

## The national crisis and de/reconstructing nationalism in South Korea during the IMF intervention

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores the process by which Korean nationalism was challenged and transformed through utilizing sports celebrities as iconic figures during the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervention in South Korea. The influences of the IMF intervention were not limited to economic and political fields; rather, Korean nationalism had undergone substantial changes through the national crisis. At that time, two Korean athletes who were hugely successful in the US became national celebrities, or even national heroes in South Korea, a baseball player, Chan-ho Park and a golfer Se-ri Pak. The media representation of these two Korean athletes is useful for the understanding of altered nationalism during the IMF intervention. The analysis of media coverage of these two athletes can be summarized in three ways: first, the coverage is focused on a self-governing individual; second, that individual is invested with the image of economic success in global competition; and third, that individual is invested with the image of responsibility for both family and nation-state. Conclusively, the two celebrities were presented as models for a new kind of citizenship, i.e. a national individual. Finally, this paper suggests that Korean nationalism has been altered through the IMF intervention, but remains a hegemonic ideology albeit combined with neoliberalism.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nationalism, globalization, the IMF intervention, sports celebrity, national individual

### Introduction

This paper explores the process by which nationalism as a hegemonic ideology was simultaneously challenged and reconstituted in South Korea through representations of sports celebrities in the late 1990s. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervention in 1997 brought about not only economic and political but also ideological challenges to Korean society. This paper examines how Korean nationalism was both challenged and transformed into an altered hegemonic ideology through the national crisis.

The IMF intervention, which was caused by a shortage of foreign funds, began in November 1997 and was declared over by the South Korean government in August 2000. The IMF crisis brought about huge depression and frustration nationwide, as Koreans witnessed the powerlessness of their government, the collapse of several major conglomerates, and mass layoffs. At the same time, two Korean athletes accomplished brilliant performances in the US and gained tremendous attention in South Korea: a baseball player, Chan-ho Park; and a golfer, Se-ri Pak. Because of the gloomy conditions in South Korea, these two athletes became celebrities, even national heroes.

The IMF intervention both caused a structural transformation of Korean society and spread a sense of national failure. It also provided Koreans with a chance to rethink the notions of national development and Korean nationalism. This paper aims at understanding the crisis of Korean nationalism in the late 1990s, which worked both positively and

negatively in Korean society, by analyzing the mass-media representations of two sports celebrities and discussing how the representation of these celebrities influenced changing characteristics of Korean nationalism, as well as how that set of norms or virtues was perceived by Koreans in light of the structural transformations brought about by the IMF intervention.

## **The IMF intervention and transformation of Korean society**

### *Structural adjustment in the economic sector*

The IMF intervention required the Korean government to carry out a comprehensive structural adjustment in the economic sector as the price for the relief fund. The main demands of the IMF on Korean economic infrastructures were to open up financial markets for foreign investment, increase the flexibility of the labor market, decentralize and restructure the financial sectors of major conglomerates and cut the government's public budget.

The first two demands, both of which addressed the opening of financial markets and labor-market flexibility, were met more than the others. A primary request by the IMF was to open financial markets to foreign investments and to increase their monetary transparency. Previously, because the government could exercise arbitrary state power over the financial market, close attachment to the government had been crucial to facilitate the financing of corporations.<sup>1</sup> The increase of foreign direct investment after 1990<sup>2</sup> made the Korean economy unstable, and the withdrawal of foreign investment in 1997 caused an unprecedented economic crisis in South Korea.

Another requirement set by the IMF concerned an increase in the flexibility of the labor market, to enhance the profitability of local companies. Consequently, many companies had to restrain their business and the government initiated big deals.<sup>3</sup> The primary and easy way to improve business efficiency is to cut permanent employees and add temporary workers, in the name of labor flexibility; in particular, less-skilled and low-income workers fell prey to this structural adjustment (Kim 2004).<sup>4</sup> Such concepts as annual salary negotiations and temporary employees were relatively unknown before the IMF intervention, but 'the attitude with which [people] look at their work and work place has changed a lot [...] after the so-called labour flexibility policy became generalized' (Kang 2000: 443). When the labor market became flexible, i.e. unstable, Koreans were no longer safe in their occupations and felt constant insecurity and helplessness.

The restructuring of major conglomerates and cutting the public budget were not carried out successfully. In the beginning of IMF intervention, the government engineered big deals among major conglomerates by providing bailouts if they agreed to the deals. However, the notorious ownership structures were hardly changed; top CEOs and their families continued to control entire conglomerates by holding a majority share in its mother company. In addition, conglomerates could resist reformation policies by criticizing them in the media as 'anti-market' and 'active government's intervention into the market' (Kang 2000).

Public budgets were not cut as much as the IMF initially required, so the ideal of a balanced budget was not achieved. While carrying out the structural adjustment, the government played a central role and had to provide large subsidies for various areas. The restructuring of banking systems became the focus of the structural adjustment, as the government spent huge amounts of public funds to make small, weak financial groups and banks merge with larger, stronger ones. Eventually, the government announced that the reconstruction of the banking system had cost about \$85 billion (*Seoul-Shinmoon*, 6 January 2000).<sup>5</sup>

Although South Korea 'had been hailed as the first country to pay back the IMF loans it received in late 1997' (Joo 2000: 319), the structural adjustments were selectively accomplished. Such selective reform was a compromise among different interests: conglomerates, which did not want to give up their privileges; the government, which hoped to keep its role in economic areas; and the IMF, which did not want to rouse public resistance through aggressive reform. Rather than 'good governance' or 'neoliberal governance,' strange hybrids of markets, crony relationships and arbitrary state power appeared (Robinson 2004).<sup>6</sup> These results implied that the goals of the structural adjustment might have been to guarantee market predictability, financial transparency and a flexible labor market so that foreign investors could use their money in safe and predictable ways, rather than to construct a truly market-based economy in South Korea.

