

Heritage, Tourism, and National Identity: *An Ethnographic Study of Changdeokgung Palace*

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Abstract

The heritage settings potentially play a significant role as a specific social space within which individuals are able to conceive, define, and reconstruct elements of national consciousness. This study involves an ethnographic-based examination of ways in which elements of the past are utilized to re-define and reaffirm national (cultural) identity within the context of contemporary South Korean society, where traditional norms and values are arguably influenced by globalized processes, norms, and values. It theoretically addresses and empirically substantiates the need for comprehensive and analytical insights concerning heritage and articulations of national identity, focusing on the intermediating roles of heritage tourism in establishing and facilitating the individual and contextual processes of identity reconstruction. Critical focus is placed on contextualizing ways in which South Korean nationals, particularly younger generations, encounter emotional attachments to the nation during heritage tourism experiences in Changdeokgung palace in Seoul. This study employs a range of ethnographic strategies including in-depth interviews and friendly conversations as an efficient tool to gain intimate and insightful knowledge of the specific social setting.

Keywords: heritage tourism, cultural primordialism, national identity, place-based identities, Changdeokgung palace, Koreanness

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Introduction

National culture can be understood as a common discourse contributing to the establishment and maintenance of unique cultural and national identities. Heritage as an essential part of national culture is predominantly related to the concept of inheritance, something transcended from one generation to the next. Heritage, a symbolic re-enactment of the past, is important in helping to sustain a nation's cultural continuity, albeit in a diluted form. The appreciation of traditions, cultural forms, and heritage representations provides opportunities for individuals to enhance their understanding of the meanings, symbols and values embedded within heritage settings. Here, recognition of the sociopsychological importance of heritage, rather than its physical assets, renders the application of heritage in a given culture and society as timeless and enduring. Their relevance arguably relates to ways in which the growing popularity of heritage has been concerned with relieving people's collective fears and worries regarding severed links with the past, particularly in the context of an ever-changing society.

Importantly, heritage is a sign and symbol of people's ethnicities, nationalities, and identities, but still subject to different readings, multiple interpretations, and diverse meanings, encouraged through the institutional endeavors of the heritage industry to portray particular messages and representations of cultural heritage, albeit in rather contrived ways—as MacCannell (1976) and Urry (1990) would argue. Heritage tourism is arguably one medium through which the “felt history” of a nation (Connor 1993, 382) is re-emphasized and productively communicated. Therefore, heritage tourism experiences are expected to play a role in what Hitchcock (2003, 72) terms as “intentional agency,” through which ethnic and national identities are constantly reconstructed and re-conceptualized and the social communication of cultural differences are stimulated.

It is recently asserted that there is much scope for tourism studies to explore the interrelated dynamics of heritage and nationhood (Chambers 2005). However, the study of heritage tourism within the



Figure 1. Buyongji Pond and Buyongjeong Pavilion at Changdeokgung Palace

context of domestic tourism has increasingly developed in some Asian countries in recent decades, particularly with respect to such areas as the marketing of tradition and nostalgia in developing rural tourism in Japan (Creighton 1997), the development of colonial heritage as a main tourism attraction in Singapore (Henderson 2001), indigenous identity and heritage preservation in Hong Kong (Cheung 2003), and the interplay of national identity and heritage tourism in Melaka, Malaysia (Worden 2003). Nonetheless, scant attention has been paid to the qualitative processes by which identities are produced, reproduced, and communicated during visits to places of national symbolic significance (Palmer 2005).

The South Korean government identifies cultural heritage tourism as the main catalyst to increase its appeal as a national and international tourism destination (Korea Tourism Research Institute 2000). Reflecting the government agenda, existing academic-based studies are mainly engaged with illustrating the potential of cultural heritage tourism in South Korea as an effective mechanism for economic

development and regeneration (Shin 1999; Jang 2000; Chin 2005). Concomitantly, there is a paucity of academic literature in South Korean tourism studies concerning the sociocultural and psychological significance of heritage presentations and representations. The sociopsychological values of culture and heritage as integral components of tourism experiences are largely overlooked.

