

Rite of Death as a Popular Commodity:

Neo Liberalism, Media, and New Korean Funeral Culture

Introduction

In the winter 2005 I was in Seoul, Korea, doing fieldwork for my dissertation. I was looking curiously at a new trend of Korean funeral culture, cyber memorial zones. In the cyber memorial zones, people memorialize their late loved ones by writing memorial letters and posting photos or movies on the web. Those who are familiar with web technologies can also set up cyber altars for remembering the deceased, making visits available anywhere and anytime. Doing fieldwork with the funeral industry professionals in Korea allowed me to look into the construction of the relation, in which different kinds of external dynamics in the new funeral culture affect the internal dynamics of cyber memorial zones. Here the external dynamics refer to the commercializing trends of the funeral culture.

In the fieldwork, I could observe that the Korean funeral culture, which has been under the strong influence of the tradition of Confucianism and therefore has remained little changed despite the wave of modernization and industrialization, was experiencing a great change. Small-scale mortuaries have dissipated while large, commercialized funeral parlors, mostly run by large hospitals, have emerged. At first, hospitals subcontracted services to funeral parlors that resided within the hospital, but now most hospitals operate the parlors directly. Independent funeral parlors have also flourished with the changes of government policy.

During the last decade, the cremation rate has also sharply increased along with the number of the large-sized columbaria. A government-driven funeral policy sought to promote cremation to resolve the shortage of burial grounds. During fieldwork, I visited The Korea

Funeral Culture Expo sponsored by the Korea Stone Industry Cooperative. The family vault was heavily promoted by the stone companies; more than half of the pavilion was used to promote private columbaria made of stones. The stone industry appears to be the chief beneficiary of this emerging funeral culture. The funeral professionals interviewed were concerned by the proliferation of stone vaults because while graves become eroded by weather exposure within a few decades, stone vaults last nearly forever. For this reason, stone vaults may create an environmental problem while encroaching on the country.

Among these trends, cyber memorial zones are considered the commercial vanguard to attract the attention of the mourners. While the dynamics of shamanic inheritance were important factors in understanding individual or socio-political oriented cyber memorial zones, cyber memorial zones seem to be no more than a promotional means to the funeral industry. I found that cyber memorial zones were developed in order to appease the mourner's empty heart with cremating their loved ones. In other words, cremating a body leaves only a handful of ashes to the bereaved while a grave becomes the tangible connection between the bereaved and the deceased. For this reason, the bereaved could have a greater sense of loss in cremation than in ground burial. In this sense, memorial letters or media files of the deceased in cyber memorial zones could be a good way to ease this sense of loss. Thus, cyber memorial zones are not only byproducts of the IT industry and the new funeral culture but also of government funeral policy. While exploring the contexts of the new Korean funeral culture- commercialized funeral parlors run by hospitals, drastic hike of cremation rate, and cyber memorial zones, in this paper I will look into how traditional rite of death has changed as a popular commodity in the neo-liberal turn in Korea.

New Korean Funeral Culture in the Neo-liberal Paradigm

On Nov. 3, 2005, the headline in the Korean news spoke of the dispute between the Korean government and the Philadelphia International Medicine (PIM), one of the bidders of the international hospital project in Korea:

The Free Economic Zone (FEZ) Planning Office has designated New York-Presbyterian Hospital (NYP) as the preferred bidder to be a foreign partner in setting up and operating an international hospital in Songdo International City. However, NYP's rival bidder, the Philadelphia International Medicine (PIM), strongly appealed against the FEZ Planning Office's decision, threatening to take the matter to the court... The MOFE [The Ministry of Finance and Economy], which earlier in the day said NYP was selected over PIM for the Songdo project, denied PIM's assertion, saying that the assessment committee consisted of 10 officials from both government and private professionals. It said NYP won by winning six votes. Songdo is part of Incheon, west of Seoul, which is home to one of Korea's FEZs (S.J. Kim, 2005).

