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Transforming Information into Knowledge: Ethnography as a Colonial Knowledge Production

The Japanese colonial empire utilized several methods of information gathering to enact social control over the Korean population during the 35 years of Japanese administration and Governor- Generalship, from 1910-1945. Korean colonized subjects were educated to believe that they were second-class citizens to the Japanese metropole by authoritative claims to scientific progress and an explicitly Western technological superiority brought by the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, stereotypes that differentiated Japanese and Koreans focused on cultural practices and mannerisms in order to produce new conceptions of what a “Modern Korea " would look like as a locality of Japan while still maintaining Japanese superiority. Representations of cultural differences between a westernizing Japanese empire and an anachronistic Korea subaltern identity were displayed to the colonized masses through new scientific journals/ethnographic accounts, educational textbooks, and culture magazines. New scientific and technological discourses of the modernizing world, now situated in Korea were expressed through the new technologies of the time: the typewriter and the camera. These media technologies played a role in the knowledge production process by constructing stereotypes, as for Walter Lippman, with their ability to stand as a metaphor for increasingly thick flows of information. The typewriter and camera reveal how media technologies can be used to redefine cultural identity and societal roles. Put into the context of the period, there was much anxiety related to labor, sexual reproduction, and the “newly complex machine civilization” (Cmiel and

Durham 133) in the Korean subaltern, where labor/ reproduction are control points for colonizing systems. Thus, the newly defined conception of culture enlisted rigid structures to ease the "manifold confusion of the empirical flux." In this paper I will argue that the typewriter and camera media technologies employed by Japanese imperial power were integral in creating a national stereotype of Korean people, effectively reimagining both the outsider and self-conceived notions of Korean culture and progress.

Out of the many Japanese ethnographers who published books out of Seoul, one prominent ethnographer who gathered information on Korean culture and sought to produce knowledge that supports the superiority of the empire is Okita Shinjo, author of the early protectorate-era ethnography *Korea Behind the Mask.* Okita "essentialized motifs of Korean individualism, laziness, and filth" to create a specific image of Korean customs, invoking the imperialist narrative that Koreans are stagnant, uncouth, and in need of Japanese intervention through Urban Sanitation projects and colonial reforms through education (Henry 646). Information gathering on the mannerisms, customs, physiology, and thus the culture of Korean peoples was essential to the structuring of Japanese imperial control— and Okita's ethnographic work seems to hone in on specific cultural stereotypes/ "othering" language which emphasizes the unsanitary conditions in which Koreans live. He noted in his ethnography that Koreans were "unhealthy" smokers, did not deal with waste excrement hygienically, and were too secluded to develop on their own. Calling it an "immoral and unethical factory of criminality," Okita suggested that metropolitan Seoul should endure the police-led census surveys and sanitary projects to crush the "stubborn pride" of the "morally and hygienically depraved" Koreans (Henry 650). The metropole authorities sought to gather census data that was novel in its quest for a wide range of information on Korean people, yet specific to the needs of the Empire's

Sanitation Bureau. Information on population numbers and details on their health was not easy to obtain, however, as the "intrusive way in which Japanese police carried out the census" caused many to hide in their homes (Henry 654). Ultimately, Japanese authorities ran into problems when they realized that their repeated attempts to quantify the population of Koreans were futile since the numbers were not consistent over time. Cmiel and Durham's definition of the *culture of happy summary* tells us that despite the inaccuracies, the conciseness and simplification of the statistical information presented in a typographic format appealed to those in power who had control over the summarizing.

Similar to the manufactured portrait of the depraved and backward Korean customs, the colonial education system printed textbooks to teach and model how to be a morally apt citizen of the Japanese empire. Education in subaltern Korea was focused on upper-class children, but its goal was never to help Koreans work for a modern upper-class lifestyle. Instead, education was mainly imperial indoctrination and to train students for obedience at lower-class jobs. For example, " all Koreans depicted in the textbooks are 'blue-collar' workers" and the colonial methods of teaching entailed simple memorization— textbooks coupled with instruction of "simple regurgitation of material" sought to influence self-conception and behavior rather than educate (Yuh 142). Much like Freidrich Neitzche's articulation of the typewriter experience, the typewriter as a technology effectuates a shift from writing out of creative/ personal agency to becoming the inscription surface itself: he says "humanity has shifted away from its inborn faculties (such as knowledge, speech, and virtuous action) in favor of a memory machine" (Kittler 29). Students were forced to memorize imperialist ideologies and the lessons included in textbooks focused on the "mundane and quotidian" including, again, hygiene, cleanliness, and organization (Yuh 139). Educational information in this case was meant to enact social order and

teach self-surveillance control in the form of "morality teaching." Photographs were also placed in the textbooks, which brings in another media technology: the camera. The effects of photographic realism on education were one means for Japanese officials to supervise and regulate their colonial subjects: " they could monitor their physical behavior. Pictures of classrooms show students sitting upright, facing the front of the classroom, eyes fixed on the teacher" (Yuh 143). Both printed textbook information and photographs were used to teach civility and morals to the stereotyped "uncouth" Korean students. An appeal to realism wherein the photograph can be purposefully staged, manipulated, and processed gave immense power to the Japanese colonial indoctrination. The colonizer effectively makes a weapon out of the media technologies and their capacity to disseminate lots of information to a mass culture.

Towards the end of Japanese imperial rule of Korea, there is a successfully more modernized "japanized" Korean culture that becomes an object of display and voyeurism as seen through the culture magazine, *Culture Joseon* (1938-1944). The magazine was published out of Seoul but written in the Japanese language, so its readership was directed at the Japanese population. The magazine was known for its vibrant and visually appealing pages which were thought to have captured reality itself through photography and typography: "the perspective of the real captured by the camera delivering truth was commonly applied to any coverage that displayed Korean culture" (Moon 73). Literati associated with the magazine were Korean, and they did try to represent some aspects truth of Korean culture but Culture Joseon was "thoroughly cooperative with Japanese imperial policy" (Moon 82). Written content never contained personal stories in travelogues so as not to incite Korean personal memories but it contained characteristics "that could be viewed as the product of collective imagination" (Moon 82). Here, we see evidence of the shift towards viewing humans themselves as information:

people of Korea can be presented as a homogenous group with magazines like *Culture Joseon* to represent their contents.

In framing the ideological superiority of everything Western, and Japan's closeness to scientific empiricism and modernity, the ethnographical information gathered and processed aimed to portray Korean culture as "behind, and then as an opportunity for tourism profit. Following linguistic structuralism, Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified is seen in the representations of culture— ethnography, textbooks, and cultural magazines which were supporting the view of the superior metropole of Japan. Media technologies operating in control of the system of colonization were used to encourage the new metaphors of scientific empiricism, modernity, westernization, and body politics (the self-surveillance) of daily life. The goal is to manufacture a new collective imaginary of Korea, one that is framed as a progression from a stagnating, obscure precolonial Korean society. It can then be more easily understood, reproduced, and repackaged as an object to be consumed. Information is processed and represented through typewriter technology with its ability to "rapidly fire off information" (as Kittler compares it to a discursive machine gun), coupled with the camera and its ability to register, store, and develop snapshots of reality as a claim to truth marked the new method of social control through manipulation of cultural signifiers.

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