial Korea.⁹⁸ Compared together, these three postcards demonstrate how postcards in collections as a visual medium palimpsestically narrated Japanese colonialism as progress.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 121

⁹⁸ Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*, 109; There is some discrepancy to dating this postcard collection set. Ruoff cites its publishing date to be sometime in the 1940s, whereas Choe cites 1925~33. It is likely they are citing two different sets, simply named the same title. Thus, the information in this thesis follows that provided by Choe, *그림 엽서로 보는 근대 조선 = 絵葉書で見る近代朝鮮 (The Postcards of the Modern Korea) Vol. 2*, 46-78



Fig. 9: Photo Postcard, 경성 조선총독부 (Government-General of Korea, Gyeongseong), *The Views of Keijo* (1925~33)



Fig. 10: Photo Postcard, 경성 경복궁 경회루 (Gyeongseong, Gyeongbokgung Palace, Gyeonghoeru), *The Views of Keijo* (1925~33)

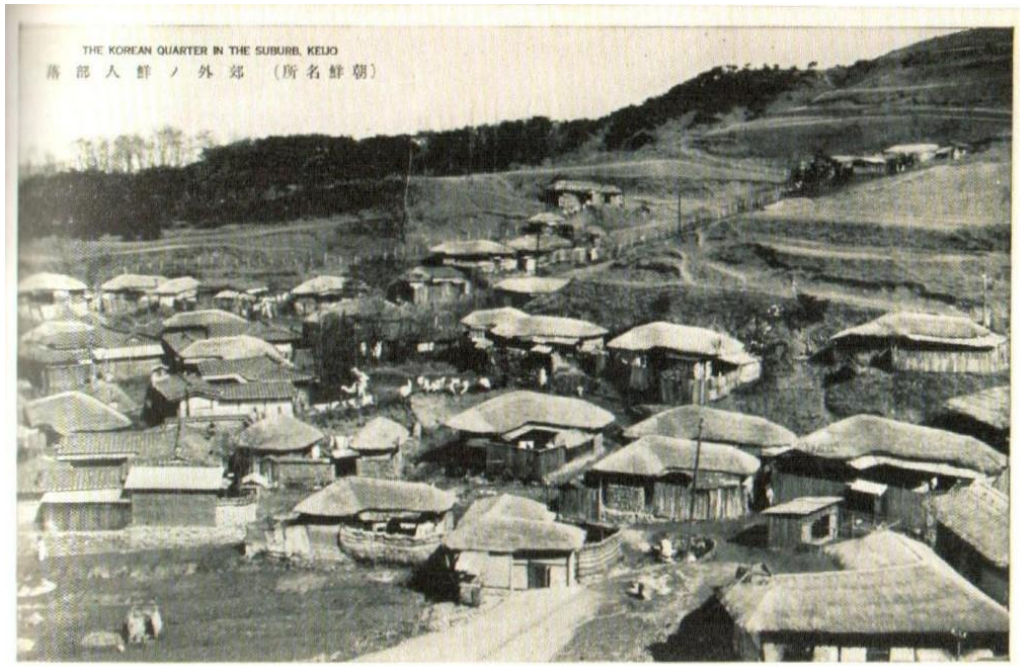


Fig. 11: Photo Postcard, 교외의 선인 마을 (The suburbs of Seonin Village), *The Views of Keijo* (1925~33)

These three postcards demonstrate the narrative of Japan as introducing modernity to Korea, often conveyed through postcard collections such as this. It is important to mention the nature of these postcards as part of a commercial collection, rather than as gathered together by an individual or historical archival entity. In line with Berger's assertions outlined in this thesis's introduction, the placing of these postcards alongside one another in a packaged commodity reflects the intent and positionality of both the photographer and the collection's producer. This interpretation aligns with the underlying assertion of this article; wherein multiple consciousnesses are inherent in visual historical sources. However, the presentation of these postcards within a Japanese-produced and Japanese-marketed commercialized collection frames these consciousnesses through a colonial hierarchy. The narrative presented by this collection is further intrinsic to understanding the postcard as a material result of modernization and the popularization of travel throughout the Japanese empire.