The Free Economic Zone (FEZ) indicates the establishment of the new liberal paradigm in Korea. As a part of the project called "Northeast Asian Business Hub," the Korean government appointed three regions including Incheon, Busan, Jinhae, and Gwangyangman as the FEZs. In 2002, the Korean National Assembly enacted a law so that foreign firms in the FEZs could have "various incentives and benefits" (B. G. Park, 2005, p. 856). Needless to say, FEZs are the consequence of the economic crisis in 1997 and the government policy to recover the collapsed economy in a way to count on the new liberal paradigm. Pointing out FEZs as the main trait in the neo-liberal paradigm in Korea, B.G. Park argues that FEZs were designed as a mode of "spatially selective liberalization" so that the government could get around the criticism from the opposition to the neo-liberal paradigm (p. 870).

Although the government intended to minimize the impact of neo liberalization, the effect of the paradigm shakes the Korean socio-economic basis beyond the boundary of the FEZs because public education and medical sectors are included in the plan. In this sense,

whoever wins the dispute will be the vanguard in the liberalization of the medical sector in Korea. Opponents of neo-liberalism argue that medical service centers have traditionally been considered as the place for public benefits” and not “for profits” (Choi & Yoon, 2002). The current regulation reflects these views. However, Choi & Yoon indicate that the establishment of a foreign medical center in the FEZs is a sign of liberalizing medical sectors and that neo-liberalization will exploit the tendency of the richer to be healthier than the poor.

Funeral Parlors at Medical Centers

Then how is the neo-liberalization of the medical sector relevant to the emergence of the new funeral culture? Most Korean medical centers currently run or subcontract funeral parlors simultaneously, which means that hospitals or medical centers have become the main places for funeral ceremonies. When hospital patients fail to survive, their bodies are sent to mortuaries that belong to the funeral parlors run by these hospitals. Even when someone dies at home, the body is usually moved into a funeral home located in a hospital. In this context, if medical centers, which were regarded to exist for public benefits, turn toward profits under the direct influence of the neo-liberal paradigm, then the commercialization of the funeral parlors in these medical centers will be accelerated undoubtedly.

Additionally, when commercial specialists become the subject of the funeral process, the bereaved become alienated. The specialists and the bereaved have a commercially-oriented relationship. Song (2003) points out that funeral parlors at medical centers attempt to simplify the funeral ceremony; however, they preserve the part of *yomsup* and *ipkwan*, which refers to “dressing and placing the dead body in a coffin” (Lee, H. S., 1996, p. 53). As in the case of the viewing ceremony in the commercialized funeral of America, the funeral parlors at medical centers make the most of *yomsup* and *ipkwan* for their profits while preserving the

traditional funeral ceremony (Song, p. 309). Korea has not fully opened its medical sector yet, but the current trends allow us to predict the commercialization of Korean funeral culture.

Before the 1980s, according to H.S. Lee (1996), people considered dying away from home as a so-called “bad death” (Bradbury, 1999) that should be avoided. For this reason, mortuaries in medical centers were mostly used for handling cases of “accidental deaths, deaths at hospitals, and deaths on the road” (Lee, H. S., p. 55). However, the trend of running funeral parlors by medical centers, whether directly or indirectly, has proliferated since the mid-1980s (Lee, H. S., p. 55) when the process of state-driven industrialization came to a climax. Industrialization changed the traditional Korean family structure from extended to nuclear families; therefore, when a death occurred, the traditional, communal way of help for the funeral process could not be expected. Furthermore, urbanization forced people to adapt themselves to small, high-density housing, which entails the “restriction of spatiality” (Song, 2003, p.299) for performing funerals. As a result, funeral specialists replaced the work of the community, and dying at the hospital was now regarded as convenient and hygienic.

In 1982, the Korean government made it mandatory that medical centers with more than 100 patients should establish mortuaries within the center (Song, p. 302). According to Song, funerals for those who died in medical centers were frequently held in these mortuaries, although this was illegal at the time. In 1993, based on the revision of the “Standing Rule of Family Ritual,” enacted under the rein of the former president Park Jung Hee, mortuaries could legally provide funeral ceremonies. Song argues that active government interventions and the cooperation with the hospital industry enabled the proliferation of funeral parlors run by medical centers. These changes demanded more educated funeral professionals, such as morticians and funeral directors, prompting some colleges to establish departments of

mortuary sciences. The funeral professionals that I interviewed were graduates from these colleges.