*A political sector: shift of governmental power and its different roles*

Although the economic crisis revealed the powerlessness of the government, the government did not give away its power to the IMF and business interests. Ironically, it regained parts of its sovereign power by virtue of the IMF requests. The IMF 'empowered the state with a strong authoritarian tradition to reconstruct the financial system and the Korean economy' (Shin 2000).

Under these circumstances, the goals of the government changed to objectives such as increasing economic efficiency and facilitating the market. The ways by and degrees to which the Korean government intervened in the economy were altered when it began to compete against, negotiate with, and co-opt the IMF, TNCs and Korean conglomerates. While the government carried out these adjustments, however, its roles became more important. Although the government followed the free-market principles recommended by the IMF, it still held 'its initiative in a new 'coordination' role, such as coordinating relations between new economic actors, making a new regulatory rule and channeling certain economic actors to new areas' (Cho 2000).

Given these complicated conditions, critics argue that the Korean government was changed 'from a developmental state model into a (neoliberal) post-developmental state rather than into a neoliberal model based on laissez-faire during the IMF intervention' (Cho 2003). The ultimate goals of such a post-developmental state are to institute the rules of market and promote the export of domestic companies.<sup>7</sup> Through the economic crisis, the developmental regime changed into a 'neo-developmental regime,' under which the relationship of business and the government 'became a "collaborative symbiosis"' featuring 'a greater privatization of state-owned enterprises' (Cho 2000).

Another important change in the political sector was the shift of governmental power that occurred when a new president from a minority party, which had been out of power for decades, took power in 1998. The presidential election was held in December 1997, a month after the previous government announced a moratorium from debt payments and asked for a relief fund from the IMF. A shift of governmental power via a democratic election was a milestone in Korean political history, because previous power shifts had only happened through either coup or revolution. It was the first time in 15 presidential elections that the candidate from a ruling party lost.<sup>8</sup> The economic crisis and ensuing public frustration might have been the crucial reasons for the ruling party's loss. This shift of governmental power perhaps made it easier for a new government to carry out the structural adjustments enforced by the IMF. Because the new government repeatedly asserted its separation from previous power blocs, it did not have to accept responsibility for the economic crisis.

Thus, the roles of government changed because of the IMF requests. Government no longer played direct and central roles in executing economic plans, but still claimed legitimacy and retained its role of coordinating and participating in the economic sectors.

### **Crisis of nationalism as a hegemonic ideology**

Although the IMF crisis was initiated by the Korean economy, it was seen as reflecting 'the ideological configuration of each social force, including cultural and political ideologies' (Shin 2000: 427) and therefore provided Koreans a chance to rethink the notions of nationalism and national development. The IMF intervention and its aftermath substantially challenged Korean nationalism, which had previously been a hegemonic ideology.

#### *Developmental nationalism as hegemonic ideology*

Nationalism has always mattered in South Korea. It is not just about ideology or myth; rather, nationalism is a moral imperative or a norm which every Korean must follow and adhere to (Lim 1999).<sup>9</sup> The notion of nationalism is both powerful and omnipresent in Koreans' everyday life.<sup>10</sup> Korean nationalism has been intensified systematically through government propaganda, educational curricula about national history, commemoration of important historical events, repetition of daily routines, and even participation in competitive sports (Anderson 1983). It seems that the everyday lives of Koreans are saturated with events that exercise banal nationalism (Billig 1995). As Smith suggests, 'nationalism has become the religious surrogate of modernity' in South Korea (Smith 1999: 100).

In particular, two historic incidents in Korean modern history, the colonial occupation and the civil war, made Korean nationalism more intense and complex. These events did not fade away; rather, they still haunt the everyday lives of Koreans and they have made the issue of nationalism represent more than ideology. These two events also play a crucial role in constituting the characteristics of Korean nationalism in two ways. First, nationalism often implies an ideology not for a nation but for a state (Anderson 1983; Kim 1999).<sup>11</sup> When various governments used the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism' without a specific referent, people took for granted that 'nation' refers to South Korea. Whereas Korean nationalism, according to Choi, is close to the traditional statism, nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s might be called 'state-nationalism' (Choi 1995; Yoon 2000). Second, nationalism became so enmeshed with common sense and everyday life that it began to function like a phantom, regulating 'dailyness' and organization. As Calhoun suggests, nationalism is 'not just a doctrine ... but a more basic way of talking, thinking and acting' (Calhoun 1997: 11).

Developmental nationalism, of course, had been a hegemonic ideology before the IMF intervention. In general, the discourse of developmental nationalism underscores national growth and modernization, processes in which the nation-state plays a central role in allocating economic elements to maximize their efficiency. In particular, it highlights the increasing amounts of export/trade and the progress of industrialization, and routinely enumerates economic indexes such as GNP and GDP (Lessnof 2002).<sup>12</sup>

In South Korea, developmental nationalism functions as governing ideology, mainly employed by the government. First, developmental nationalism was used to establish the political legitimacy of the governments, which seized political power through coups in 1961 and 1980 (Park 1998).<sup>13</sup> These governments routinely justified their military actions and authoritarian control by citing economic development at a national level as well as referring to the threat from North Korea. Second, developmental nationalism, as a governing ideology, was conflated with anti-communism and cited as crucial to South Korea's defense against the danger of North Korea and its communist ideology.