The subject of numerous mass-produced postcards to celebrate its construction in 1926, Figure 9 depicts the Japanese Government General building in Seoul, which was built on the site of the Korean Gyeongbok Palace. The Palace was built in 1395 as both a physical and a symbolic representation of the auspiciousness of Joseon dynastic rule. This, in turn, bolstered the legitimacy of the dynastic change this rule brought, and helped to naturalize the movement of the dynasty's capital from Kaesong to Seoul.⁹⁹ Moreover, the construction of the Palace followed Korean geomantic principles, positioned in relation to its surrounding environment according to these values as a means to enhance the Joseon dynasty's spiritual right to rule. Geomancy is defined by Han Jung-san as, "traditional ideas and practices concerning the relationship of human beings with the surrounding environment," the utilization of which helped the ruling elites to solidify their power.¹⁰⁰ The Gyeongbok site had been the subject of Japanese destruction previously; it was destroyed in the Japanese invasion of 1592, left derelict for 273 years, and restored in 1897 by Prince Regent Heungseon, under King Gojong.¹⁰¹ Following the annexation of Korea in 1910, the Japanese defaced Gyeongbok Palace in an attempt to accentuate their own power and naturalize the authority of their colonial rule. Most importantly, they manipulated Korean geomantic ideals to reinforce this, and constructed their General Government Building on the palace grounds, leaving only unfavorable outer buildings of the Palace standing.¹⁰² Yoon Hong-Key employs the cultural-geographic approach of "reading landscape as a text like a book" to analyze the site of Gyeongbok Palace.¹⁰³ Yoon delineates the changes to this cultural site across the 20th century, and examines how ideologies

⁹⁹ Hong-Key Yoon. 'Iconographic Warfare and the Geomantic Landscape of Seoul,' in *The Culture of Fengshui in Korea: An Exploration of East Asian Geomancy*. (New York: Lexington Books, 1988), 283

¹⁰⁰ Han Jung-san. 'Japan in the Public Culture of South Korea, 1945-2000s: The Making and Remaking of Colonial Sites and Memories,' *Japan Focus* 12, Issue 15, No. 2 (2014)

¹⁰¹ 'Gyeongbokgung Palace.' *Cultural Heritage Administration*. (2006)

https://english.cha.go.kr/chaen/search/selectGeneralSearchDetail.do?mn=EN_02_02&sCcebKdcd=13&ccebAsno=01170000&sCcebCtcd=11&pageIndex=2®ion=&canAsset=&ccebPcd1=&searchWrd=GYEONGBOKGUNG+PALACE&startNum=&endNum=&stCcebAsdt=&enCcebAsdt=&canceled=&ccebKdcd=&ccebCtcd=
[Accessed 02/20/24]

¹⁰² Yoon, 'Iconographic Warfare,' 277

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 287

and power relations were built into the meanings taken from these physical geographic changes. Geomantic interpretations were central to this, and Yoon argues these social constructions were used to artificially reinforce popular beliefs about specific landscapes. As part of the Japanese colonial government's attempt to diminish Korean spirit, construction of important colonial administrative and infrastructural sites, such as government offices, postal service buildings, train stations, etc., often involved the palimpsestic manipulation and destruction of important Korean geomantic sites. Pieces of the previous Korean sites were either left in ruins beside the new, modern, Japanese architecture, or transformed into historical tourist sites in order to demonstrate Japanese superiority in archaeology and historical artifact preservation (narrated as symbols of Japanese modernity).¹⁰⁴

Viewers of these sites in person would have been continually reminded of the discourse of progress bound up in Japanese colonialism. Further, viewers of the site via postcard were to understand modernity as being a result of colonial rule, additionally reinforced by the transmission of this narrative on a visual medium (a postcard) itself the product of increased tourism and modernity. Thus, narratives of the Gyeongbok Palace site as a place inferred through postcards created the site and its history as a consumable place, in turn understood as representative of Korea as a nation: a commodity, not a political sovereign reality, that should be understood only in relation to the Japanese empire.