Most of the professionals showed positive attitudes to industrialization of the funeral culture and the opening of the medical and funeral sector to foreign investments. They pointed out that in the past the funeral culture operated in an unsanitary environment; now the industry is competitive and the quality of service is very high. Another funeral professional, Jung-tae, testified to his attempts to market service as a managing director in a provincial funeral parlor. In the region where his company is located, the average number of deaths in a month is between 60 and 70. One day, he learned that another funeral parlor was planning to open in the same town. His company invested money to make his parlor more luxurious, purchasing a Cadillac hearse. This marketing strategy proved effective, and the new parlor did not open. Jung-tae's experience reflects the market-driven and commercialization environment of the new Korean funeral culture.

A drastic increase in cremation

A drastic increase in cremation is another characteristic of the new Korean funeral culture. In the 1980s, the cremation rate was less than 15%, which shows only a 10% increase in the last three decades (Song, 2003, p. 294). It seems that industrialization did not influence the change of ground burial culture or the traditional way of disposing of bodies. However, since the late 1990s, the rate of cremation has showed a sharp increase: almost half of the deceased across the country were cremated in 2003 (Song, p. 294). In large cities such as Seoul or Busan, the cremation rate in the same year was more than 60%, which is much higher than in rural areas.

Furthermore, nearly 70% of people now prefer cremation to ground burials (Hankyoreh, 2004). The ostensible reason for this sudden change can be attributed to a shortage of burial space, which would make it difficult to consign a body to the grave in the near future. The habitual inclination of hygiene discourse can be ascribed as one of main reasons behind the increase in cremation. The modern habitus of hygiene and sanitization encouraged Koreans to stay away from the traditional funeral culture and adapt themselves to a simplified and practical way (Lee, H. S., 1996, p.54). From this practical consideration, Koreans presently do not have as many meaningful connections to the traditional funeral process (including ground burials) than they did in the past. That is, “emotional and rational distinctions between burial and cremation” have become obscured (Lee, H. S., p. 54), thus the preference for cremation has increased.

In this context, the traditional shamanic view on the body, which was an important medium to maintain balance and harmony between this world and the other world, does not attract the attention of people in the present. Changing the funeral tradition of *imjong* reflects such a tendency. As a part of Korean funeral ceremony, *imjong* refers to “keeping watch with the dying person” (Lee, H. S., p. 53). In the traditional funeral culture, it was considered a filial duty that descendants and other family members perform *imjong* for the last moment of a dying person when death occurs. Although *imjong* is the ceremony that was influenced by the Confucian principle, it also echoes the shamanic view on the body. Performing *imjong* means caring for a body in the threshold of order and disorder, representing hope for a safe journey to the other world and the recovery of the broken balance caused by death.

H. S. Lee argues that in the current funeral culture *imjong* is now carried out by funeral parlors and therefore “all symbolic meaning has, of necessity, vanished” (p. 54).

Koreans' habitual inclination of hygiene and sanitization along with practical considerations can be ascribed to the disappearance of symbolic meaning. Considering that the loss of meaningful connections tends to treat a matter lightly, the disappearance of symbolic meaning entails making light of the meaning of the body. The government-driven funeral policy also becomes a catalyst for the increase of cremations (Song, 2003; K. D. Kim, 2003; S. Y. Chun, 2003).

In the 1990s, the Korean government attempted to fully revise its funeral policy, the root of which could be traced back to the Japanese Occupation. In the revision, the government eased policy on cremation and the establishment of charnel houses but made it difficult to consign the body to the ground. While the approval of the government is required for ground burials, cremation only needs to be reported. In the beginning, government attempts to implement this policy faced strong opposition, but the revised policy was finally enacted in 2001. Its main purpose was to utilize land efficiently. In particular, Korean graveyards encroachment on the land had become problematic. To alleviate this problem, the government employed a policy to encourage cremation and expand the establishment of public charnel houses as well as family vaults.