This study of the construction and reconstruction of national identity is mediated through individual narratives and subjective accounts of collectively shared social memories encountered in heritage tourism settings. It is also expected to substantially contribute to identifying the significance of heritage as a definitive medium by which national cohesion and unity are encouraged, despite global social processes and Western cultural influences. Furthermore, the employment of ethnographic qualitative methods hopefully paves the way for diversifying the current profile of South Korean tourism research, which is traditionally concerned with measuring and validating quantifiable variables for assessing and enhancing tourism promotion and development.

National Identity, National Heritage, and Globalization

The complex and multifarious characteristics of nationalism and national identity have led to a plethora of definitions with differing theoretical implications. In two major conceptual understandings of nationalism and national identity, attention is drawn to contrasting accounts: the “modernistic perspective” and the “primordial perspective.” For Gellner (1983), nationalism is a modern outcome resulting from the processes of industrialization, where the construction of the state and the creation of a collective identity shared by all members were of pivotal significance in defining and maintaining newly-formed, industrialized nations. As opposed to the modernistic account of nation and nationalism, the primordial approach places greater emphasis on the significance of the antiquity of nations, the strength of ethnicities, and the sociocultural implication of ethnic

ties. Primordialists regard nations as a naturally given form rather than something socially constructed or culturally imagined within the modern era. Importantly, the belief that an individual's culture and nation are sacred and special is vital to understanding the essence of cultural primordialism. Smith (1994, 376) emphasizes:

It was and is the members of ethnic communities and nations who feel their communities are primordial, existing almost “out of time” and having an “ineffable” binding and almost overpowering quality. It is no part of this approach to suggest that such communities are primordial, only that members *feel* they are.

In a similar vein, Brubaker (1996, 14-15) claims that primordialists place great emphasis on the “deep roots, ancient origins, and emotive power of national attachments.” Here, recognizing the emotive power of heritage as an essential national attachment is pertinent to understanding the relevance of primordial approaches to nationalism and national identity, particularly with respect to the current research study. The belief and pride associated with the propagation of a homogeneous race and culture have played a pivotal role in unifying Korean nationals, particularly at times of national crisis and foreign invasion (Cummings 2003; Feffer 2003). It is claimed, therefore, that a strong sense of “Koreanness” is based on an ethnic rather than a civic assertion, which is primordially bestowed. The nation's cultural characteristics indeed play a major role in the formation and reconstruction of a unique Korean identity. Moreover, these characteristics constantly reassure Koreans of the primordial nature of their national identity.

The reorganization of time and space within the framework of globalization inevitably leads to a situation where the form and content of nationalism necessitates reappraisal. The increasing dominance of economic globalization also contributes to denationalizing national territory, thereby repositioning the roles of individual nation states.¹ Therefore, global processes intimidate the power of nations

1. See Sassen (1996).

to determine their own identities and notions of nationhood, diminishing the symbolic significance of national and local culture and heritage. It thus appears that the values of traditional culture and national heritage are being dominated by new meanings associated with the ascendancy of international and transnational cultures, practices, and events (Urry 1990). Regardless of the dispersal of a homogenized and unified culture under the pervasive influence of globalization processes, it is crucial to note that globalization may not necessarily override the distinctive characteristics of the local. It cannot be disputed that there is a strong tendency in re-evaluating and reinforcing distinctive local cultures and regional and national identities in newly-established global contexts. Giddens (1991, 22) insightfully maintains that the process of globalization needs to be understood as an ongoing and persistent “dialectic of the local and the global.” Hall (1992, 304) further states:

There is a new interest in “the local” together with the impact of “the global.” Globalisation . . . actually exploits local differentiation. Thus, instead of thinking of the global replacing the local, it would be more accurate to think of a new articulation between “the global” and “the local.”

Drawing on Billig’s (1995) notion of banal nationalism and indicating its relevance in the context of the reproductive mechanisms of Welsh nationalism, Jones and Desforges (2003) demonstrate the significance of local contexts through which senses of nationalism can be consistently represented by such cultural reference points as linguistic identities and localized nuances of identity. They emphasize that this “reaffirmation of place-based identities” (Jones and Desforges 2003, 277) can contribute to the continual enactment and reproduction of nationalism in global contexts.² A recent surge of interest in local culture, heritage, and tradition within tourism contexts is inextricably bound up with reaffirming and re-emphasizing “place-based identi-