Moreover, Seoul was effectively created as a desirable tourist destination through the comparison of postcard images within popular collections, as the sites highlighted and displayed alongside each other narrated a specific construction of Seoul as a visitable place. Alongside Gyeongbok Palace in Figure 9, Figure 10 depicts Gyeonghoeru Royal Banquet Hall

¹⁰⁴ Yoon, 'Iconographic Warfare,' 281

(referred to from here on out as Gyeonghoeru). A pavilion located on a balustraded platform on a lake in the grounds of Gyeongbok Palace, Gyeonghoeru was reconstructed during restoration to the site in the 19th century, prior to Japanese colonialization. The pavilion was designed for hosting the king's national banquets, and in the late 1800s featured a single-story roof and wooden structure, with patternless stone pillars (they had previously been engraved with dragon sculptures).¹⁰⁵ Gyeonghoeru is the largest wooden traditional building remaining in present day South Korea, and was noticeably left untouched by the Japanese desecration of the Gyeongbok Palace site. The message behind this clearly emphasized that Korean traditional culture could only be understood through historical examination, furthering the past/present colonial hierarchy dichotomy.

Concerned with the archaeological preservation of Korean traditional and historical sites, the Japanese colonial administration commonly ordered surveys of sites of note by scholars trained in Japanese universities. Pai explains how these surveys “emphasized the reclamation of long neglected ancient ruins and relics as tangible symbols of a shared body of Japanese/Korean patrimony.”¹⁰⁶ Encouraging assimilationist narratives such as this through the imposition of ‘modern’ archaeological standardization and technologies was a central component to the maintenance of Japanese colonial rule. These narratives reconstructed Korea’s historical relationship with Japan to legitimize occupation through imposing metaphors of imperial lineage. By imposing an imagined, pre-modern shared history onto the geographical landscape of Korea, Japanese preservation efforts worked to influence the spatial understanding of Korea in relation to Japan, claiming that the two geographies had been linked

¹⁰⁵ ‘View of Gyeongbokgung Palace from Gyeonghoeru Pavilion.’ *Cultural Heritage Administration*. (2018) https://www.cha.go.kr/newsBbz/selectNewsBbzView.do?newsItemId=155700685§ionId=b_sec_1&mn=NS_01_02 [Accessed 02/26/2024]

¹⁰⁶ Hyung Il Pai. ‘Gateway to Korea: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Reconstructing Ruins as Tourist Landmarks,’ *Journal of Indo-Pacific Archaeology* 35, (2015): 15

since time immemorial. The reproduction of this through postcard further commercialized these narratives, the postcard itself becoming a material mechanism through which to perpetuate and maintain rhetoric of Japanese colonial rule.

The palimpsestic architectural efforts employed by the Japanese colonial government in the construction of their administrative buildings is transferred into the presentation of these sites through postcard collections. As one views the collection as a whole, a narrative emerges through the layering of the modern Japanese constructions over traditional Korean sites, the select preservation of historical sites of note that emphasized Japanese archaeological ingenuity, and the placement of these images in progressive comparison to the postcards depicting Korean suburbs and neighborhoods as underdeveloped and poverty-stricken. The third postcard seen in Figure 11 depicts a Korean neighborhood located in the suburbs of Seoul, showing low, thatched roof buildings and an agricultural landscape. The narrative from this image displays not only Japanese imperial rhetoric demonstrating how Korean villages lacked architectural modernization, but also reveals the conditions Korean people lived in under colonial rule. This village is depicted on the postcard to encourage the nostalgizing of Korean traditional rural life in the minds of the consumer, but also highlights how only Japanese settlements in Korea were afforded the benefits of modern infrastructure that came with Japanese architectural constructions. This contradictory presentation exemplifies the intricacies of imperial nostalgia, whereby Korea's traditional past is commercialized through representations of place, caught up in the past/present dichotomy inherent in 'colonial kitsch' that emphasized the quaintness of villages such as those in Figure 11, but the lived experience of Korean people residing in such villages remained oppressed in the colonial present.

The comparison of these neighborhoods with firstly, the Japanese colonial administrative buildings, and secondly, the commodification of historical Korean sites by Japan into tourist spots, presents Korean culture and tradition not as located in the past in the same manner as said historical sites, but as embodying the past whilst being located in the present. This further purported to consumers of these cards that Japanese colonialism, and the touristic ‘improvements’ it brought with it, were the result of forward modernistic progress, and that the consumer could themselves experience this through visiting the places depicted on these postcards. This affected how Korea was understood as an imagined geography, and the spatial invocations presented in postcard imaging was vital to the maintenance of the Japanese empire.