An interesting point in this process is the role of the media. Most media, print or electronic, reported the problem of burial and the benefits of cremation with one voice (Chun, 2003, p. 152). Whether progressive or conservative, the media supported the government-driven policy of cremation. The main subject of the reports was the problem of graveyards. The formation of cremation discourse gained power as time progressed. Such a media tendency faces criticism that the discourse on cremation preference prevented people from recognizing more fundamental problems of ground burial aside from the encroachment on

lands. Chun argues that the main problem in ground burials lies more in illegal graveyards that account for 70% of the total, graveyards for the unknown that comprise 40%, and luxurious graveyards for the prestigious. If these problems could be resolved, the burial system would not be a problem. K. D. Kim (2003) concurs that while the media condemned the graveyard problem, it remained silent to the problem of golf courses, which are more problematic in terms of encroachment of land space. Thus, media discourse functioned as an instrument of governing techniques, allowing people to form the cremation preference through media practice.

Cyber Memorial Zones

Cyber memorial zones, another characteristic of the new Korean funeral culture, began as an instrument of governing techniques. The successful cyber memorial zones of today were not what the government intended when they created these zones. According to the Seoul Metropolitan Facilities Management Corporation (SMFMC), Post Office in Heaven, one of the oldest cyber memorial writing zones, started with memorial books for the purpose of providing bereaved family members of those who had been cremated with comfort. SMFMC is a public corporation that is in charge of operating the public facility in Seoul, including various columbarium and cemeteries in the Seoul area, as well as managing the oldest cyber memorial zone in Korea. SMFMC started these memorial book services in order to promote cremation, and the blossoming cybercultures led to the popularity of the cyber memorial zone.

According to one government official, the attempt to computerize the outdated funeral management system motivated the creation of cyber memorial zones. In the process of computerizing the system, the government recognized that the power of computerization

not only could organize the outmoded internal system but could also be the most appropriate instrument to spread the formation of cremation preference discourse. The situation of computerization and the government-driven information policy present a commonality based on strong government interventions that intend to formulate the disposition of people by passing an order down from top to bottom.

The Post Office in Heaven, a memorial writing zone, was created by the government to increase the cremation rate. The main concept of memorial writing zones, which use cyberspace as a medium to communicate with late family members or friends, was adopted and developed as a different type of cyber memorial zone. In particular, the findings of this research show that cyber memorial zones become the commercial vanguard with immanent flow of capital to attract the attention of the mourners, which, looking from a Deleuzian perspective (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), provides space for constantly de- and reterritorializing commercial forces.

A funeral professional named Ki-sung told me that he utilized memorial writings as an “event” to promote a private cinerarium a few years ago. He said that before he joined the funeral industry, he was a wedding photographer and sometimes produced funeral ceremony videos. Ki-sung said that he realized when doing these videos that since the early 1990s, Korean funeral culture has changed into an event-driven culture. Under these circumstances, he added, writing memorial letters offered an important vehicle through which the company can generate revenue.

For the private cinerarium business, how to increase the numbers of charnel reservation is the key to the success of the business. When I suggested the event, I considered the usages of memorial writing zones as the potential source for promoting the company as well as generating profit. In other words, the main purpose of creating cyber memorial zones is to gain profit. The prospect and efficiency were considered at the same time.

The event of writing memorial letters became successful and many bereaved family members participated in the event particularly because until then, the idea of writing a memorial letter and posting it online was new, thereby attracting more attention from the bereaved. Ki-sung said that following his initial success many other private cineraria have sponsored similar events for other grieving family members. Ki-sung also confirmed that the cyber memorial zones does not exist in isolation from the commercially-driven category. Shown in Ki-sung's case, the de- and reterritorialization of commercial forces in cyber memorial zones reflects commercializing Korean funeral culture under the influence of the neo-liberal paradigm.

The neo-liberal paradigm in Korea emerged on a full scale to deal with the economic crisis in 1997; the implementation of the neo-liberal policy was the obligatory for IMF loan package (Hundt, 2005, p. 249). The neo-liberal paradigm is a set of political economic policy that underlies the “ ‘self-limiting’ state, unregulated investment capital and the ‘free-trading’ open global economy” (Peters, 2001, pp. 207-208). In this description, Peters stresses the relationship between capital flow and globalization, regarding the neo-liberal paradigm as the promotional source of globalization. Because the frequency of the capital flow in the neo-liberal paradigm increases, a state as territory has less effect. Deleuze and Guattari's view (1983) on capitalism as the process of deterritorialization uphold Peter's claim.

