

# ASSUMING MANHOOD: PROSTITUTION AND PATRIOTIC PASSIONS IN KOREA<sup>1</sup> *Cheng Sea-ling*

**"Korean Men! Rise! Korean Men! Rise!"**

The Korean beverage market is saturated with male tonics. A 1999 TV commercial of one such tonic<sup>2</sup> featured a gigantic bottle of the drink making a thunderous landing onto the city, upon which toppled buildings become erected, together with throngs of Korean office men's arms raised to the sky, cheering in unison to the male voice-over, "Korean Men! Rise! Korean Men! Rise!" The theme of rise from ruins in national and commercial propaganda has been prominent following the "IMF crisis," a local interpretation of the Asian economic crisis and its effects on Korea. Together with the slogan "Glory and Might" (*wip'ungdangdang*) in its print-ads and a poster featuring a naked athletic male body, the advertising campaign offers the promise not only of male virility but also reinvigoration of national honour through the revitalization of the male body.

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1. "Korea" refers to South Korea or the Republic of Korea throughout this paper unless otherwise specified.
  2. The drink, "Tongchunghacho," is named after the ingredient—a species of fungus that grows on the remnants of silkworm pupa. The advertisement campaign is

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In spite of this popular concern with male prowess, dominant discourses are highly repressive and moralizing towards sex. In the public arena, forms of sex deviating from the moral ideal of marital sex is readily controlled and suppressed.<sup>3</sup> Public discussion of sex in the late 1990s continues to focus largely on the sanctioning of sex within marriage.<sup>4</sup> However, statistics have shown that Korean men's use of prostitution is a prevalent phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> A series of reports assert that there are around one million women engaged in the Korean sex industry, amounting to as much as 20 percent of all women between the ages of 15-29.<sup>6</sup> My findings suggest that these contradictions have to be understood in terms of three powerful but conflicting discourses

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clearly a "masculinization of power" (Cornwall and Lindasfame 1994: 21) on the one hand by associating the drink with powerful figures in China to demonstrate its potency—among them are Deng Xiao-ping (the ex-president of the People's Republic of China), the "Ma Army" (the team of record-breaking marathon athletes under the coach surnamed Ma), Mao Ze-dong, and Emperor Chin (the first ruler to unify China). On the other hand, it reaffirms Korean consumer nationalism (Nelson 1997)—it is emphasised that the product has been made from Tongchunghacho developed by the National Agricultural Science & Technology Institute at the Rural Development Administration. In other words, it is advertised as a product that combines the wisdom of Chinese civilization and the technological and natural resources of the Korean nation.

3. Stanley Kubrick's film "Eyes Wide Shut" as well as a local film "Lies" were both banned because of the possible bad effects to public morals—the former with its exposure of pubic hair and the latter with the sexually active heroine dressed in a school uniform, according to the censorship committee. Yet double standards for men and women on censorship can be observed in another controversy: two recent autobiographical publications on personal sexual experiences by a male cultural critic and a female actress received very different public and official evaluation. The former was received with relative public calm and could be purchased freely while the latter stirred up a heated public controversy and could only be purchased by adult readers over the counter following a government ban.
4. Ku Song-ae, a nurse-turned-sex educator, has been immensely popular with her lively and bold discussions of sex in the mass media since 1998. Her talks are targeted at teenagers and deal with issues such as sexual desires, relationship between masturbation, love and sex etc., but she also has a large adult following. She has coined the term "Our Beautiful Sex," which gives a positive meaning to a previously tabooed subject. However, discouraging the "irresponsible" pursuit of "passions," she reinforces the legitimacy of marital sex as legitimate and "beautiful."

on sexuality and masculinity in Korea; namely, Confucian traditions and morality, the military culture, and Christianity. These three discourses, as diverse in origin and doctrine as they are, find common expression in the building of a Korean nation through the discipline of morally, physically, and spiritually superior individuals, and invariably inscribe individual bodies onto the grand national project.