Similarly, the discourse of developmental nationalism served the interests of business interests, mass media, etc. Business interests welcomed developmental nationalism more than any other ideology, often deploying it to criticize labor unions and strikes and to orient public opinion to anti-unionists. Especially during the 1970s and 1980s, businesses and

governments held a solid alliance in which the governments offered a preference to the conglomerates and then the conglomerates provided illegal funds for political activities. Mass media usually supported the discourse of nationalism, not only because they had been controlled by the government but also because they had intimate relationships with business sectors (Kumar 2004).

Nevertheless, developmental nationalism also appealed to people because South Korea continued its economic success for decades and therefore, people could enjoy better lives. A milestone occurred in 1994, when the president made a declaration of 'globalization' (*Segyehwa*) (Shin 2000). The motto of *Segyehwa* expressed confidence that South Korea had become a developed country and was ready to be one of the leading countries in the world. This declaration, which indicated the pinnacle of developmental nationalism, turned out to be a prelude to the national crisis of the late 1990s.

#### *The national crisis and an alternative discourse in South Korea*

The IMF intervention brought about fundamental changes in South Korea. At risk was the hegemonic regime that consisted of a developing state, major conglomerates, crony relationships between politics and economics, and (developmental) nationalism. The sense of crisis or even failure came to be prevalent, accompanied by frustration with developmental nationalism. The IMF intervention enabled Koreans to think over their relationships to the nation-state and to discover the negative aspects of developmental nationalism. Followed by the economic crisis, the crisis of nationalism promoted discourses of crisis, which consequently resulted in the breakdown of hegemonic ideology. It became urgent, if not entirely acceptable, to constitute an alternative hegemonic ideology that could complement or even displace developmental nationalism.

The immediate response after the beginning of the IMF intervention was to call for changes in Korean society, so the discourse of reform became popular right away. Not only because of the negative aspects of economic success, but also because of pressure from global agents, people felt that reform was imperative if Korean society was to survive. The discourse of reform was widespread during the presidential election period; for example, a minority candidate successfully deployed it to blame the governmental party for corruption and incompetence that might have caused the financial crisis, and subsequently won the election. After the election, the discourse of reform was widely utilized not only in political fields but also in everyday lives. For a while, this discourse seemed to displace developing nationalism as a hegemonic ideology in South Korea.

However, the discourse of reform could not maintain this position, as the immediate shock of the IMF intervention slowly faded. There were a couple of reasons for this quick downfall. One was that the discourse of reform did not provide the detailed directions and goals that Korean society needed. Although it sounded attractive and timely, for whom and in which direction reforms were to be carried out remained unclear. Besides, the government that deployed it during the election period failed to generate institutional and administrative policies but rather, under the rubric of reform, continued to execute economic policies based on neoliberal ideas. As a result, the government, along with the discourse of reform, lost both its public support and its justification. Unable to drive a fundamental transformation, the discourse of reform failed to become a hegemonic ideology.

Meanwhile, another discourse emerged that appealed to nationalistic sentiments, in spite of the seeming contradiction of replacing one kind of nationalistic ideology with another as a response to the failure of developmental nationalism. Such adoption of a nationalistic discourse, however, was not new to other Asian countries whose economies were hit by global influence (Glassman 2004; Robinson 2004). As reactive responses to the



intervention of global agents, people were often drawn to support more nationalistic economic policies (Glassman 2004).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, many Koreans regarded the economic crisis in part as the result of the encroachment of the IMF and TNCs. At the same time, it is fair to say that nationalism in South Korea would not be abandoned easily in spite of the country's frustration. Even when it disappoints, nationalism still appeals to people emotionally.

Re-emerging nationalistic ideology also succeeded in gaining almost unanimous support from government, local corporations, and the major media. One example that heavily utilized a nationalistic discourse was the Gold Drive Campaign of 1998. This campaign, which was initiated by the government and then joined by various media corporations and organizations, basically asked people to donate their private gold to pay down the national debt. Campaign broadcasts on the national networks elicited huge interest and participation; 200,000 Koreans joined in January 1998, when total earnings were approximately \$2 billion (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 19 October 1998). Actually, the campaign was very similar to the Movement of Compensation for National Debt, which began in 1907 when Koreans were asked to donate money to pay national debts to Japan. The analogy between Japanese colonization and the IMF intervention, seen as an economic form of colonization, brought forth a desperate, emotional response. As a nationalistic discourse, the Gold Drive Campaign helped reunite public opinion under the flag of 'nation.'

During the economic crisis, developmental nationalism was denied as a hegemonic ideology, although there was a strong public desire for reform. However, nationalistic sentiments did not disappear and people were still interpellated by nationalism while the ideas of neoliberalism overshadowed economic and political transformation in South Korea. Nationalistic ideology still haunted Korean society, but it would transform itself through being articulated with core ideas of neoliberalism.

Meanwhile, the great performances of two Korean athletes in the US were gaining national attention in South Korea. The representation of these two athletes was connected with the process of altering the characteristics of Korean nationalism.