Exploring New Funeral Culture: Tow Perspectives

A Deleuzian Perspective

Deleuze and Guattari insist that the main characteristic of capitalism is “[t]he decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius” (1983, p. 34). Its power of deterritorialization “consists in taking as its object, not the earth, but ‘materialized labor,’ the

commodity.” (1987, p. 454). With the power of deterritorialization, capital as “convertible abstract rights” (p. 454) constantly flows beyond social realms such as nation-state, institution, neighborhood, and so on. The claim of “[t]he neo-liberal paradigm as globalization” (Peters, 2001, p. 208) appears reasonable. With the deterritorializing power of capitalism, neo-liberalism can be seen as “one of the most pervasive, if not, dangerous ideologies of the 21st century” (Giroux, 2004, #para 1). Giroux argues:

In its capacity to dehistoricize and depoliticize society, as well as in its aggressive attempts to destroy all of the public spheres necessary for the defense of a genuine democracy, neoliberalism reproduces the conditions for unleashing the most brutalizing forces of capitalism (2004, para. #5).

Giroux’s argument suggests important points for understanding the commercialization trend in the Korean funeral culture. Giroux calls attention to the capacity of the capital to dehistoricize society. The deterritorializing power allows capital flow to move beyond the territorial boundary of a state as well as to permeate the perceptual boundaries of human existence: life and death.

While capital flows beyond social realms with the power of deterritorialization, capitalism also has a tendency to restore the territorialized social realms in order to facilitate the flows of capital. Considering the contradictory characteristics of capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) states:

[T]hrough its process of production, [capitalism] produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear, but which nonetheless continues to act as capitalism’s limit Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantity (p. 34).

The deterritorializing power of capitalism allows the flow of capital to penetrate into all possible realms, but capitalism also inclines to restore all the territories, not exactly the same

as the originals. While capitalism needs the process of deterritorialization to enhance capital flow, paradoxically capitalism calls for the process of reterritorialization to reestablish territories that can smooth the flow of capital.

However, the process of reterritorialization does not aim to tighten the control of the state because excessive state power cannot make the flow of capital efficient. In capitalism, the schizophrenic processes of de- and reterritorializing social realms occur for the same purpose of maximizing the flow of capital. As deterritorialization of social realms takes place to assure the flow of capital, the process of reterritorialization moves toward increasing profit. These two territorializing processes are contradictory, but they share the same destination. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) sustain this point:

The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value. (pp. 34-35).

The commercialization trend in Korean funeral culture in the neo-liberal paradigm has the schizophrenic traits of capitalism. Deterritorializing capital flow takes apart the meaning of the rite of death to change it into a commodity. In contrast, government funeral policy reterritorializes the realm of the funeral culture. Such schizophrenic traits of capitalism embedded in the Korean new funeral culture calls closer attention to Foucault's notion of governmentality.

Culture as Governmentality

Governmentality, referring to the "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 19), is also the result of contemplating the role of schizophrenic and immanent flow of capital in the technologies of domination. While

articulating the art of government in the modern states, Foucault also addresses the concept of economy in maintaining continuity between the rulers and the ruled (2000, pp. 206-207). Since economy for Foucault suggests the flows of capital within a state, the governing techniques in modern states center on how to control “the sort of complex composed of men and things” (p. 208) constructed through the flow of capital. The term “things” includes “means of subsistence,” “ways of acting and thinking,” and “accidents and misfortunes” (Foucault, p. 209). By “complex”, Foucault insinuates that the abstract and immanent but constant flow of capital functions as the technology of domination and influences the relations between men and things.