### Research Background

Research on prostitutes' clients has been scanty in the social sciences. While prostitutes are studied as deviants and/or victims (Pateman 1988; Barry 1981; Dworkin 1989), clients are often missing in the picture or assumed as a kind of "non-person" (Hart 1998). The reluctance to identify clients as a subject of research perpetuates certain assumptions about the essential nature of prostitutes' clients, reinforcing the idea of a "natural"

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5. Chang & Cho (1991) studied 366 men aged between 20-40: 87 percent of Korean men have premarital sex and 50 percent have had their first sexual experience with prostitutes; 64 percent of married men have had extramarital sex, and of these, 60 percent have prostitutes as partners. Choi et al. (1998) studied 1,212 "young soldiers" (age unspecified) and found that 68 percent were sexually experienced and 22 percent of them had their first sexual intercourse with prostitutes.
  6. There is no reliable statistics on the sex industry in Korea. The few surveys that have taken place are rough estimates reached by calculating the number of "entertainment establishments" (see section headed Sex Industry in Korea since the 1980s) and the number of staff at each place. All the establishments included in this study *potentially* facilitate commercial sex, but there is no certainty. In the same venue may be found women who do and those who do not provide sexual services. Yet all of them would be collectively considered as "fallen women" (*yullakyosong*), the legal term for prostitutes. The statistics are further undermined by the many sex workers who practise the trade outside these establishments. Such ambiguity thus leads to some apparently overblown figures for the number of sex workers in Korea: estimates between 650,000 (Korea Crime Policy Research Institute 1990) to 1,200,000 (YMCA 1988) have been reported by different agencies, amounting to as much as 20 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 29. A summary of a few of these reports can be found in the 1998 publication by the Korean Women's Development Institute.

male sex drive that has necessitated prostitution. It should be recognised that men's use of prostitution is as much shaped by social and cultural processes as prostitution as a trade, and deserves equal rigor in its examination.

Studies of prostitution that actually try to include an examination of clients' perspective have largely focused on Western men's use of prostitution as a compensation for feelings of inadequacy according to the dominant form of masculinity.<sup>7</sup> O'Connell Davidson (1998:165-8) found group patronage of prostitutes, which functions as the "ritual reinscriptions" of manhood, bizarre because of "the absence of personal sexual desire or erotic interest." Yet she fails to explore why prostitution has been identified as the site for such reinscription, and how the rituals work to enable the seemingly bizarre performance of something "personal and intimate" with total strangers.

Studies of men's sexual consumption in Asian cultures are chiefly limited to that of Japan and Thailand. An important revelation in Allison's (1994) study of salaried men's patronage of hostess clubs on company expenses is how male consumption of femininity and female sexuality may be an institutionalised practice. Fordham (1993, 1998) further illustrates how sex with prostitutes should be considered in the context of the entire male rite—the competitive drinking rites concluded with sex with prostitutes should be treated as "one homogenous male ritual dedicated to the constitution and public demonstration of masculine

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7. Høigård and Finstad (1986: 39) found that "habitual customers" in Oslo, Norway are people who are "on the outside"—"the more customer experiences a man has, the more different he is." These are men who "characteristically have difficulties holding down a job or managing their own finances, and they have a limited social network." O'Connell Davidson (1998), based on her research on Western clients in both England and sex tourism sites in the Caribbean and South-east Asia, ascribed the clients' sexual exploitation to the denial of care in dominant form of masculinity in Western society. O'Connell Davidson observes that clients are "typically men who are hugely ambivalent about entering into close and dependent relationships with non-prostitute women because they fear that, in so doing, they risk being infantilized, engulfed, out of control, open to rejection and humiliation" (161).

status and potency" (Fordham 1998: 98). My findings also show that male peer group rituals in Korea are essentially a *process* of giving legitimacy to the expression of desires and the constitution of a virile masculinity. The male ritual culminates in a collective transgression of the dominant moral code that further enhances the solidarity of the male group.

