

that matter.

Political science, with its lack of interest in place, permits a lack of rigour on other counts. The book never explains whether Korean or Chinese or German sources were used. The bibliography contains only English-language references. Were interviews conducted in English or in a local language? Surely, this information is crucial in a book about collective identities and self-understanding.

The core claim of *Narratives of Civic Duty*, though, is sensible for South Korea. Further arguments could be advanced as to the ways that nationalism shapes and improves the country's democracy. And it is exciting to think about the claim's relevance elsewhere. If this argument is to be explored beyond Korea, then key questions relate to how far the claim can be taken in other contexts. Where would we expect it to be relevant? (Or, what are the "scope conditions"?) How does the claim need to be tweaked or adjusted in another context? Presumably, the conditions of postcolonialism, anti-authoritarian struggle, and relationship with a superpower have shaped the nationalism-civic linkage in contemporary South Korea. Some societies have similar conditions; not all do.

The latter parts of *Narratives of Civic Duty* plough directly into an expansive argument, without pausing to reflect on these questions. Instead of a discussion of varieties of nationalism or the contextual nature of nationalism—which is where the book started, cautiously, and with nuance—South Korea has by the end become a "normal" case from which universal knowledge can be derived. The book brings out the limits of a discipline uninterested in place, even as the author's sensitivity to her subjects and their societies highlights how really interesting political knowledge can be gained from taking context seriously.

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Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads by

Olga Fedorenko. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 298 pp.

Years ago, when I started my PhD, my supervisor, who was British, handed me a scrap of an advert for my reference. It was a largish newspaper ad for Hyundai Motor Company (hereafter Hyundai) from 1991 published in *The Korea Economic Weekly*. The ad shows an illustration of the Korean Peninsula, in

which cars drive on a long road that stretches from the northern to the southern ends of the peninsula. The rather prosaic copy reads, “The Korean Peninsula should be a unified land. All 70 million Koreans share the same dream.” There is no sales pitch in sight. All you can see is the promotion of a good cause, that is the reunification of Korea.

Advertising is commercial speech. Sometimes, however, we come across advertisements that deviate from this stereotype. Just like the Hyundai ad mentioned above, there are ads not made to sell something but to communicate messages of public interest or transmit certain affects. Olga Fedorenko’s *Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads* (hereafter *Flower of Capitalism*) focuses on this kind of advertising. Fedorenko’s argument here is that publicness is a key characteristic of South Korean (hereafter Korean) advertising. In Korea, publicness is not confined to public service announcements but permeated into a broad range of advertisements. In fact, Fedorenko was surprised to find that Korean people do not appear to distinguish non-commercial public service announcements and commercial advertisements. Both are thrown into the same category of *kwanggo* or advertisement together with classifieds and notices of condolence (6).

The title of the book comes from the popular metaphor of unknown origin. Although Fedorenko interprets flower as “the crucial part of a phenomenon,” it is equally plausible to take it as its opposite; that is, “something beautiful and glamorous but inessential.” Fedorenko adopted this metaphor to show “willful disregard for advertising’s commercial dimension” (7). However, I take it to mean the *extraordinariness* of “unlikely advertising,” or an advertisement that does not look like one (29). From a foreigner’s point of view, this brand of advertising might appear different and surprising. Indeed, that was my supervisor’s reaction to the aforementioned Hyundai ad. While receiving all the praise and celebration, however, this kind of advertising remains a small minority in Korea, a small island in the sea of banal hard sell. Perhaps banality is the real face of advertising.

Throughout the book, Fedorenko seeks answers to her question, “where did Korean advertising’s orientation to public interest come from and how does it work?” Fedorenko’s approach looks very sound and robust. Her “multi-sited ethnography of advertising-related practices” proves to be extremely effective. There is a fine balance between ethnography, text analysis, and discourse analysis. With this approach, she is able to show that the process of advertising is relational, and its publicness a complex and contingent outcome of various actors’ aggregate action. It looks much more accomplished and complete compared to my similarly minded previous attempt.¹ I am also deeply impressed by her

ethnographic work. In particular, her detailed description of what happens in the review board is very interesting and informative. It shows how censorship works in a chaotic, haphazard fashion, a far cry from the popular image of the rigid, monolithic bureaucracy.