This explains why Bennett (1992) proposes that culture is governmentality. Bennett insists that culture as governmentality provides the “means of a governmental intervention in and regulation of culture” (p. 26). The object of government such as “morals, manners, codes of conduct, etc.” becomes the domain of controlling culture (p. 26). Bennett’s view of culture as governmentality is pertinent for understanding the proliferation of funeral parlors at medical centers in Korea and the government intervention in this process. Above all, discourse on hygiene and sanitation formulated since the colonial modernity consolidated the technique of “noso-politics” (Foucault, 1980), becoming a means of regulating culture. The noso-politics expanded its influence because the discourse of hygiene created a culture where the universe is ordered through “selective perception and labeling” (Bradbury, 1999, p. 119). In this cultural discourse, living is considered to be an order; death a disorder. Moreover, the decomposition of the body causes pollution, which become a threat to living as an order (Bradbury, pp.119-120). In this clear-cut division, the discourse of hygiene becomes “a regime of health for a population” (Foucault, 1980, p. 175). The formulated discourse of

hygiene was taken for granted, thereby facilitating government and the hospital industry to establish funeral parlors at medical centers.

As governmentality, culture is equated with “a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual” (Williams, 1983, p. xvi). From Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective, culture as a way of life becomes an immanent realm where de- and reterritorializing social realms constantly occurs, enhancing the flow of capital. With culture as governmentality, the technologies of domination are internally exercised on the relations of men and things, where technologies of the self are constructed corresponding to the application of technologies of domination. Tension is always on in the threshold between the technologies of domination and those of the self.

Such technologies of dominance are associated with the process of de- and reterritorialization in capitalism. Technologies of domination are operated on the relations between men and things, under which the flow of capital continues. From this power structure, it can be deemed that technologies of domination are closely interconnected with the flow of capital, both of which exercise immanent power on the relation between men and things. The exercise of power becomes immanent and rarely perceivable because capital is “convertible abstract rights” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.454) and the flow of capital in the territorializing process is rarely recognizable.

When the flows of capital de- or reterritorialize social realms, technologies of domination use the immanent power in de-or reterritorializing the complex constructed between men and things. Thus, as capitalism progresses to the abstract and immanent, so do governmental techniques. Culture as governmentality becomes less discernible in the neo-liberal paradigm, where the flow of capital is extremely profit-oriented. It becomes an

attractive technique of governing because the flow of capital maximizes the creation of profits; the flow of capital is increased without losing the efficiency of governing power. The commercialization trend in the Korean funeral culture can be considered in this context.

Rite of Death as a Popular Commodity

Before the neo-liberal paradigm emerged in Korea on a full scale, the rite of death was not considered as an object of commodity. The rite of death was mainly provided as a space for contemplating the meaning of life. However, in the neo-liberal paradigm where the deterritorializing power of capital reaches the peak, even the rite of death became a commodity. What happened in the funeral industry of America more than a hundred years ago is now happening in Korea. The funeral industry in America, under the influence of the deterritorializing power of capital in the late nineteenth century, established the modern shape of the industry (Mitford, 1963). In contrast, it was not until the late twentieth century that the funeral industry began to take shape in Korea. Korean funeral culture has become rapidly commercialized in the last decade, and the funeral industry has demonstrated the power of capital in deterritorializing the meaning of the rite of death.

Although the neo-liberal paradigm is characteristic of maximizing the frequency of the flow of capital, it carries little conviction that the paradigm deterritorialized the inherent meaning of the rite of death and reterritorialized it with commercialized values in such a short period. Then how did the socio-political and economic environment become so susceptible to the deterritorializing power of capital? The various technologies of domination in Korean modernity suggest a direction for exploring this question. Korean modernity took its form under Japanese Occupation, whose technologies of domination were internally exercised on the Korean people. The unique trait of the technologies in the colonial power was to use the

Korean funeral culture as a tool for consolidating colonial control. By implementing the policy of cremation, the colonial power attempted to have Koreans construct their technologies of the self detached from their funeral tradition, which had been built on shamanism, the indigenous Korean belief system. Colonial governmentality oppressed shamanism in the way that technologies of colonial dominance were exercised on Koreans and their funeral culture.

Even after the Japan Occupation ended, colonial governmentality lasted through post-colonial modernity. The policies and regulations of the colonial modernity influenced those of the ruling powers in the post-colonial modernity. Subsequently, technologies of post-colonial domination operated on the relations between people and the funeral culture. An example is “The Standing Rule of Family Ritual,” implemented by Park Jung Hee’s military regime. The Rule was intended to regulate conduct in the funeral and wedding cultures; this was a typical technology of domination used to infuse the legitimacy of the illegitimate regime.