2. See also McNeill (2000) and Edensor (2002).

ties” in increasingly homogenized tourism environments, influenced by the processes of globalization. A strong sense of local, regional, or national identity, either self- or collectively imbued, is needed to secure people’s grounded existence. In this regard, heritage can make a constructive contribution to strengthening “place-based identities” and enhancing clear sociocultural linkages with the nation’s past. Consequently, heritage tourism experiences can encourage people to contemplate connections with the nation’s unique past and primordial culture, reaffirming an awareness of their own cultural authenticity and national solidarity within a wider globalized environment. However, before presupposing this rather popular assertion that heritage tourism reconstructs nationhood experiences,³ critical attention should be paid to systematically analyzing how individual tourists actually relate themselves to the notion of nationhood during the encounters with heritage settings, and what elements of heritage play a discursive role in the process of national identification and cultural signification. Therefore, this study is mainly concerned with examining ways in which a sense of national belonging and cultural connection is evoked and facilitated during the visits to Changdeokgung palace, especially focusing on the individual and subjective interpretations of heritage and nationhood.

An Ethnographic Approach

Tourism studies in South Korea traditionally focus on illustrating the importance and implications of the tourism industry in economic terms, thus producing a range of statistical variations, correlations, and frequencies.⁴ Accordingly, the significance of qualitative methods in tourism research is largely underestimated, particularly in terms of developing the depth and breadth of social data. Furthermore, due to an emphasis on developing economic activities and promoting prod-

3. See also McNeill (2000) and Edensor (2002).

4. See Kim Hong-bumm (1998), Ko and Stewart (2002), and Lee et al. (2008).

uct values based on industry-led perspectives and policy-making procedures, qualitative-based research concerning the cultural and social nature of tourism and heritage is significantly undervalued within South Korean tourism studies.

This current inquiry involves a qualitative approach based on the employment of ethnographic techniques and strategies. This approach arguably provides an appropriate methodological framework for revealing diverse meanings, opinions, and interpretations of particular social phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Huberman and Miles 1994; Guba and Lincoln 1994). The study utilizes five main strategies for retrieving social data: (1) 130 ethnographic interviews with domestic visitors; (2) participant observation; (3) systematic lurking, employed around key areas of the palace (e.g., *huwon* or the rear garden, souvenir shop, and cafeteria); (4) regular encounters and friendly conversations with palace staff (7 palace custodians and 12 tour guides); and (5) employment and evaluation of 98 university student essays concerning site visits and personal perceptions of Changdeokgung.

I believe these strategies provide an efficient means of gaining an intimate insight into the intricate social world of heritage institutions, as well as an understanding of the diverse perceptions of both visitors and employees. It was anticipated that this research study would reveal a range of feelings, impressions, and experiences concerning issues associated with heritage perceptions and “national identification.” The friendly conversations, for instance, served as an active means to facilitate informants’ involvement in directing knowledge development and negotiating issues to discuss, particularly in terms of what they deemed to be appropriate. The selected procedures and techniques arguably encouraged individuals to express their feelings, impressions, and personal opinions in less inhibited ways within the everyday context of social interaction.

The multiple methods adopted in this study sought various perceptions and subjective undertakings of the investigated social phenomena. Social phenomena and settings are fundamentally multidimensional and in a constant state of change. Engaging with the emo-

tional and subjective perceptions of the researched is of fundamental significance in acquiring a clearer understanding of multiple narratives and divergent reflections embedded in the social setting. As a result, this study does not attempt to produce definitive and conclusive explanations or ultimate truth.

Individual Interpretations of Heritage and National Belonging: Feelings of “Familiarity” and “Intimacy”

The influence of Western culture in contemporary South Korea has been prevalent in recent decades. Although the economic achievements of the nation are highly acclaimed, the dominance of Western cultural influences and the rise of ultramodern developments are perceived to be a clear breach with Korea’s (pre-modern) national past (Lee D. 2004). In various ethnographic narratives, deep concern over the sociocultural transformations inherent in the structural fabric of South Korean society is clearly expressed:

I strongly feel all the Western tourists who are interested in discovering Korean culture and heritage should not fix Seoul as the first destination in their itinerary. It would be disappointing to their whole experience. . . . They might think Korea just came into being a few decades ago, so there is nothing old or historical in it . . . the history of our country is over 5,000 years . . . who can see this fact in Seoul? (Mr. Yun, palace custodian).