Chapter Three

Visual media played a central role in the publicity of colonial popular culture, blurring the lines between indigenous imaging and imperial practices of leisure.¹⁰⁷ In this chapter, I examine historical postcards of colonial Korea that feature people, specifically women and children, to explore the visual framing of the Korean people within mass consumption-oriented imperial images. People depicted on postcards became framers for the social imaginary of Korea as a place, once again contributing to the devaluing and marketing of Korea as a consumable entity. The depiction of children on postcards was common and rendered a narrative of pity towards children living in colonized Korea, as well as simultaneously implying their lives needed to be shaped through the modernization brought by Japanese imperialism. This chapter argues that the narrative framing of children on postcards limited Korea to the child role in their relationship with Japan, inventing an infantilized image of Korean people, which in turn became intertwined with how consumers imagined Korea as a geographical place and sociopolitical entity. By further analyzing the depiction of women on postcards, I explore how place itself became gendered through the commercialization of female colonial subjects, visually intertwined with the commercialization of place. This gendering of place additionally utilized stereotypical understandings of gender roles and expectations to imply the subservience of a feminized Korea to a masculinized Japan, informing the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Moreover, in this chapter I aim to provide a form of agency to Koreans depicted on these postcards, interpreting the subject's interaction with commerciality, and decoding the communication of colonial hierarchies within the visual economy of empire.

¹⁰⁷ Saheed Aderinto. 'Researching Colonial Childhoods: Images and Representations of Children in Nigerian Newspaper Press, 1925-1950,' *History in Africa* 39, (2012): 244

Children as ‘Native Markers’: Infantilizing Korea

The imaging of children is often used to purport specific narratives in relation to institutions and governance. For example, Marissa McClure examines how educators in present day Italy use images of the ‘ideal’ child to project notions of education.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, these images create a dichotomy between an acceptable and unacceptable child, generating rhetoric about how children should relate to their educational institutions and excluding those who do not conform to this idealism. When images of children are utilized in this way under conditions of empire, the narratives produced concerning notions of youth necessarily reflect the colonial hierarchies influencing their production. Saheed Aderinto argues that “the representation of children in the print media offers a useful entry into broader and intricate politics of class, agency, gender, and race” under conditions of imperialism. While Aderinto is specifically examining images of colonized children in newspapers and other printed press, rather than postcards, the same contention can be applied to children on postcards of colonial-era Korea. However, in this section, I analyze images of children regarding how they stand as emblems for Korea as a nation and project idealisms onto Korea as an imagined social geography, rather than to discern the conditions that Korean children lived under in this period or to distinguish how Japanese imperialism negotiated concepts of childhood in terms of social and historical construction.

Images of children or young girls were common on postcards of colonial Korea. Children on postcards acted as “native markers,” painting a sympathetic narrative for the viewer of the children of a conquered Korea.¹⁰⁹ The visuality of the child on images of colonial

¹⁰⁸ Marissa McClure. ‘Spectral Childhoods and Educational Consequences of Images of Children,’ *Visual Arts Research* 35, no. 2 (2009): 91

¹⁰⁹ Pai, ‘Staging ‘Koreana,’’ 305-306

Korea worked to simultaneously construct these children as ‘Other’ and emphasize the need for their saving through the modernization brought by colonialism. Pai explains how these depictions were not limited to just the postcard, stating, “Portraits of Koreans as ‘child-like’ and somewhat ‘helpless’ barbarians who needed to be saved by civilized nations mirrored contemporary missionaries’ travel photographs and narratives.”¹¹⁰ Although not a postcard, the commemorative photograph in Figure 12 also demonstrates the savior narrative bound up in images of colonized childrens’ education. The photograph is part of a collection of photos taken to celebrate a school expedition to Mount Geumgang and Mount Soyo in May of 1934. It is implied within the image the benefits such students gain, by way of school expeditions, from the Japanese standardization of education under empire.¹¹¹