As Connell (1995) and Cornwall and Lindasfarne (1994) point out, hegemonic masculinity—the culturally exalted form of masculinity—is contextual and produces different subordinate variants. What is considered as "power" in one context may be seen as "impotence/powerlessness" in another (e.g., physical prowess extolled in the military unbecoming a Confucian gentleman). Individual men juggle with competing models across contexts in the constitution of their masculine identities, in relation to women, and to the "less powerful." The relational perspective in multiple identity construction suggested by Moore (1994) has informed my examination of discourses and behaviour of these Korean clients. Hart's (1998: 26) call for the need to look at clients "*as persons*, with lives within and beyond their identities as clients and sex workers respectively" prompted my investigation to attend to the contradictory roles and performances expected of the men, and their negotiation of these differences. I seek further to explore how global inequalities and processes of globalization play a role in the shaping of individual desires by examining the masculinisation of power in Korea, its expression in men's use of prostitution, and how virile male bodies are identified with the body politic (Cornwall and Lindasfarne 1994: 21)

### Methodology

Though the material used in this article mainly comes from interviews, it is also supplemented in important ways by my observations and discussions with Korean academics, activists, and friends (both foreign and local, men and women) during my fieldwork in Korea for a total of 26 months.

The interviews involved ten middle-class Korean men between the ages of 28-36.<sup>8</sup> This age group roughly corresponds to what is known as the "386" generation<sup>9</sup> in Korea—those who have gone through *as students* the tumultuous changes of democratization and internationalization in 1980s. This era witnessed incessant militant anti-government and anti-American protests as part of the *minjung* ("masses" or "common people") movement. The democratic struggle finally brought about the first presidential election in 1988 after almost three decades of military rule. The Seoul Olympics in 1988 was also the first diplomatic "coming-out party" (Cumings 1997: 332) for the miracle of Korea. The success of the Games gave an impressive start to Korea's participation in the international community and brought about a heightened sense of national pride. In the words of the then President Roh Tae Woo, "With the Seoul Olympics, we will arrive at the threshold of the developed world, the entry to which has been our long-standing national goal."<sup>10</sup>

These informants thus belong to the generation that experienced in their university years the euphoria of both democratization and Korea's entry onto the world stage. This age group has been selected largely because of accessibility owing to the researcher's social circle in hierarchized Korean society in which age is a chief organizing principle. In fact, conversations with people around this age have triggered my initial interest in the research.

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8. The specificity in terms of class and age contrasts with Elaine Kim's (1997) informants who came from a much wider spectrum in the late 1980s. Kim's analysis also sought to bring out class differences in Korea by contrasting the disdain for women held by wealthy businessmen with the more sympathetic attitude of lower class men.
  9. A term coined in the 1990s, with the three digits referring respectively to their age (30s), their year of entry into university (classes of the 80s), and their birth years (1960s).
  10. Roh Rae Woo (1990) *Korea: A Nation Transformed*, p. 41, Oxford: Pergamon quoted by Lee (2000: 172). The Games was the largest international sports event with 161 out of 167 members of the International Olympic committee taking part. Its success provided a powerful impetus for Korea to resume diplomatic ties with China, the Soviet Union, and other socialist countries.

Interviews were conducted through personal contacts between April 1998 and October 1999. All interviews with informants<sup>11</sup> were taped and transcribed. I found that beer<sup>12</sup> was essential as a social lubricant and instrumental in easing moral taboos on the subject. An interview usually took place at a beer house (for clientele of both sexes and without hostesses), and the talk would take place over beer and food for two to three hours. At the beginning of each interview, I explained that my interest in their experiences as clients emerged from the absence of relevant material in existing studies of prostitution. I further pointed out that most of these studies assumed clients to be simply "bad men," an assumption that I did not agree with and thus this research pursuit. This preamble was meant to express my sincerity in learning about their thoughts and experiences in relation to prostitution use, as well as my detachment from the moral condemnation commonly leveled at clients.