Seoul has become a huge metropolitan city, flooded with high-tech developments and Western culture. Young people on the streets of Seoul seem to be exactly identical with those who live in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and New York. What can you think is so special about Seoul and its people? Not a very easy question, is it? (Woman in her 40s).

The existence of Changdeokgung is a blissful antidote to the modern landscape of Seoul. Based on the research data, it is reasonable to

assert that Changdeokgung is perceived as a timeless symbol of nationhood, in stark contrast to Seoul's profile as a global city. This point is clearly elaborated upon in the remarks and responses of visitors and the palace staff, for instance:

It is a great relief that we still keep this place in Seoul. This is the place where we all feel we can share who we really are and where we have come from. If we ever lose this place, we will give up being Korean (Man in his 70s).

How blessed we are to have this place in the middle of the city! How wonderful the palace is to reassure us of who we are in the midst of this very, very modern city, with all these changes going on. It is just such a great relief to us (Mrs. Kwon, tour guide).

It is interesting to note that some tourist narratives tend to indicate ways in which the experience of Changdeokgung can evoke childhood memories. Tourists familiarize themselves with the heritage setting by relating their personal memories to certain cultural attributes of Changdeokgung. The following anecdotes articulate memories of the past, prompted by tangible and intangible significations inherent in this specific heritage setting:

I feel so comfortable here. I grew up with things such as the *giwa* roof and stone walls . . . this is what I used to live with (Woman in her late 70s).

The air smells and feels so nice here. This place reminds me of my hometown where I was born and bred. The colors and smells of this place are quite similar to those of my hometown. It gives a real feeling of what things were like in old days, what our old country was like (Man in his 50s).

You probably wouldn't know the name of this tree; it is called *hwasal namu* (*Euonymus alatus*). When I was young, we used to make rice cake mixed with its leaves. I haven't seen this tree for a long time. How wonderful! Today's visit has made me think about

things I had forgotten (Woman in her 60s).

Nostalgic yearning for the past is intensified by means of reviving intimate memories and provoking individual remembrance. Visits to Changdeokgung thus potentially encourage people to reconnect with the past and reawaken intimate and long-forgotten memories. Importantly, feelings of comfort and familiarity facilitated by personal memories are pertinent in fortifying people's emotional attachment to the nation. National consciousness is invoked through interaction with comfortable and familiar surroundings that are expressive of the nation's symbolic character. The researcher overheard an interesting, albeit brief, conversation between two women in the *huwon* (rear garden), which exemplifies familial associations between aspects of the palace and home life:

Man: Can you believe how familiar these things come across in your mind? I thought all the heritage and history things can be quite imposing and pompous in a way . . . but no, it is so different to what I thought it would be, isn't it?

Woman 1: Well, it is not a pompous atmosphere, just about royalty. I felt so comfortable in Nakseonjae, which was more or less similar to my grand mum's place. Look at that pond there, and the way the trees are lined over there! You have seen so many things like that all over our country, that's why this place is not so strange.

Woman 2: You're right! You feel familiar with it because it is nothing new. We have grown up with it, without necessarily realizing it.

Man: Yes, I never thought I could feel this here. I expected it to be very different.

By engaging with their own personal memories, individuals may be more at ease in establishing an intimate sense of national belonging. Consequently, heritage tourism experiences at Changdeokgung enable visitors to sense and experience the nation in rather intimate, con-



Figure 2. Huijeongdang Hall at Changdeokgung Palace

crete, and affirmative ways. Other tourist narratives imply the importance of comfort and familiarity as integral to the Changdeokgung experience. For instance:

I just feel so relaxed and free from stress in here. It makes me feel like I have come to visit my old home. . . . It is very calm here and relaxing, especially walking around the *huwon* (Man in his 40s).

Although this is my first visit here, the palace appears so familiar I don't know why. I just feel so natural and comfortable here (Man in his 30s).

Here, it is important to recognize that personal memories and subjective experiences are of paramount significance in initiating and facilitating the process of conceptualizing an essence of national belonging during heritage tourism experiences. People are likely to utilize personal memories as an effective means of consolidating their affinities

with national heritage, though not always in an overtly nationalistic manner, but often in subtle and intricate ways. In understanding the symbolic dynamics and social potency of Changdeokgung palace as a national site imbued with cultural and historical significance, South Korean nationals are able to rediscover and re-appreciate their primordial cultural characteristics and historical circumstances. Sustaining the nation's cultural associations is at the core of maintaining a sense of Koreanness, particularly at a time of rapid sociocultural change and increasing influx of globalized culture. In this light, this research suggests that Changdeokgung stands as a national space where established notions of national memory and cultural identity remain notably resilient in an era where global (Western) transformations prevail.

