



SC2217 Travel Matters

Visual Analysis Project

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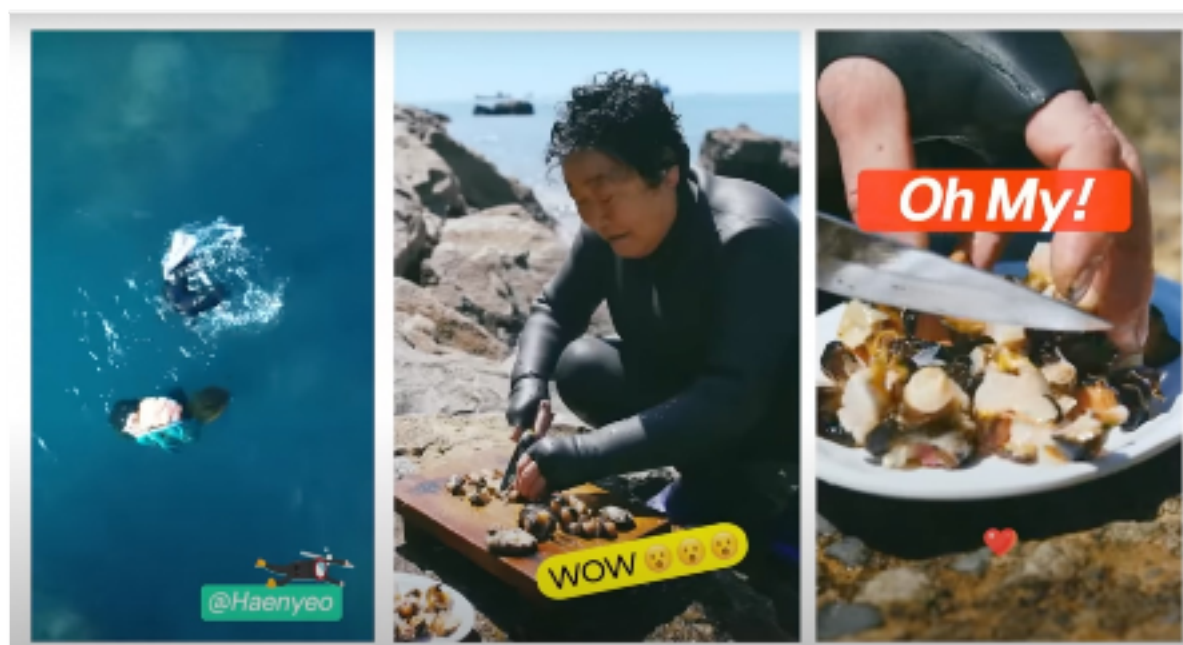
Littered with colourful, animated text cut-outs, the ‘Are You Ready to Travel?’ video packs an exciting to-do list in South Korea. However, the video’s highlight was the cast involved in this campaign—a small group comprising of East Asians and people from the West; a stark absence of Southeast and South Asian people, two groups that make up one of the biggest migrant communities in the country.



With an ageing workforce comes the need to fill that gap, which is where migrant workers come in—legally or not. The pandemic cutting off legally employed migrant workers meant that farms had to “rely mostly on illegal immigrants, who fill 80% to 90% of that shortage” (Kuhn, 2021). Yet, despite being so important to the country, South Korea still leaves their migrants in poor living conditions and the grey area in which they exist legally, perpetuated by the government’s immigration policies. It is difficult for migrants to become citizens as the government is aware of public disapproval towards mass immigration, with a poll showing only 19% agreeing with an increase (Kuhn, 2021). Identities must become codified and institutionalised in order for them to be socially significant (Torpey, 2000), and the denying of migrants their necessary documents subjects them to extreme employment conditions with no safety net. To deny migrants of their rights, and to not include them in country-related activities

such as tourism campaigns gives rise to particular perceptions of who are ‘outsiders’, leading these migrants to always be othered.

Here, travel is depicted as comfortable and carefree, an awe-inspiring experience of adventure with limitless boundaries. Viewers of the tourism campaign are introduced to 5 characters who easily travel across social spaces through luxurious modes of transport. Likewise, technology plays a key role in presenting Korea as a travel destination. References to social media were made using Instagram with captions such as “#Busan” in the video. This markets travel as an fun experience, a social process that is enjoyed alongside others, friends and family alike. With increased access to food, culture and tourist activities, tourists are given the power of heightened mobility. This tourism campaign heavily concentrates on enticing individuals who have a socio-economic and financial status that enables the means to experience material luxuries. Furthermore, the portrayal of Korea itself is welcoming as locals contribute to the merry experiences of tourists.



However, such images of travel largely differ from the experiences of migrant workers in South Korea. It is essential to examine how the quality of migrant workers’ and tourists’ travel experiences changes due to present inequalities. For instance, the attitude of locals toward

migrants in the agricultural sector undertakes a hostile stance, one that opposes the tourism campaign. Former Cambodian migrant workers mention that they endured “abuse”, “mistreatment” and encountered employers who “violated labour rights and contracts” (AP Migration, 2015). As such, these migrant workers are in a constant state of negotiation with their “grey space” identity (Reeves, 2013). The social coherence and progression of agricultural companies is largely dependent on the interactions between locals and migrants. However, while the work of migrants is appreciated as they contribute to sustaining agriculture, they themselves are not treated with respect. This shows how the outlook of immigrants from power institutes reduces their identities into a state of liminality.



Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the fun-filled experience enjoyed by travellers and the lived experiences of migrant workers, reveals the stratification of foreigners by the state. Unlike travellers, migrant workers are placed into various visa programmes. Low-skilled migrants are allowed into Korea under the E-9 visa, where the lived experience of migrant workers are constrained to predetermined, labour-intensive job scopes. In fact, the jobs are informally referred to as “3D”, namely dirty, dangerous, and difficult. Here, the work permit serves as an

identity card. Identity cards are used by authorities to enforce intermittent checks (Torpey, 2000).



Following this thread, when migrant workers are checked by Korean authorities, they are not only required to produce the work permit but also provide a satisfactory performance. As shown in 'The Illegal Traveller' (Khosravi S., 2007), performance plays a crucial role in evaluations made by authorities. In the video, the travellers commute on beautiful trains while taking pictures without any worry on their minds. We wonder if they zip past the partially modified shipping containers containing migrant workers who battle the cold, harsh winters.

"Last year, a woman from Vietnam died because of the cold inside her container. The employer found her body the next morning," - Sanjay Yadav

This is a terrific little piece. The way you have interwoven the analysis of the campaign with the migrants at the heart of Korean economy but excluded from these visualizations of pleasure and enjoyment in Korea is unexpected and effective - I was startled. The juxtaposition also helps to highlight some of contradictions in tourism travel. I appreciate that you raise as many questions as you answer in this reading - I hope you will keep think about these connections especially questions of pleasure, safety, risk, and joy in relation to mobility and transnational connections. A

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