More importantly, I believe my identity as a Hong Kong Chinese and a woman has been important in making the interviews with Korean men possible. My marginal status as a foreigner has, as Kim (1997) observed, encouraged the Korean men to "teach" me about Korean culture and society, and to be "frank" about their personal lives, as they assumed that the stories would not reach any mutual acquaintances. When I assured informants of their anonymity, some of them commented that a publication overseas was too remote to be consequential to them. It was also a rare experience for them to have a chance to talk to a woman about their prostitution experiences, since talking to a Korean woman about these experiences risks being considered lewd. At the interview, most of the informants got

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11. Five of the ten Korean men (four regular clients and one non-client) from the same office constituted the largest group interview. I interviewed three of these five colleagues (including the non-client) for a second time six months later. Three other informants have been introduced by mediators and interviews with them took place in the company of the mediators. I met twice with two other informants who agreed to my request for interviews.
  12. Beyrer (1998: 18) noted the dramatic difference between discussing the issue of prostitution in northern Thailand as an academic issue and as a topic "over beers."



increasingly engaged as more stories, experiences, and details came into light. At a group interview with five men (four of whom visited red-light districts together regularly) from the same company, the informants enjoyed the discussion so much that Mr. Ma (30, engineer, married with one son) suggested that they should talk about these things more often. At the same interview, the informants soon became so engrossed in talking about issues of marriage, intimacy, and unspoken fears in relation to prostitution that my presence became hardly noticeable.

Owing to the gender specificity of the topic, direct participatory research in the male ritual has been minimal. The instance that came closest to participation was when I joined a male group for dining and drinking, and was invited to join them on a visit to a *tallanujom* with women hostesses. These instances came closest to participation in terms of my research methodology. Voluntary work for local organizations for sex workers have allowed me to talk to brothel-owners, pimps, as well as female sex workers. Research work with Filipina "entertainers" in GI clubs, whose clients include both Koreans and GIs<sup>13</sup> have also helped with my understanding and interpretation of the interviews.

### The Sex Industry in Korea since the 1980s<sup>14</sup>

The emergence of a large middle class with disposable income in the 1980s as a result of the Korean economic "miracle" led to unprecedented commodification and diversification of the sex industry. On par with the political climate of democratization and liberalization of 1980s, the sex industry proliferated to fill the gap between *kisaeng*<sup>15</sup> houses for Japanese tourists and local elites and street-level prostitution for the poor.

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13. Cheng (2000).

14. John Lie (1995) has examined in detail "the transformation of sexual work" in 20th century Korea and found that the "prism of prostitution unveils the nature of Korean society and its power structures" (323).

15. "*Kisaeng*" refers to women of lowborn class who served as entertainers at court and at provincial governments, a custom that began in the Koryo dynasty

The proliferation of commercial sex was part of the boom of the entertainment industry in the 1980s. Sexual services became easily accessible in a variety of new pleasure-seeking establishments: room salons, cabarets, nightclubs, bars, beer halls, coffee shops/tea houses, motels and hotels, saunas and bath-houses, barber shops, massage parlours, and tourist restaurants. In addition, sexual services outside these venues emerged catering for different groups of men: call-girls, highway prostitution for truck drivers, women taxi drivers who provided additional sexual services, etc. Just as male clients from different economic backgrounds have been drawn in by the market diversification, women from a variety of backgrounds—runaway teenagers, college students, movie stars, housewives, and “widows”—also found their way into the sex industry as service-providers. Some of them worked under abusive conditions and pressures of debt, but some worked as part-timers to obtain a supplementary income.