Younger Generations' Reflexive Evaluations of Heritage and National Belonging

The advent of new attitudes among the current generation of young people was closely related to postmodern cultural and social changes in South Korea during the early 1990s. The so-called *orenji jok* ("Orange Tribe") was at the forefront of this trend, representing young people from Seoul, mainly from the Gangnam area (Southern Seoul) who lavishly indulged in conspicuous forms of material consumption and pleasure-seeking activities, supported by their parents' income in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Han 2003). New terms have been continuously introduced to delineate the core characteristics of a new generation of individualistic-based lifestyles (e.g., X-Generation and N-Generation). For example, "N-Generation" (Network Generation) represents younger people whose main social communication is grounded in the development of such network devices as computers and mobile phones (Heo 2000). Younger generations are perceived as being independent, progressive, and easily adaptable to the rapid cultural changes inherent in a globalized society.

On the one hand, the changing attitude and behavior of the

younger generations positively influence the consumption patterns of contemporary material society. On the other hand, they have been criticized for being unaware of nationalist sentiments at a time of rapid cultural change. However, there is growing recognition that they are arguably becoming conscious of the significance of regaining a strong sense of national belonging under increasing threats of globalization.⁵ These ambivalent viewpoints on younger generations inspired the researcher to be particularly attentive to this age group's perceptions of traditional forms of Korean culture and heritage. Younger generations are open to criticism from older generations, who suggest that younger people are becoming unaware of and uninterested in shared national memories and national sentiment, mainly as a consequence of the social appeal of Western cultures and products. The following narratives typify this point:

We have achieved economic wealth and prosperity at such a quick pace, you know. Young people have a big craving for Western products and lifestyles. They even try to look more Western, dyeing their hair in blonde or light brown having cosmetic surgery to heighten their nose and make their eyes look bigger (Woman in her 40s).

Even though outer appearances are becoming more and more different, the inner-self remains the same Dyeing hair and wearing Western-style outfits can change what we look like, but it cannot fundamentally change who we are (Man in his 50s).

It is the inner spirits that count. We are Koreans, not Japanese, Chinese, or American. . . . This small land in the far-eastern corner of Asia is our homeland (Man in his 30s).

Mr. Kim, the palace custodian, expressed his concern with regard to some of the issues raised above:

5. See Lee M. (2005).

These days, everybody seems to be crazy about their appearance. They spend hours and hours working on their bodies to become a *momjjang* (a person with an attractive body). Many use cosmetic surgery to look a lot younger than what they are. But not enough attention seems to be paid to improving their character, which really concerns and worries me.

The above comments rather delicately call for a sustained emphasis on the need to maintain a clear sense of identity, which transcends influences that are not perceived to be imbued with traditional values and meanings. Concerns raised during the ethnographic encounters deeply relate to ways in which a globalized value system is pervasive in South Korean society. Accordingly, global culture and Western lifestyle as a “significant (national) other” is thought to endanger values and meanings associated with what is perceived to be traditionally Korean. Continuing links with the past are thus viewed as a form of social stability in a rapidly changing society. One male tourist in his 40s maintains:

Some people claim that sticking to the past could spoil the present, but I do not agree with it. We cannot be here without our past. I always think of the past as a compass which directs us to a better present and future.

However, the nationalist sentiments of the younger generations, provoked by such salient events as national sport activities like the 2002 World Cup, counteract popular criticism of their dilute sense of national consciousness. I am keen on exploring emotive-based perceptions of the younger generation, particularly articulations of national consciousness and belonging. For instance:

I am not that nationalistic, I suppose. Well . . . to be really honest, I wasn't that willing to come to this palace at the beginning. There are a lot of exciting places out there . . . visiting the old palace seemed to be boring and dull. I thought that the palaces are for the old people like my granddad. But it has certainly been an educa-

tional experience for me to know more about my country (Man in his early 20s).