Flower of Capitalism is without doubt a major contribution to the study of Korean advertising. There has been a dearth of academic books on Korean advertising, and more so when it comes to English-language publications. There is little to criticize in the book, showing the long and meticulous process of its preparation and production. However, there are a few things I would still like to point out. Firstly, there are some inaccurate or dubious claims. For example, associating humanist ads with *hongik ingan* (devotion to the welfare of humankind, the founding idea of the ancient kingdom Gojoseon) (30) seems a stretch. *Hongik ingan* is a political idea different from humanist ads' brand of heart-warming, feel-good humanism. It should also be pointed out that Dong-A Ilbo has never belonged to Dong-A Group. They are two different conglomerates (51). Compared to other works on Korea written by foreign authors, however, the error count in this book is thankfully low.

Secondly, I am not sure about the book's strategy of focusing on some celebrity creatives when discussing advertising practitioners. Advertising is always a collective work, which cannot be credited to one person. It is common practice among advertising practitioners not to say that such and such ads are his or hers, but rather that he or she took part in such and such ads. Quite often, celebrity creatives are all but a surface image that does not reflect the realities of the occupation of advertising. Thirdly, Fedorenko seems to base her argument on the dichotomy of creative advertising of the West versus the humanist advertising of Korea, which is heavily influenced by Japanese advertising, seemingly for the sake of clarity of argument. This dichotomy appears rather simplistic, since there is a lot of "humanist advertising" in the West including Dove's famous *Real Beauty* campaign launched in 2004. On the other hand, there is a strong aspiration for creative advertising and international recognition among some advertising practitioners and advertisers alike.²

All these criticisms are, however, nitpicking in the end. This is a great achievement and a lesson in how to perform academic research. Academics and students will all learn a few things from this book, albeit in different ways. I hope it inspires new studies in Korean advertising and look forward to

1. Kee Woong Lee, "Practicing Globalization: Mediation of the Creative in South Korean Advertising," PhD diss. (London School of Economics, 2013).

2. Lee, "Practicing Globalization."

Fedorenko's next work.

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Understanding Korean Webtoon Culture: Transmedia Storytelling, Digital Platforms, and Genres by Dal Yong Jin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022. 252 pp.

As the first monograph on South Korean (hereafter Korean) webtoons, Dal Yong Jin's new book, *Understanding Korean Webtoon Culture: Transmedia Storytelling, Digital Platforms, and Genres*, examines webtoons as a pivotal cultural product poised to shape the next generation of *hallyu*. Webtoons represent a novel youth culture that has evolved through integration of digital media, originating from print comics (*manhwa*). Distinguished from their printed counterparts, webtoons captivate audiences with their distinctive vertical format, vibrant color palettes, purposeful spacious layouts, and imaginative incorporation of sounds and visual effects. This book delves deep into "a critical understanding of webtoons as a transnational media phenomenon" (8), shedding light on their technological development, the political, economic, and sociocultural factors that underpin their significance, platformization, and their emergence as a transnational, transmedia storytelling phenomenon.

In its exploration of the evolution of webtoons, *Understanding Korean Webtoon Culture* divides their history into four chronological eras, effectively charting their development. The inception of webtoons can be traced back to the late 1990s, when they rapidly emerged as a prominent facet of youth culture. During the first generation, webtoons owed their growth to advancements in the internet and the establishment of websites. Transitioning into the early 2000s, major internet portals, such as Daum and Naver, began to offer their own dedicated webtoon pages. These platforms, during the second era, fostered distinct attributes that set webtoons apart from traditional *manhwa*. The third era was ushered in by the advent of mobile phone technology and government-driven investment, resulting in an expansive diversification of genres and themes with richer and more elaborate storylines. Consequently, webtoons evolved into primary source material for big-screen adaptations. In the most recent era, spanning from the mid- to late-2010s, webtoons entered a phase of convergence