### **The sensational popularity of Korean sports athletes**

#### *The fever pitch in South Korea toward Korean sports celebrities in the US*

During the national crisis, two Korean athletes accomplished amazing successes in the US: Chan-ho Park and Se-ri Pak. Park became the regular starting pitcher for the LA Dodgers in 1997 and continued to play well until 2001.<sup>15</sup> He was selected as the best player of the month in July 1998, and team Most Valuable Player (MVP) in 1999. Pak made a sensational debut in the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in 1998, when she won three tournaments, including two major ones, and was named Rookie of the Year. Most notably, she made a dramatic win in the US Open, winning the title after two playoffs and providing an amazing spectacle. In the gloomy national mood of South Korea, they became national celebrities and heroes.

Beginning in 1997, Korean national public networks broadcast all the games in which Park played as a starting pitcher and his performances were reported as the top news item in all media. Although his play in Major League Baseball (MLB) had attracted attention before the IMF crisis, his popularity tremendously increased during the IMF crisis. The popularity of MLB in South Korea was reflected in part by the soaring fees for MLB broadcasting rights.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Pak's success in the US also brought about a huge golf boom in South Korea; mass media began to broadcast PGA and LPGA tours, and learning golf became fashionable among many Koreans.<sup>17</sup>

While Park and Pak continued their success in the US, their images were everywhere in South Korea. Their milestones, such as Park's 10th and 15th MLB victories and Pak's national

LPGA title, were front-page news. Samsung Corporation, one of the biggest conglomerates in South Korea and Pak's sponsor since her preparation for LPGA, was described as the biggest beneficiary of her success. Park also had sponsorships from multinational corporations such as Nike and local corporations such as Hyundai Insurance Company. Park and Pak's images were ubiquitous as representations of Korea's greatest success and future potential during the daunting days of the IMF intervention.

Park and Pak's impact was not limited only to mass media. Koreans developed an interest in baseball and golf that spilled over into their everyday lives. Pak's LPGA success contributed to changing Korean attitudes toward golf, making it fashionable. Golf had been regarded as a luxury leisure activity rather than a sport, and treated as highly political. For instance, politicians used to make secret deals while playing golf together; 'golf' and 'field' are Korean slang for such activity. The president even prohibited all public servants from playing golf in the mid 1990s, but after Pak's dramatic victories in LPGA, golf began to be regarded as a venue through which Koreans could show their potency and ability and was treated as a valid leisure sport. Golf began to be advertised, and was almost believed to be a public sport, even though the reality did not match the rhetoric due to the high costs associated with playing.<sup>18</sup>

The everyday lives of Koreans were saturated with these two sports celebrities and their representations during the IMF intervention.<sup>19</sup> Even Koreans unfamiliar with the basic rules of baseball or golf became acquainted with their names and exploits.<sup>20</sup> Their names and images traversed the boundary of sports and became icons presented as role models for every Korean.

#### *Governmental intervention in representing sports celebrities*

It seems contradictory that the government actively participated in importing US sports at the same time it was suffering economic deficits, because a US sports boom could have hindered recovery from the recession. Nevertheless, direct and indirect interventions were accomplished in several ways.

First, public networks, which are either owned directly by the government or operated with subsidies, broadcast MLB games beginning in 1997, when KBS (Korean Broadcasting Station) contracted with MLB International (MLBI) to show every game in which Park played as a starting pitcher. In 1998, however, KBS was unable to renew the agreement, not only because MLBI increased its price tenfold but also because the government was concerned about criticism over spending money on sports during a severe shortage of foreign funds.<sup>21</sup> Between 1998 and 2000 the rights were purchased by i-TV, a provincial and commercial cable company.<sup>22</sup> After the government announced the end of IMF control in 2000, MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation), a subsidized national network, signed a four-year contract with MLBI for \$28 million.

Second, news about the performances of the celebrities was treated as nationally important both by the public networks and in newspapers. The public networks reported news of Park and Pak along with other political and economic topics even when they did not broadcast the games.<sup>23</sup> Such a juxtaposition is unusual for South Korean TV, where the main news is usually separated from the sports news, except for international sporting events such as the Olympics and the soccer World Cup. But placement even in the middle of the main TV news highlighted them both Park and Pak as sports celebrities and public figures. Major newspapers with national circulation repeated this pattern by mentioning Park and Pak in editorials and essays as well as the news sections, and by placing shots of them on cover pages with eye-catching headlines. Not only straight coverage and box scores but also in-depth reports were published serially.<sup>24</sup>

Third, government officials explicitly referred to Park and Pak, and used their images in conjunction with their own. In 1998, President Kim invited them to the Blue House again

and bestowed a medal of national honor on Park, calling him a 'national hero' – only the third time such an award had been given to a Korean athlete in the modern era.<sup>25</sup> Also in 1998, they were featured in a public advertisement: Park smiled next to the message 'Korea with Love' (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 5 August 1998)<sup>26</sup> and Pak's dramatic shot in the US Open was overlapped with the message that South Korea could overcome any ordeal.

Such active government involvement suggests the important contribution of representation toward implementing another nationalistic ideology. The next section will examine the detailed representation of the two celebrities in mass media from 1997 to 2000, and explore how another nationalistic ideology was articulated within the representation under the IMF's influence.<sup>27</sup>

### **Representing a sport celebrity as a national individual**

Because images of the sports celebrities were ubiquitous in the mass media, as well as in the everyday lives of Koreans, their national popularity made it possible to implement another nationalistic ideology through several venues. The Korean government made use of Park and Pak's images to boost national unity and confidence; the mass media sold their images and news with a strong nationalistic flavor; and people preferred to talk about entertaining items rather than face political and economic issues. The huge MLB and LPGA booms in South Korea proved that nationalism still worked ideologically, politically and economically. However, as discussed, people no longer placed the same reliance on developmental nationalism, which had brought them so much frustration during the IMF intervention. Nationalism as a hegemonic ideology had to be modified in order to coexist with a global trend such as neoliberalism.