The actual experience of Changdeokgung seemingly provides young visitors with opportunities to counteract stereotypical perceptions concerning the lack of social worth of heritage institutions. In her student essay, Jeong Se-a writes:

I thought visits to the old palaces are not a very fashionable pursuit for young people. In fact, to visit a royal palace would be viewed as a source of ridicule by my peers. However, I think it is a truly educational and comforting experience. The visitor experience is indeed a learning experience

However, it has been revealed that some young people are indeed very positive about Korean traditional culture and heritage. The following narrative illustrates this point:

Some of my friends make organized trips to museums and heritage places on a regular basis. We even call these interests “In search of our old paths.” They are just like me, they used to regard visits to old places as boring and unstylish, but we have changed a lot over the last couple of years. I cannot really figure out what has changed us like this We probably just cannot help feeling more attached to things that represent Korea, I suppose (Woman in her 20s).

In order to express affinities with the heritage setting, younger individuals tend to draw reference to less comfortable experiences and encounters with other foreign places and heritage sites. Such comparisons help to further comprehend the social and cultural significance of Changdeokgung palace as a potent reminder of nationhood for Korean nationals. One female tourist in her mid-20s highlights:

During my stay in Beijing, I used to go to the Forbidden City. At first, I was truly overwhelmed by its size and scale. I just adored it and I thought it was much grander than Korean royal palaces.

I even admitted to myself that Chinese culture was superior to ours. But very surprisingly, as time went by, I got bored of the size and scale of the palace. I found it too much. Something important seemed missing to me. It began to appear too imposing and overpowering. I realized it was not something for me . . . nothing connected there for me. It was just all the appearance. Humble as it might appear, Changdeokgung is what I feel comfortable with, what I was born and brought up with.

Another male tourist also explicates his own experience of a trip to several royal palaces in China, commenting:

I was overwhelmed by the gold color prevalent everywhere . . . just breathless at first. But the strange thing was that those overwhelming impressions gradually disappeared. I couldn't share any intimate memories with that palace. As a foreigner, it was impossible to feel connected to its significance. As soon as I entered this palace, I instinctively sensed that this belongs to me . . . so comfortable and warm.

Central to the comparative distinctions indicated in the above two narratives is the hierarchical positioning of heritage in terms of social preference, partly determined by intimate associations, emotional attachments, and cultural affinities. It is important to note that the conceptualization of the nation by younger generations is also expressed in affective and intuitive manners. Other tourist narratives appropriate cross-comparisons between Changdeokgung and other heritage settings:

I found those palaces (in China and Japan) more and more disconnected with myself. Today's visit to Changdeokgung is very different . . . not too imposing but so familiar. I feel so comfortable and relaxed here (Woman in her late 30s).

When we look at the beautiful castles and palaces in places like France, Germany, China, and even Japan, we look at them in awe. We never feel that kind of excitement here because we are very

used to this. Screams of excitement are usually made when people encounter new and different scenes. They do not scream at things that belong to them . . . well . . . this tells something very important. We wouldn't scream at this place because this is ours, familiar but deeply felt (Miss Kang, tour guide).

The above narratives focus on the significance of Changdeokgung by comparison with other foreign heritage settings. In other instances, however, individuals express how embarrassed they feel due to their perceived ignorance of their own culture and heritage, not to mention their adoration for foreign palaces. Seok Ji-eun elaborates on this in her student essay. In focusing on her own feelings and experiences, she writes:

While preparing for this essay, I found that there has been a ceremony for the changing guards in front of Donwhamun gate (the main gate of Changdeokgung) since 2000. I have always dreamt of watching the ceremony of the changing guards at Buckingham Palace. That is the place I want to see first and foremost if I ever go to England. But I was never been aware of the changing guards here. I feel very embarrassed and ashamed of my ignorance. It was a spectacular scene. I felt very proud of the fact a lot of foreigners seemed mesmerized by our cultural ceremony. Probably I should not be too concerned with the guard ceremony at Buckingham Palace from now on!

Another female tourist in her early 30s indicates that visiting other foreign places can encourage individuals to self-reflect on their own culture and national heritage, claiming:

Well, you know what? The rice cakes in someone else's hand always look bigger than those in your own hand. Foolish as it sounds, you can't help believing this is a fact sometimes. Lots of people talk about how beautiful and attractive the foreign countries they have visited are. But they do not realize how spectacular their own country is . . . how refined their own culture is. Well what I saw in here today is much more attractive than most of the things

I encountered during my trips abroad.