Korean postcolonial modernity was established under the influence of American modernity. Americanized modernity was burned on the body of Koreans during the Japanese Occupation and has exercised its influence with the continuation of Cold War ideology (Yoo, 2001); therefore, the deterritorializing power of capitalism was positively engrained on the body of Korean society. Illegitimate military regimes have continually stirred people’s propensity of capitalism in the name of democracy. Technologies of the Korean self were constructed to identify democracy with American modernity and capitalism. Because of these situations, the Korean social body changed to the extent that many Koreans became pervious to the deterritorializing power of the neo-liberal paradigm. Korean society became vulnerable

to the deterritorializing power of capital, and it is not surprising to see that the current funeral culture is under the influence of the capital power.

During the last decade, Koreans have achieved the democratization of a nation free from the control of military regimes that was the immediate problem they faced in post-colonial modernity. The status of the marginalized populace improved, and their dynamics erupted in the numerous ways. Nevertheless, commercializing trends in many social realms were aggravated, and the funeral culture was no exception. Even the Korean government, elected by the people, increased deterritorializing capital power with commercializing trends, particularly since the economic crisis in 1997. Although some social elites attempted to problematize the policy of the government, their power seemed feeble compared to the degree of propensity of capitalism engrained on the Korean social body. Now the deterritorializing power of the neo-liberal paradigm shapes the new social structure to the extent that even the medical sector, once considered as the public social division, is giving way to the deterritorializing power of capital. Funeral parlors, many of which are under the contract with or owned by medical centers (a unique cultural phenomena in Korea) are also yielding to the deterritorializing power of capital. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) point out, the flow of capital wields power in dismantling intrinsic values of these social realms. The extensive campaign to promote cremation, driven by the Korean government in the late of 1990s, demonstrates the combination of the deterritorializing capital power and culture as governmentality.

An example of this campaign was the Korean National Council for Cremation Promotion (KNCCP) that began in 1998. In its prospectus, KNCCP “seeks to establish the appropriate funeral culture to correspond to the changing circumstances by spreading

cremation culture as the most efficient option to resolve land shortage for graveyard caused by the ground burial tradition” (Korean National Council for Cremation Promotion, n. d.). The prospectus of KNCCP indicates that the efficiency of land usage was the slogan of the campaign. Along with promoting cremation, the campaign focused on the spreading of public and private columbaria and family vaults. This campaign reached its peak when The Law for Funeral Culture was implemented in 1999 to replace The Standing Rule of Family Ritual.

The Law for Funeral Culture suggests more practical approaches to the changing environment of the funeral culture, such as the urgency of land shortage for graveyards and commercialization trends. This law also confirmed that the Korean government had changed its preference from ground burial to cremation oriented. The consideration in policy as shown in this law stirred up the proliferation of public and private columbaria. Commercially-driven cyber memorial zones are considered in this context. Field interviews with funeral professionals found that most of the commercially-driven cyber memorial zones were established by columbarium companies to increase the deterritorializing power of capital.

This confirms the characteristics of reterritorialization in capitalism in the new funeral policy of Korean government. While the power of capital flows deterritorialized the realm of funeral culture and transferred the meaning of rite of death into commercial products, government policy such as the Law for Funeral Culture and the government apparatus (i.e. KNCCP) reterritorialize the relationship between people and the funeral culture. Private and public columbaria, the family vault business, and the stone industry are main parts of the reterritorializing process, through which the flow of capital is made smoother.

The columbarium-related industry had been in a prosperous condition for the past five years due to the advantage from government policy. However, this prosperity did not last

long. Too many commercial columbaria led the industry into a recession. Government policy now promotes scattering, and the columbaria industry has reacted against this policy. Funeral professionals insist that the consideration in policy was temporarily given to the columbarium industry. In other words, scattering is the mode of the body disposal for which the government had initially intended. However, the columbarium model was provisionally adopted to buffer the cultural shock that the change from ground burial to scattering might cause. Chul-min, a sales person working in a columbarium, elaborated on this:

Koreans tend to have something tangible for the worship of forbears. In ground burials, graves were regarded as the space where the relationship between ancestors and descendents were constructed and preserved. But cremation leaves nothing except a handful of ashes. The government needed something tangible in introducing the scattering model so that people could accept the new model without resistance. In that sense, columbaria were deemed to play an intermediate role of something tangible.