A sample of the stratified sex industry is as follows. At the high end, “room salons” that emerged in the 1980s emulated expensive Japanese hostess clubs catering to a continuous flow of corporate clients. As Lie (1995) found, “the basic set up was a series of private rooms where a group of 2 to 10 men were entertained by an equal number of young women” amongst whom are college students owing to the attractive income. Imported liquors are usually consumed with overpriced dishes as accompaniments, and a fixed tip has to be paid for each hostess. Sex with these hostesses requires additional payment. In the middle stratum, tea houses (*tabang*) enjoyed widespread popularity in both urban and rural areas (in particular near factories, railway stations, and military installations). The customers, usually from a motel, order by phone teas and coffees which will be delivered by a young woman. The visit normally lasts for 30-40 minutes and the women

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(McCarthy 1991) and became more institutionalized in Choson dynasty (1392-1910). They were educated in traditional arts, e.g., music, dance, and literature. In the 1970s, the South Korean government encouraged the establishment of *kisaeng* houses in order to attract Japanese tourists after normalization of relations between the two countries.

will share the fees earned with the tea house owner. Street prostitution in red-light districts like Mia-ri, Chongnyangni, and Yongsan in central Seoul provides cheap and quick sex with attractive young women soliciting behind large glass panes. Some of the brothels in these areas have been famous for their sex shows<sup>16</sup> together with alcohol and snacks available prior to intercourse.

According to a news article, "The Inside Story of Korea's Sex Industry" in 1988,<sup>17</sup> data from the National Tax Administration revealed that a total of 178,000 entertainment venues had a total sale of 259 billion won in 1985. This figure was claimed<sup>18</sup> to have increased to 400 billion won in 1988, as much as 5 percent of the GNP. Park (1994: 175) pointed out that the drastic increase in the number of barbershops from 24,470 in 1986 to 47,930 in early 1988 reflected the dramatic effects of liberalization on consumerism. However, such prominence also led to temporary government crackdown on erotic barbershops<sup>19</sup> in order to present "clean" images for the 1988 Olympics (Hangyora 1994 quoted in Lie 1995: 323).

Otherwise, the process of diversification intensified into the 1990s, with continuous economic growth only temporarily checked by the Asian economic crisis. The range of pleasure-seeking venues expanded in types, geographical reach, and numbers. A progressive newsmagazine estimated in 1994<sup>20</sup> that the annual turnover in the prostitution business amounted to 4.3 trillion won. Reports from the National Tax Administration show

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16. Unlike those in Thailand that may involve intercourse on stage, these are only done by women who perform various tricks usually with their private parts.

17. Yoon Il-ong, *Choson Monthly News Magazine*, May 1988, p. 390.

18. The figure has been cited from "sources from the Inland Revenue" in a freely distributed Christian magazine *Salt and Light* and the hidden agenda in quoting such a figure should be kept in mind. Lee H. M. (1989) "The modern Sodom City: The Culture of Pleasure-seeking," *Salt and Light Magazine*, September 1989, p. 182, quoted in Park 1994: 151.

19. These barber shops are attended by women who provide massages and sexual services.

20. *Hangyora 21 News Magazine*, April 1994.

that in 1999, there was a total of 239,241 licenses issued to restaurants, bars, lodging businesses, recording an increase of 14,439 from 1998—in particular, the number of room salons increased by 112 percent to 4,275 (2,016 in 1998).<sup>21</sup> Room salons continue to dominate the high-end of the entertainment market, where a visit easily costs millions of won. This is followed by *tallanujom*, or karaokes modelled similarly to the room salons but at more affordable prices<sup>22</sup> for middle-class clients. Per visit per person costs around 200–250,000 won including tips for hostesses and food and alcohol. Sex with hostesses will cost an extra 100,000–200,000 won. Street level prostitution in the red-light districts now costs around 50,000–100,000 won, more than the costs of “a few beers” but still the cheapest one can find.