The unique appeal of Changdeokgung can also be distinguished through comparative illustrations with Seoul's other royal palaces. Kim Chang-su captures this point well in his student essay, noting:

The structure of Gyeongbokgung palace is very similar to that of the Forbidden City. The influence of Chinese culture and tradition were of great significance during the Joseon dynasty, as was the case with the general history of Korea. Definitely, Gyeongbokgung is much more grand and pompous than Changdeokgung. However, due to pervasive Chinese influences, Gyeongbokgung is not as appealing as Changdeokgung to us. Changdeokgung is definitely more Korean.

Other narratives further highlight the fact that Changdeokgung is perceived as the most “purely Korean” of all palaces, for instance:

Gyeongbokgung palace exudes an imposing grandeur. It seems too grand to feel comfortable. It seems too artificial to make us feel naturally attached. When it comes to Deoksugung palace, well, I don't know, really . . . it seems to be too commercialized. I feel it has lost some core characteristics (Woman in her 30s).

Notwithstanding a barrage of criticism from older generations concerning young people's Westernized appearances and lifestyles, it is clearly emphasized that the younger generations can become significantly aware of their cultural and national identities. Importantly, visits to such heritage setting as Changdeokgung offer nationals an opportunity to encounter, recognize, and rediscover their emotional attachment to the nation. Heritage tourism experiences can thus play a facilitating role in encouraging young people to encounter the essence of nationhood, as well as reassuring individuals of their intimate and emotional attachments to their nation in rather less overt and subtle ways. Under increasingly globalized forces and sociocultural changes, heritage tourism stands as one definitive medium

through which younger generations are able to appreciate and reassess intimate affinities with the nation, thereby critically reflecting on their own sense of Koreanness.

Conclusion

As the empirical data suggested, perceptions of Westernized forms of cultural and economic production enabled individuals to critically reflect on their own sense of Koreanness. This reflexive rationalization of conduct was pertinent in understanding ways in which the palace stands as a central source of the cultural identification process, enabling individuals from different generations to (re-)appreciate and/or reassess intimate affinities with the Korean nation and its people. It can be thus asserted that the heritage tourism experience in Changdeokgung enables South Koreans to rediscover their primordial identity at a time of rapid sociocultural change and increasing incursion of globalized culture. Importantly, the essence of “Koreanness,” which is deeply grounded in the Changdeokgung visitor experience and its heritage representations, encourages visitors to conceive of their nation as an emotionally constructed entity. The empirical-based narratives emphasize elements of “familiarity,” “comfort,” and “intimacy” manifest in the individual articulations of national belonging during the heritage tourism experience at Changdeokgung. This is closely associated with recognizing and reasserting the significance of such emotional elements of heritage as shared memories and values.

In the overall context of this study, domestic heritage tourism is not just an act of touristic consumption of heritage sites and artefacts, but a re-affirmation of national meanings and values attached. Furthermore, the sociopsychological dimension of heritage is important in understanding how the symbolic significance of heritage is essential in enhancing its long-standing appeal as a potent reminder of nationhood. The recent influx of globalized cultural influences, epitomized by the upsurge of material values and commercialized practices, is popularly perceived as a danger to traditional values. Nonetheless,

people's perceptions of globalized forms of cultural and economic production enable individuals to reflect on their own sense of Korean-ness. Despite the ability of non-traditional forms of culture to divert people's attention away from understanding and engaging with the premodern past, individuals are able to perceive the cultural site of Changdeokgung as an immortal memento of their national identity and belonging. It is particularly interesting to note that most tourists are able to recognize the Changdeokgung experience as being familiar and comfortable, irrespective of age. In this light, the symbolic significance of heritage as an essential element of national solidarity and cultural continuity prevails within the context of Chang-deokgung.

In conclusion, heritage tourism experiences in Changdeokgung play a facilitating role in encouraging younger and older generations to realize and (re)appreciate their intimate and inseparable connections to the Korean nation and its people, with particular reference to emotional and sociopsychological elements of heritage. Finally, it is expected that this paper invites further research into the discursive interrelationships between heritage tourism and national identification. More ethnographic studies of the relationship between the two are needed, as well as an exploration of more theoretical perspectives on tourism from the social science disciplines.

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