The following analysis will show that the major characteristics of media coverage of Park and Pak, which both influenced and reflected altered nationalism in Korean society, can be summarized in three ways. First, the coverage is focused on a self-governing individual. Second, that individual is invested with the image of economic success in global competition. Third, that individual is invested with the image of responsibility for both family and nation-state.

#### *A self-governing individual*

Representations of Park and Pak strongly emphasized their individual efforts; in particular, the media complimented their incessant training and mental toughness. At first glance, such attributions of a professional athlete's success to personal endeavor are not surprising. However, these descriptions were not only markedly different from traditional descriptions of sports athletes in South Korea, they also paralleled a growing emphasis on self-government, which can be called the biopolitics of neoliberalism.

Before these two sports celebrities, the government of South Korea had invested heavily in the cultivation of what were thought of as elite sports, such as golf, in a manner similar to other developing nations (particularly in Eastern Europe). Most of this investment went into organizing and hosting international sporting events and supplying excellent athletes with facilities and salaries. Thus, it was taken for granted that the success of every athlete in any major sporting event was due to governmental support and even personal support from presidents. Media commentary on athletic accomplishment was, accordingly, patronizing; for example, athletes were urged to do their best in order to repay the government for its support (Cho 2002).

Because this sort of attitude had become a cliché in sports coverage of successful athletes, media emphasis on their individual effort, particularly the relentless training and mental toughness that had enabled Park and Pak to overcome several obstacles in MLB and



LPGA, was extremely unusual. Coincidentally or not, such praise for individual effort has something common with neoliberal concepts such as self-discipline, scientific management and competitive individualism (Miller *et al.* 2001). Like Michael Jordan, who functioned as an embodied exaltation of the twin discourses of late modernity, neoliberal democracy and consumer capitalism, Park and Pak became near-perfect incarnations of neoliberalism (Andrews 2001). By emphasizing their preparation, which in turn was directly connected to their success in US sports, media representations of Park and Pak indicated the importance of 'self-government' and 'individual responsibility.'

Citing his individual effort, Park was called a 'typical Hollywood success story' (*Moonhwa-Ilbo*, 13 April 1998; *Hankook-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997; *Seoul-Shinmoon*, 2 August 1997; *Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997). Accordingly, early in his career the mass media described him as a wonder boy from a small country town who became a celebrity both in South Korea and the US, even daring to call him a 'Global Star.' The drama of his success story was heightened by the fact that he had previously drawn less attention than his fellow athletes – the Hollywood equivalent of rising from bit player to leading man.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Park's accomplishments in MLB were surprising to the Korean public, which had not been deeply enculturated with the idea that ordinary people could succeed through effort alone.

On the other hand, Pak's success in LPGA was attributed to her genetic excellence and the superior ethnic culture of Koreans. Particularly, it was suggested that agricultural tradition, chopstick culture, and the heavy usage of fingers in daily life were cultural mores that helped her make consistent and correct swings (*Hankook-Ilbo*, 22 December 1998). Such descriptions indicate that the media continuously tried to connect the individual attributes of Park and Pak to ethnic or national elements.

Similarly, their mental strength was routinely described as a rocky spirit<sup>29</sup> that enabled them to overcome obstacles and become heroes. They were praised as pioneers who broke down racial and ethnic barriers in LPGA and MLB; in particular, Pak was highlighted through references to the previous, heavy domination of whites and Westerners in golf and LPGA (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 9 May 1998; *Kyounghan-Shimnoon* 1998; *Seoul-Shinmoon*, 29 October 1998). In Park's debut season as a starting pitcher in MLB, features such as his height (6'2") and muscularity were often compared to bulky American players. Both Park and Pak were portrayed as vulnerable to racial or ethnic prejudice as one of only a few Asian competitors in their respective sports.

This new emphasis in the late 1990s on the self-governing individual provided an alternative model of the role of the individual and the relationship between the individual and government. For decades, under developmental nationalism, individual Koreans had to sacrifice their personal benefits to the national interest; in turn, the government was supposed to act as patron or guardian. However, such a relationship could not be sustained when people witnessed the incompetence and powerlessness of the government in the face of the IMF. A new kind of nationalism was needed, one that could promote the roles of individuals who were responsible for their own well-being. Representations of Park's US athletic career provided the best examples of a responsible individual within a new hegemonic ideology that relieved the government of its burden of social welfare by making the concept of self-governing individual commonsensical and even moral.

#### *Economics success in global competition*

Representations of Park and Pak described them as winners in global competition, which of course operates on free-market principles. The media repeatedly pointed out that they were survivors and even true winners in an unlimited contest, and that their success was proven by their economic profitability, i.e. their annual income.

In the US, Park and Pak were called 'World Stars' who had achieved an 'American Dream.'<sup>30</sup> Their American Dream needs to be understood in the context of the late 1990s, a time of US domination of the global economy, when globalization itself had come to be seen as an endless and borderless competition. Paralleling the practical economy, MLB and PGA functioned as arenas in which any player, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity, competes against all other players based only upon individual capability and market value. Therefore, the American Dream of Park and Pak overlapped the footsteps of Korean immigrants to America and also offered a futuristic vision of Koreans who were expected to compete – and succeed – in global competition.