Fig. 12: Photograph, ‘일제강점京城同德女子高等普通學校 (경성동덕여자고등보통학교) 학생들 金剛山 수학여행 사진,’ (Photo of students from Gyeongseong Dongdeok Girls’ High School during Japanese colonial rule on a field trip to Mt. Geumgang), *National Mountain Museum, South Korea* (May, 1934)

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 306

¹¹¹ Dongdeok Girls’ High School, now Dongduk Girls’ Middle and High School (동덕여자고등학교) was approved by the Japanese colonial administration on 27th April 1926. <https://dongduk.sen.hs.kr/40506/subMenu.do> [Accessed 02/26/2024]

From the commercial photographer’s perspective, the “innocent expressions and demeanor” of children depicted in this photograph “embellished the exotic and pristine quality of... travel experiences and affirmed [Japan’s] status as discoverers of unknown, distant lands and peoples.”¹¹² Thus, as the children depicted on postcards were implied as metaphors for Korea as an imagined geography, the framing of children on postcards worked to construct an ‘Other’ of Korean people and culture as a whole. Examples of this can be seen in Figures 13 and 14. ‘Othering’ was central to the continuation of imperial rule across numerous instances of empire. These processes become complicated in the Japanese context, whereby this ‘Othering’ of Koreans occurred contradictorily in combination with emphasis of shared ethnic and mythical origins. Moreover, commercialization of nostalgic affect through the mass production of postcards was indicative of the contradictions within Japanese assimilationist policy, as understood through examination of material cultures.



Fig. 13: Photo Postcard, 조선평양정해문 (Jeonghaemun, Pyongyang, Joseon), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)

¹¹² *Ibid*, 306



Fig. 14: Photo Postcard, 普通の 兒女 (An ordinary child), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)

The positioning of children in front of historic monuments, or in relation to traditional agriculture work, helped to enhance the nostalgia of the postcard. This contributed to constructing an imperialistic nostalgia of Korea as a place, as it limited the Korean subject to the child role in their relationship with Japan. This was intertwined with how the consumer of these postcards would imagine Korea as a socialized place. The positioning of these children alongside the historical sites, themselves emphasized to convey that Korean tradition and custom was located in the past, enhanced the immaturity of Korea as an imagined place in comparison to the modernization rhetoric surrounding Japan's portrayal on these cards. This cemented Japan as the parent/older sibling, leading the younger Korea by the hand. The conflation of Korea with the image of a child in comparison to a leading adult Japan was also common in satirical political cartoons of this period, often to emphasize Japan's role as a pan-

Asian leader to Western imperial powers. An example of this can be seen in Figure 15, which depicts a political illustration by Georges Bigot, where Korea is represented as a blind child/old man being pulled between Japan on one side and Russia on the other.¹¹³



Fig. 15: 'Which will have the rearing of the child?' Georges Bigot, illustration (1900)

In this image, Korea is represented as without agency, inferring the need for political and societal guidance from a more mature imperial power. Moreover, the Korean representative in this illustration is both a young child (implied by their small stature and the presence of a child's walker) and a blind old man (implied by their traditional dress, glasses, and facial hair). This dual representation constructs an additional narrative for Korea's place

¹¹³ Georges Bigot was a French political cartoonist living in imperial Japan at the turn of the 20th century. The use of political cartoons and illustrations as visual sources is comparable to postcards, as they were also used to present specific narratives for political and commercial ends. Further exploration into how political cartoons and illustrations compare to analysis of the postcard throughout the Japanese empire is a useful entry point for further academic research on the value of visual historical sources.

within an imperialized world: that its culture and tradition is stuck in the past and is immaturely refuting (imperialist) modernization attempts.

In summary, images of children on postcards infantilized conceptions of Korea as an imagined social and political place, and this was further reflected onto Korean traditional culture as a whole. The presentation of these infantilizing narratives on postcards engaged material cultures with consumer's geographical imaginaries, manipulating viewers sense of temporality in relation to Korea and, at the same time, promoting colonial governance of spatial mobility across the Japanese empire.