Changes in the domestic and global arenas also introduced new variants into Korea’s sex industry. Domestically, host bars, which first emerged at the end of the 1980s, enjoyed a revival in the late 1990s. Male “hosts” entertain a clientele of housewives, “hostesses” off work, and other young women with a disposable income.<sup>23</sup> The negative publicity caused by regular media reports of police raids on these host bars continued in spite of a failed attempt to criminalize men working as hosts.<sup>24</sup> Teenage prostitution including *wonjokyojae*<sup>25</sup> became the most heated social debate in the late 1990s.<sup>26</sup> With the advent of the internet, reports of young people’s informal engagement in sex work

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21. *Choson Ilbo*, January 21 2000.

22. Usually scheduled to entertain at 8 p.m., 10 p.m., and slightly after midnight every evening, each session lasts about 2 hours. Clients can decide on the number of hostesses.

23. For a more in depth report on the clients and male sex workers in these host bars, see *Feminist Journal IF*, Autumn 1997, Seoul: IF Publisher.

24. In mid-1999, the Ministry of Health and Welfare’s proposal to revise health-related laws in a bid to ban male prostitution was withdrawn before submission to a Cabinet meeting, after widespread protest from women’s organizations on grounds of equal rights between the sexes.

25. Teenage girls provide company to middle age men in return for cash and gifts, a pattern attributed by most Koreans to Japanese influence.

26. There has been continuous debate on the issue of teenage prostitution (even though prostitution is illegal in Korea, only teenage prostitution has become a

initiated through online chatting escalated. On the international front, outbound tourism grew in the 1990s following the government's decision to grant freedom to travel, and sex tourism to Southeast Asia burgeoned. The importation of migrant labour has also brought in foreign female sex workers in the late 1990s, especially in GI clubs in U.S. military camp towns<sup>27</sup> where restrictions to Korean nationals became more relaxed in the 1990s. Most of these foreign women come from Russia and the Philippines, but recently also from Latin America, giving Korean men an opportunity to fulfill their exotic fantasies.

### Engendering Male Desires in Korea

Male desires are shaped and reproduced within the larger system of gender relations. In Korea, Confucianism, Christianity, and the military constitute three matrixes of masculinity that also underline the competing discourses of nationalism and their divergent demands on individual consciousnesses and bodies (Figure 1). The gendered nature of these divergent nationalisms underlies the construction of a "Korean nation of men and by men" (Moon S. 1997), in which women are reduced to their reproductive and labour powers. Confucianism and Christianity operate as public discourses that tie individuals to the past and the future of the nation: identification with Confucianism binds individuals to revered traditions and culture, while identification with Christianity orientates one to the vision of a modern Korean nation. Military culture and discipline exalt valour and sacrifice for the male group (the team, the army, the nation etc.), preparing the men to exert and to forgo power accordingly within the hierarchy. Each of these three discourses seeks to enlist individual man's body for the

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subject of heated discussion and police raids). This led to the introduction of legislation effective on July 1, 2000 under which a man may have his identity publicly revealed if he is caught paying for teenage prostitutes.

27. There are still 37,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in Korea as a legacy of the Korean War. Their presence has maintained a demand for female company and sexual services around the bases. See Moon 1997 and Cheng 2000.

nation-state, serving simultaneously as discursive scripts for the negotiation of masculinities and the nation. Women in these discourses are essentialized to the whore/Madonna (wife) dichotomy, which is reproduced in the conceptualization and practice of women's sexuality. Korean men's use of prostitution thus takes place within the dichotomous gender relations that have been embedded in the construction of the masculinist nation.

### Matrixes of Masculinity

#### *a) The Confucian Gentlemen in East Asia*

The idea of Korea as the vanguard of Confucianism in East Asia persists in popular discourse and individual consciousness. The idea of Korea as a "Confucian society" invariably came up not only in my interviews, but also in my conversations with many Koreans. This is particularly so when they talk about issues of morality and traditions in Korean society. Furthermore, there is the general belief that Confucianism, though originating in China, is now much stronger in Korea than in China, where it has not been as vigorously practised since the collapse of the Ming dynasty, and has further suffered a setback in the communist era.