The dominant criterion of Park's success was economic (increasing salaries and additional income from being featured in commercials, etc). Media speculation about his upcoming salary, which became especially loud at the end of each regular season, stated that his income potential was proof that he had been recognized as one of the top pitchers in MLB (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997; KBS 9 pm News, 28 September 1998; MBC 9 pm News, 25 September 2000). Similarly, Pak's success was also related to her contribution to her sponsor, Samsung Corporation, whose net profit was calculated as \$1 billion in 1998 (*Kyounghyang-Shinmoon* 1998; *Seoul-Shinmoon*, 7 July 1998; *Donga-Ilbo* 1998; *Hankook-Ilbo* 1998).<sup>31</sup> At the same time, it was proclaimed that Park's increasing income from MLB was contributing to the national wealth of South Korea and even single-handedly overcoming the country's economic crisis.<sup>32</sup>

Another interesting feature of the recognition of their success in the US was that Korean media coverage drew heavily from international news sources and American media. By the late 1990s, almost every Korean newspaper and broadcasting network was sending its own reporter to bring back news about Park and Pak. Nonetheless, Korean media still quoted passages from US media, particularly the *L.A. Times*, the *L.A. Daily News*, the *New York Times*, the Associated Press (AP) and ESPN (KBS 9pm News, 25 September 1997; MBC 9 pm News, 25 September 1997).<sup>33</sup> In particular, almost all media mentioned Pak's cover picture in the *New York Times*<sup>34</sup> and her AP award for Best Female Athlete of 1998 (*Hankook-Kyungjae*, 31 December 1998; *Donga-Ilbo*, 31 December 1998). Similarly, broadcast news often ran interviews with the Dodgers' general manager and team members, as well as with other Americans, all of whom commented favorably about Park (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 4 April 1998; KBS 9 pm News, 25 September 1997, 8 April 1998, 18 April 1999; MBC 9pm News, 28 September 1998). These new media practices implied that recognition from US and international media was necessary to confirm the success of these athletes, both in American and global terms. They also reflected public frustration with and distrust of the Korean media, which had failed in 1997 to predict the sudden economic crisis.

As the emphases on global competition and economic success helped legitimize such concepts in Korea as free market principles, unlimited contest, and economic profitability, reports of the increasing annual salaries of Park and Pak helped Koreans become familiar with such terms as 'free agent,' 'annual salary,' 'negotiating salary' and so on. In this way, representations of these athletes encouraged Koreans to take such global competition for granted but did not raise questions about fair competition and structural inequality. Particularly when the South Korean government and local corporations had difficulties under the IMF intervention, the success of Park and Pak in the US suggested, implicitly and explicitly, that any Korean could and should be globally competitive and successful. Their images provided an ideal prototype for every Korean to emulate, instead of depending on government, local corporations or cronyism – habits that in part caused the national crisis. Because the prototype did not include other social issues such as welfare, minimum wage and human rights, these issues could continue to be easily ignored by the media.

*Responsibility for family and nation-state*

Finally, representations highlighted Park and Pak as responsible individuals. Both through identifying their success in the US with national achievement and through underscoring their close relationships to their families, the media successfully used them to symbolize individuals who are responsible not only for themselves and to their family but also to and for South Korea.

Basically, these representations created nationalistic discourse by equating athletic victories with the triumph of the nation-state. The media habitually used the term 'national' to describe them: for instance, Park's nickname became 'Korean Express' for his fastball, and Pak's swings were described as 'Korean Shots' (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 27 July 1998). They were also called a son or daughter of all Koreans – especially Pak, 'a model for an ideal mother because of her tanned skin and mild smiles' (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 31 December 1998). Traditional symbols such as the national flag and historic metaphors were also often used in connection with their performances (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 23 August 1997 and 16 July 1998).

Moreover, the Korean media directly stated that their performance in the US encouraged national unity and confidence, describing it as 'national refreshment and vitality' to Koreans who had been frustrated and dejected while undergoing the IMF crisis (*Moonhwa-Ilbo*, 7 July 1998; *Chosun-Ilbo*, 19 May 1998; *Seoul-Shinmoon*, 8 July 1998; *Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 8 July 1998). In particular, Korean immigrants in LA commented that it was 'Park who generated emotional catharsis [and] became a real celebrity or even hero among the immigrants in L.A., and also gave us a vicarious pleasure of beating Americans' (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 1 October 1997; *Seoul-Shinmoon*, 2 August 1997; *Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 13 November 1997 and 8 June 1999; KBS 9pm News, 25 September 1997; MBC 9pm News, 1 August 1997 and 28 September 1998).<sup>35</sup> The media also used Internet quotes from Koreans to report that many Koreans acknowledged Park and Pak's effort and service on a national level (*Seoul-Shinmoon*, 7 May 1997; *Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 27 May 1997). Online, people often called each of them 'a cultural ambassador who contributed to the fame of Koreans' and other similar praises (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997).

If Park and Pak were to be regarded as national figures, their relationship to their family would be important (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997 and 11 July 1998; *Donga-Ilbo* 2 August 1997; *Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 6 October 1997). In Asian and Confucian culture, family symbolizes the nation-state in miniature, and the nation-state is regarded as an extended form of family in which the president is usually equated with the father. Representations of Park continuously described his family's emotional support and expectations as critical factors in his success. For their parts, neither Park nor Pak forgot to mention their appreciation of their families and to credit their support as essential to their mental stability. These connections were not defined as a legal duty but rather described as an ethical responsibility. They needed to succeed and to return their family's appreciation, not to receive special gifts or privileges as a family member but because they were children of their families. The relationships between Park and his mother and Pak and her father were particularly emphasized.