Chul-min's description testifies that much of the Korean new funeral culture is the result of the exercise of technologies of government domination. The government used the columbaria as buffering zones to transform from a grave to scattering culture. The revised funeral policy announced on April 5, 2006 (Hwang, 2006) confirms Chul-min's account. In the announcement, the government promotes scattering as a method of body disposal. Although several Koreans had already used scattering, they had difficulties because no regulation has supported this method. The revised policy also restricts the size of family vaults and claims that the government preference has changed toward scattering.

When this social trend toward cremation and scattering is considered from the view of culture as governmentality, it can be interpreted in two ways. From the view of technologies of the self, this preference reflects the degree of resistance against conventional social norms. Cremation and scattering represent technologies of self that are empowered in a persistent

attempt to deviate from the control of power. As Aries (1974) suggests, cremation is a method that completely eradicates the connection between past and present. Compared to disposal through ground burials, cremation and scattering are easier ways for the bereaved to stay away from the deceased. From the view of technologies of domination, government policy represents the deterritorializing power of capital that can decode the social meaning of death, transforming it into a commodity. In the Korean funeral culture as a field of immanence, the process of de- and reterritorialization continually occurs. Capital flow dismantles the meaning of the rite of death to change it into a commodity. Government policy reterritorializes the realm of the funeral culture. The Korean funeral culture as a field of immanence discloses the tension lying between technologies of the Korean self and technologies of the government's dominance.

In cyber memorial zones, from the view of technologies of government power, deterritorializing power of capital flow and flux inside and outside of cyberspace and in the rite of death is reterritorialized as commercially metamorphosed ritual. The revised regulation of the funeral culture, based on a government preference for cremation and scattering, reterritorializes various commercializing trends.

Interpretation

The new Korean funeral culture is under the influence of the neo-liberal paradigm, where the deterritorializing power of capital reaches its peak to cause a decline in standard of living, polarizing the haves and have-nots. Considering that the rite of death constitutes the foundation of a nation's culture, commercialization of the funeral culture means the subordination of the cultural foundation to the deterritorializing power of capital flows.

Along with the commercialization of the medical sector, this can be a serious problem in the near future.

The findings of this research showed that cyber mourners were insensitive to the commercializing trend of the funeral culture. There are several possibilities for this result. Discourse on cremation and scattering is formed widely through the media; under these circumstances, commercialization trends in cyber memorial zones would not have difficulty in attracting the attentions of cyber mourners. Koreans also seem to display tolerance for government policies that enhance the capital flows in the neo-liberal paradigm. The tendency to identify political democracy with the success of capitalism and American modernity, which has been built on the process of Korean post colonial modernity, makes Koreans less aware of the process of turning the rite of death into a commodity. Technologies of government domination function well in reterritorializing the dismantled social realms while reducing aftermaths of the deterritorializing process.

Most funeral professionals who were interviewed considered opening the medical service industry to the foreign market as unavoidable but felt that it would help the industrializing process of the funeral service industry. They opposed the view that commercializing trends of the funeral service industry would harm the inherent values of traditional funeral culture believing that the involvement of large enterprises would advance the industry. In terms of globalization, some of the funeral specialists insisted that viewing and embalming, which represent American funeral culture, should be adopted in consideration of the globalization trend. It will not take long for many Koreans to adopt viewing and embalming as advanced funeral cultures.

This research also found that the wave of tension between technologies of governmental dominance based on the neo-liberal paradigm and technologies of the Korean self is not noticeably rising in cyber memorial zones. Koreans are not yet aware of reterritorialized technologies of government dominance exercised on the funeral culture to enhance the deterritorializing power of capital flow. The deterritorializing power of capital is so vigorous yet insinuating that the commercialization of the rite of death, which forms the foundation of Korean culture, does not trigger an awareness from the people. Technologies of government power certainly contribute to this cultural phenomenon. American modernity, deeply inscribed on the Korean social body, should also be considered.

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