Visual Gendering Through Postcards: The Colonized Woman as Nation

The commodification of women and their bodies is well researched throughout discourses on the history of commercialization and capitalism. In particular, the occularcentrism of the 20th century saw the photographing of women increase to its largest scale, and globally circulated images of exoticized women were delivered en masse to the non-elite public.¹¹⁴ Beyond a simple visual documentation of women for ethnographic or census means, the increased representation of women in visual touristic images is indicative of how capitalism and gender interact, and how gender is used as a mechanism to uphold capitalistic societal structures. 'Sex sells,' we so often hear, and the prevalence of sexualized and exoticized women's images on historical postcards is testament to how women's bodies were sexualized and used to sell notions of place. Indeed, the image of children on Korean postcards to represent the immaturity of the colonized nation was in direct contrast to the sexualization of the Korean colonial subject

¹¹⁴ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 5

that occurred in postcards depicting Korean women and *kisaengs*. *Kisaengs* were a specific group of women who have been continually historicized through a sexual narrative of victimhood due to their role as sex workers during, but also prior to, the colonial era.¹¹⁵ Yet, the flurry of historical sexualized images of women on postcards is not unique to the Korean case, as Alloula also investigates this in relation to Algerian women living under French colonialism.¹¹⁶ Further, the immense increase of the publication of these postcards leads to questions of how these gendered visual representations are altered when they occur under imperialistic environs; where the facets of a consumer-driven society, that we are so accustomed to in our present, are inherently structured by ideologies of empire and colonial hierarchies.

Colonial rhetoric was fundamentally gendered to situate a masculine Japan at the head of the imperial table. *Kisaengs* were featured on postcards to facilitate exoticized consumer perceptions of Korean culture, playing into the contrasting of Korea's "exotic customs" with the modernity of Japan as the colonizing fatherland.¹¹⁷ An example of this can be seen in Figure 16. This exoticization was further employed to construct women on postcards through colonial perceptions of "the native."¹¹⁸ (Re)production of women's images on postcards enhanced the desire they held as a visual entity. Postcards embodied the fantasy of travel, mediated through colonial structures of modernization regarding spatial mobility, and postcards depicting women contained desire two-fold; desire for travel, and desire for the women depicted on the card itself. Moreover, this desire could be accessed cheaply through a postcard purchase, making *kisaengs* and their craft immediately accessible to the mass public and perpetuating the violence of the

¹¹⁵ Rhee, 'Beyond the Sexualised Colonial Narrative,' 38

¹¹⁶ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*

¹¹⁷ Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith*, 109

¹¹⁸ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 5

masculine colonial system against them.¹¹⁹ The postcard, Alloula argues, “is nothing but one of the forms of aesthetic justification of colonial violence.”¹²⁰ The historical postcard represented a temporality in motion, but it was not ever present in the temporality it depicted. Thus, the colonized women depicted on postcards of Korea were further denied material existence, limited to commodified subjecthood caught between presentations of a temporally frozen Korea and an ever forward moving Japan.



Fig. 16: Photo Postcard, 朝鮮妓生の舞 (A dance performed by a Korean geisha), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 118

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 120

This discussion relates to Massey’s earlier contentions that place is constituted through gendered social relations.¹²¹ Massey argues against a static and essentialized understanding of place, and instead considers place as the result of continual processes, non-demarcated by singular identities or boundaries.¹²² Incorporating Massey’s contentions into the Korean colonial context and historicizing her arguments highlights how place can itself be gendered. As detailed in this thesis’s introduction, her work further illuminates how a sense of place, both imagined and material, can communicate and construct social hierarchies. Figure 17 shows how Korean women were positioned alongside landscape views to solidify the conflation of these women with Korea as an imagined place. In portraying feminized and sexualized Korean subjects on postcards – understanding postcards as a commodified material symbol of historical mobility – the narrative of Korea as a place taken from this visual source is also feminized. This is inextricably bound up in the complexities of the oppressed feminine colonial subject, uniquely understood through postcards as a visual historical source endowed with spatial and temporal movement.