The emphasis on personal responsibility to family as well as nation-state in representations of Park highlights another aspect of the relationship between individuals and the nation-state in South Korea. Previously, the government had urged individual sacrifice for the national interest, a useful rhetoric both for the suppression of non-conforming people and ideas and for helping the government take credit for economic progress on a national level. In the late 1990s, however, a new nationalistic ideology actively encouraged people to pursue their own dreams, which in turn would contribute to national development, rather than preaching repression of individual interests for the sake of national development.

Additionally, using the rhetoric of traditional rationales such as Confucianism, governmental rationality encouraged people, as individuals, to be responsible for themselves as well as for their family and nation-state. Thus, it became an ethical responsibility for individuals to accomplish their visions in global competition. Meanwhile, presidential or paternal duty as head of the family/nation-state was absent from the representations. By citing Park and Pak in the US as the best examples of responsible individuals, the government relieved itself of the burden of social welfare by making the idea of individual responsibility normal and even moral.

### **Conclusion: a new kind of citizenship – a national individual**

Representations of Park and Pak can be summarized by three salient features: (1) a self-governing individual who (2) achieves economic success in a global competition and (3) demonstrates responsibility to family and the nation-state. These characteristics concretized the virtues of the new kind of citizenship that Koreans were told they needed, not only in order to keep up as survivors but to become winners in unlimited contests. In short, the representations of Park and Pak invented the concept of Koreans as national individuals in a global era.

The implication of these characteristics can be better understood when placed in wider perspectives. First, representations of Park and Pak were closely related to sensibilities of neoliberalism, such as valuation of the market over the state, reasoning based on economic efficiency and ethical norms such as self-responsibility, and a return to individualism and consumer sovereignty (Ong 2005). Through emphasis on their competitiveness, economic success and responsibility to his family, representations of Park fully reflected core neoliberal values and thereby successfully shifted the burden of social welfare from the government to Korean citizens. In addition, the materialization of individual responsibility shifted the moral duty of every Korean to include taking care of the destiny of South Korea as an extended form of family. In the representations, neoliberal elements dovetailed with nationalistic discourses, which in turn meant that South Korean nationalistic discourses defined the relationship between individuals and the government/nation-state.

Second, representations of Park and Pak in South Korea were not equated with images of cosmopolitan identity. Outwardly, they might have functioned as an incarnation of Korean cosmopolitanism because they seemed to embody all the necessary elements (mobility, economic success, competitive ability and fluent English) (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 23 August 1997).<sup>36</sup> However, they were constantly identified as Koreans. In particular, the media also regularly compared Park's performance and records to Japanese players in MLB (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 4 August 1997; 23 August 1997; 25 September 1997).<sup>37</sup> Even though there was no urgent reason to do so, games in which he might beat Japanese players or exceed their records were always treated as particularly important.

This paper investigates what happened to Korean nationalism during the IMF intervention. Despite the failure of developmental nationalism, this paper shows that nationalistic ideology, in spite of alterations, remained strong in South Korea through the national crisis. It also argues that this altered nationalism effectively affiliates itself with the idea of the individual and leaves room for co-opting ideas such as a free market and global competition. Meanwhile, the representation of the two athletes was utilized as a model for a new kind of citizenship, i.e. a national individual. According to this analysis, nationalistic images of citizenship did not contradict an emphasis on individuals, because they stressed the roles of individuals who were responsible for national competence and confidence. The idea of a national individual, originally outlined in the principles of neoliberalism, could be effectively utilized as a means to mobilize people because of its nationalistic flavor. Such an

altered nationalism in South Korea reminds us that nationalism, which had been at stake, still works as a hegemonic ideology.

## Notes

1. Cho explains that raising and distributing resources is performed in the interaction between the market and the state (Cho 2000).
2. This progress gained momentum when South Korea joined the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1996.
3. The big deals indicate swapping companies between conglomerates if both had the same branch, which made each conglomerate own a bigger company in one branch while giving up another branch to the other.
4. Shin argues that the most immediate impact of the economic crisis has been the polarization of economic status amongst the people (Shin 2000).
5. I referred to the Economic Statistics System ([www.ecos.bok.or.kr](http://www.ecos.bok.or.kr)) for the exchange rate between won and dollar at 6 January 2000.
6. Robinson illustrates that 'reforms had been selective': for instance, deregulation was selectively 'implemented in the traded goods sectors where the [local] conglomerates were absent but not in the domestic trading of manufacturing cartels where privileged oligarchies were entrenched (Robinson 2004).
7. Cho also calls it a regulatory state model (Cho 2003).
8. South Korea held the first presidential election in 1948, but, among 15 elections, the democratic elections were about half and the ruling parties won all the elections in 1952, 1956, 1963, 1967, 1971, 1987, and 1992.
9. Lim argues that the nation in the modern history of Korea is not only the reason for moral punishment but also the criteria in historical judgments (Lim 1999).
10. Smith maintains that in many parts of Africa and Asia, 'religious nationalism, or the superimposition of mass religion on nationalism, has made a remarkable comeback' (Smith 1993: 22).
11. Anderson suggests the notion of 'official nationalism'; as a persistent feature of nationalism, it is something from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost (Anderson 1983). Kim describes that a nationality in Korea is an identity of a forced community (Kim 1999). The nation-states during the 1970s had fascism elements.
12. Gellner's theory offers two reasons for the success of nationalism; one is that nationalism satisfies the functional requirements of industrial society (Lessnoff 2002).
13. Park insists that the integrating effects of nationalism are employed by political power groups and cause the suffocation of diversities of civic societies and individuals (Park 1998).
14. The economic nationalism is driven by complex interactions between transitional and social forces to which political parties and the state must reply. Glassman argues that the Thai government deployed economic nationalism that is only national in a very specific and neomercantilist sense (Glassman 2004).
15. His salaries also had increased enormously and reached at almost ten million dollars in 2001.
16. The fee was only \$0.3 million in 1997, but it was increased to \$1 million in 1998, \$1.5 million in 1999 and \$3 million in 2000. In 2001, MBC, a national network, contracted a deal to pay \$7 million per year for 4 years, and in 2005, X-sports, a cable network, made a \$10 million per year deal.
17. The boom in learning golf became a social issue and, in particular, the golf education of youths became controversial (*Donga-Ilbo*, 15 July 1998).
18. One article reported that many people got confused about the sudden boom of golf in South Korea commenting that 'golf is the sport with social implications either positive or negative in South Korea' (*Hankook-Ilbo*, 21 July 1998).
19. One article reported that pitching practices and indoor driving ranges were good items for new business due to the two celebrities (*Hankook-Ilbo*, 16 November 1998).
20. An anonymous respondent commented that 'I am overly excited with her performance although I have no idea of what golf is' (*Hankyora*, 8 July 1998). A columnist also commented that she was anxiously watching the games although she had less understanding of the rules and the details (*Seoul-Shinmoon*, 20 July 1998).
21. The media argued that due to the high fees it was a good decision for public networks to give up broadcasting MLB during the economic crisis, and suggested that people should be patient with the inconvenience of not watching his games live (*Saekye-Ilbo*, 9 January 1998). One newspaper reported that 91% of the online poll participants voted not to pay money for broadcasting MLB in 1998 (*Hankook-Ilbo*, 21 January 1998).



22. Contrary to other national networks such as KBS and MBC, i-TV covers only Kyounginn province, which includes Incheon city, Seoul and the suburban areas. No one expected i-TV to purchase the rights to broadcast MLB in 1998. However, i-TV was highly criticized for paying so much money (*Saekye-Ilbo*, 2 April 1998; *Kookmin-Ilbo*, 2 April 1998).
23. His news was introduced earlier than the news about the Olympics and the Korean team in KBS 9 pm News on 2 August 1997.
24. For instance, *Chosun-Ilbo* put the serial reports of estimating Park's success in MLB for five days after the end of the 1997 season (from 30 September – 5 October 1997).
25. President Kim bestowed a national honor on him, along with female golfer, Se-ri Pak who also played in US female golf tournaments, on 2 November 1998 (*Saekyae-Ilbo*, 7 November 1998).
26. He was in a public commercial with another sports celebrity, Se-ri Pak who also accomplished a great performance in the LPGA (Lady Professional Golf Association) in the US without getting any money (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 5 August 1998).
27. I obtained the sources in two ways: first, I copied the pages of the newspaper *Chosun-Ilbo*, in which Park's news was reported; second, I downloaded the news about Pak and Park from [www.kinds.or.kr](http://www.kinds.or.kr).
28. In his amateur days, he was not ranked as a top prospect: rather, he was regarded as a pitcher who could throw a fast ball (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997).
29. When he pitched the ball while suffering with a stomach-ache and cold, the media entitled his performance as a victory of mental strength (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 18 August 1997).
30. For example, Park's first tenth victory in MLB was compared to accomplishing an 'American Dream' (*Chosun-Ilbo*, 2 August 1997).
31. See *Donga-Ilbo* (14 July 1998) with a comment on making 'Astra' (a brand of golf wear of Samsung Corp.) a global brand following the success of Nike; and *Saekye-Ilbo* (9 July 1998) with a comment on 'the soaring stock prices of Samsung'.
32. Contrary to media description, his salary and other incomes basically did not help with the Korean economy: rather, he earned money from local corporations for the commercials without paying taxes to the Korean government due to special tax agreements between the Korean and American governments (*Donga-Ilbo*, 7 October 1997).
33. In particular, MBC News reported the detail from the article of *LA Times* for three minutes.
34. Most newspapers reported the cover picture of Pak in the *New York Times*, with the story that Korea could rebound from its economic struggles and Pak had become the hope for Koreans (*Donga-Ilbo*, 12 August 1998; *Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 13 August 1998).
35. Park also expressed his appreciation to Korean immigrants in LA for their endless support.
36. He was often blamed for his seemingly awkward Korean during the interview in 1997 (*Kyounghyang-Shinmoon*, 27 May 1997).
37. When Park had his 17th victory in 2000, it was particularly underscored that Park exceeded the record of Nomo Hideo, a Japanese player in MLB (MBC 9pm News, 25 September 2005).

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Younghan Cho is currently a postdoctoral fellow of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. After earning his MA degree at Seoul National University in 2002, he moved to the US to pursue his PhD degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2007, he completed the dissertation, under the advice of Lawrence Grossberg, which is entitled 'Emergence of individuated nationalism among Major League Baseball fans in South Korea.' His major research is on nationalism, sports, media and popular culture, and his current projects include East Asian popular culture and alternative modernities in East Asia. He has been appointed as a postdoctoral researcher in Asian Research Institute at National University of Singapore, a post that begins in April 2008.

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