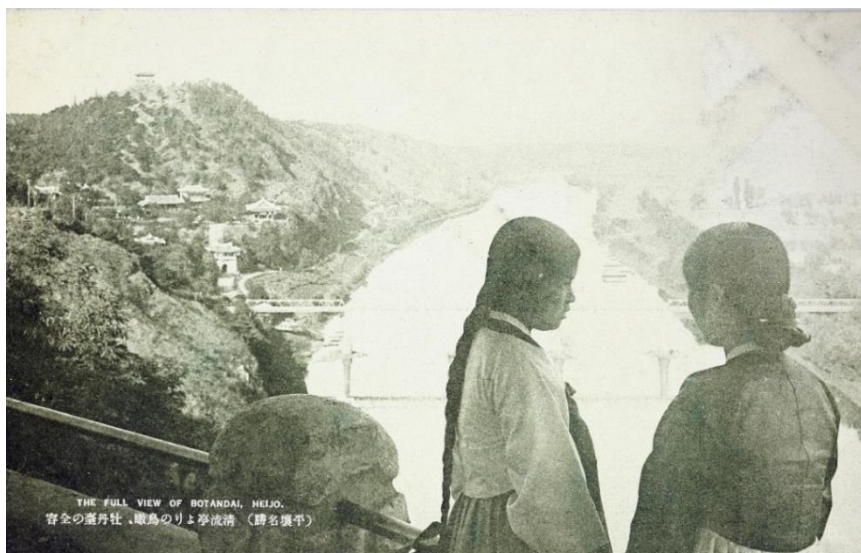


Fig. 17: Photo Postcard, 평양명승, 청류 (Pyongyang Scenic Spot, Cheong-ryu), *Busan City Museum* (1910~1945)

¹²¹ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 147

¹²² *Ibid*, 147

Failing to take women's voices into account "dismisses the gendered experience of colonialism."¹²³ The Figures above demonstrate how the examination of the visuality of postcards, and the historical analysis of said images (which goes beyond a textual understanding and evaluates the broader practices that affected the sharing and (re)production of the visual text), can reveal facets of Korea's gendered experience of colonialism. Namely, this phenomenon shows how imperialistic ideas of modernity transmitted through postcards of Korea were mediated by Japanese imperialism on multiple levels – including in entertainment and the material culture of the time. Ironically, Japan attempted to simultaneously align itself with Western colonial powers yet differentiate itself from its geographical neighbors.¹²⁴ Subsequently, Japanese imperialism created the notion of a shared past through cultural products such as postcards, contradictorily placing itself within the inter-Asian narrative it created. We can therefore understand the narrative of Japan as modernizing colonizer as masculinized, bringing a feminized Korea out of its culture rooted in the past. Thus, inherent in postcards that depict *kisaengs* and Korean women is the understanding of a feminized Korean tradition and a masculinized Japanese modernity, further affecting how the consumer postulates about each of these geographies as imagined places.

¹²³ Rhee, 'Beyond the Sexualised Colonial Narrative,' 38

¹²⁴ For more on the contradictions of Japanese empire, see: Stefan Tanaka. *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has argued that historical postcards of colonial-era Korea can be visually analyzed to understand how Japanese imperial rule was negotiated and maintained through the management of the spatial touristic economy. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how the spatial and the temporal conceptual spheres interact through imperial material cultures. Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how the postcards of a colonized Korea narrated the landscape, tradition, culture, and people as being ‘stuck in the past,’ in direct comparison to a forward progressing Japanese imperial modernity. The commodification of Korea as a place through material culture, such as postcards, helped to maintain Japanese colonial rule, as it dehumanized the Korean people, reducing them and their nation to visual objects representative of colonial leisure to be shared and circulated, both throughout Korea and the metropole of Japan. In this thesis, I have established the utility of visual historical sources for investigating instances of empire, and provided an analytical path through which other instances of Japanese imperial occupation can be explored.

This thesis has shown how various historical narratives were conveyed through postcards as visual commodities, and how these narratives were inherently influenced by processes of temporal mobility, as well as the sense of place that they (re)produced. Japanese commodification of Korean culture during the colonial period can be decoded from postcards, as they are both the result of increased imperial tourism, and yet helped to promote this tourism in the first instance. This thesis has argued for the valuation of visual sources to interrogate commercialization under empire, as well as highlighting postcards as a form of ‘colonial kitsch,’ rooted in imperial nostalgic affect. How postcards were structured and presented to the consumer has also been explored in this thesis through discussions of the palimpsestic narratives of progress bound up in postcards produced in commercialized collection format.

Finally, this thesis has expounded how postcards that depicted Korean women and children worked to feminize and infantilize perceptions of Korea as a social geographical entity, in turn intertwined with the objectification of colonized Korean culture. Moreover, postcards depicting colonial Korean landscapes and subjects crafted Korea as a commodity: geographically, touristically, and culturally. Examination of the “spatio-social imaginary” constructed of Korea through the picture postcard thus allows us to understand how colonial distinction was conceptualized and performed.¹²⁵ Postcards are encoded with historical mobility made possible by modernization, and we can understand this as movement not only across the spatial components of the Japanese empire, but the temporal too.

A potential avenue for further academic scrutiny concerning historical postcards of Korea would be to examine in-depth the other purposes of individual cards, which Choe and Urakawa gesture toward, and to investigate how these purposes have been categorized in present historical archives. For example, how a commemorative postcard might interact with the temporality embedded in colonial rhetoric is likely different from how an advertisement postcard would. Examination in this vein would add another layer to our understanding of colonial kitsch and the multiplicity of consciousness inherent in visual media.

This thesis has established the picture postcard as a visual source at the intersection between modernity, mobility, and tradition in the examination of colonial-era Korea. The reproduction of tradition, and the demarcation of the past from the present, continues to affect the narratives of the contemporary. Moreover, the standards to which this past was, and continues to be, categorized and catalogued in our present have been defined by imperialist standards. In the case of Korea (and contemporary South Korea), modernity as a concept has

¹²⁵ MacDonald, *Placing Empire*, 2

been historically mediated by Japan, and what becomes conceptualized as ‘tradition’ is intrinsically connected to this influence. In South Korea today, the construction of the colonial past further operates to serve specific anxieties and political narratives in the present. However, how Korea mediates the presentation of this past is inherently influenced by their post-colonial, nationalist context. The creation of a nostalgic Korean (post-colonial) national tradition was intricately connected to its formation in opposition to the cultural oppression of Japanese colonialism. The writings of a prominent folklorist, Zōng In-Sob, from the 1950s displays this:

“We have shown in our modern literature as well as during the recent Korean War an ability to integrate the Western science with our spiritual home-life, and thus we are equipped to fight against any aggressions whether political or cultural. As a whole, modern Korean literature can be called “The Literature of Resistance against Imperialism and Communism.”¹²⁶

How Korea’s colonial past is told and retold underwrites the affective connection of the Korean people to their sense of national tradition, further connected to the demarcation of a culture and society that is specifically Korean in nature. Yet, national traditions do not exist in a vacuum, and the influence of Korea’s colonial experience on the construction and proliferation of tradition must be recognized and investigated in order to understand how the present as it is experienced today came to be.

Furthermore, the concepts applied to representations of Korea as an imagined geography throughout this thesis are pertinent to how Korea is spatially understood in our present day. The 2010s have seen the explosion and immense globalization of Korean culture, music, and food, facilitated through modern visual digital technologies.¹²⁷ These technologies,

¹²⁶ Zōng In-Sob. *Modern Short Stories from Korea*. (Seoul: Munho-Sa, 1958), 1

¹²⁷ Ju Hyejung. ‘Korean TV drama viewership on Netflix: Transcultural affection, romance, and identities,’ *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 13, no. 1 (2020): 32

such as social media, music performances, television, and film, similarly work to influence consumer's understandings of Korea as a place through promoting specific images of Korean culture and everyday life. Increasingly a major player in the global visual economy, Korean popular media production feels keenly the nationalistic need to assert itself as distinctly 'Korean' through representations of its traditional culture, encouraging intense feelings of affect as it does so – not dissimilar from the nostalgia imbued in colonial-era postcards. Additionally, due to the nature of the online sphere as ambivalently located, these media also operate through Berger's publicity image outline; whereby a distance is created between consumer and place visually represented. Yet, the traversal potentiality of the promotion of Korea through these technologies is more subtle than occurs with postcards; online visual Korean media is immediately accessible, whereas postcards are limited by the lack of immediacy in the postal system. Although differently temporally endowed because of this variance, both historical postcards from the colonial period and contemporary visual depictions of Korea work to promote specific narratives of Korean culture, and further construct Korea as an idealized, visitable, consumable entity.

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