The Confucian gentleman assumes power through moral rectitude. Neo-Confucianism was consolidated as a state ideology in the Choson dynasty (1392-1910).<sup>28</sup> The ideal Confucian gentleman-scholar is expected to have mastered his own desires and act as the moral example for the family, the kin group, and society (Kim 1996). Sexual indulgence is thus a sign of weakness in a man. In this paradigm of masculinity, a woman's role is subordinate to that of a man and restricted to the private realm; and women's sexual purity is an indication of men's successful control.

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28. See Martina Deuchler (1992) for a detailed analysis of the Confucian transformation of Korea in the Choson period (1392-1910).

Self-restraint and sublimation constitute the "hegemonic masculinity" in the public sphere that "may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men. Yet very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model" (Carrigan 1985: 92 quoted in Cornwall and Lindasfarne 1994). In all public discussions related to sexuality and sexual mores, the moral man is clearly "the culturally exalted form of masculinity" reproduced in government policy, public statements, and debates, necessary to be revitalized for the general well-being and order of Korean society in view of the evil influences from the outside world.

*b) The Patriotic Soldier*

The military has been the key arena for "creating citizens, and creating men" (Gill 1998) for modern Korea. As a legacy of the Korean War, which was the last armed confrontation between the two Cold War blocs, the Korean peninsula has become the most heavily fortified line in the world<sup>29</sup> (Cumings 1997: 458). Military leaders ran the country from 1961 to 1993. President Park Chung-hee's aggressive national building since the 1960s consistently invoked the image of Choson warrior hero Yi Sun-sin as the ideal of self-reliant, patriotic manhood for modern Korea (Jager 1999).

The military, emphasizing male vigor and collectivity, is ideologically and experientially important in the shaping of Korean masculinity and male cultures. Except for the upper classes with abundant political and economic power, military experience is an important source of manhood.<sup>30</sup> With 26 months of compul-

29. The availability of military manpower (males 15-49) in South and North Korea respectively are 13,954,916 and 5,768,038, and military expenditures as percentage of GDP are 3.2 percent and 25-33 percent (1997 estimate) respectively. Quoted from CIA Factbook 1999.

30. In the third and latest investigations into draft dodgers by the Kim Dae-jung government, 54 out of 119 people to be investigated were either former or current lawmakers (*Korea Times*, 11 February 2000). There is also the metropolitan-provincial distinction in which men who have served the full term of 26 months of

sory military conscription for almost all adult males, the military effectively laid down the behaviour code of hierarchy and collectivity in male groups, including the work place. The extent of the discipline of individual bodies can be seen in the practice of circumcision: over 80 percent of recruits are circumcised, and the average age of circumcision is 20 (Yang et al. 1998). Circumcision is done for hygienic reasons as well as for alleged better performance in sex, and is a mark of adulthood.<sup>31</sup> Informants recall how an uncircumcised penis would immediately turn one into an object of laughter in the military.

Absolute deference to authority<sup>32</sup> in the military lays a model of authoritarianism in other organizations—Janelli (1988) has observed that the corporate office reproduces the culture and practices of the South Korean military. All informants recall beatings by seniors as a commonplace, if not everyday, practice in the military. Despite their distaste for such violence, they also justify such practices in terms of the nature of the military and the nation's exigency that will not end until unification is achieved. After a directive prohibiting physical assaults, Mr. Park (30, engineer, single) recalls putting make-up powder on a target's face when he was in the Marine Corps. The feminization of powerlessness effectively reinforces the masculine nature of authority in the military.

Mr. Ho (32, single, postgraduate student) recalls that he first went to visit a sex worker on a day off from his military service.

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service are considered the most eligible men for marriage in the provincial area, and where education achievement generally ranks more important in the metropolis of Seoul. One informant spoke of a family in his hometown that felt so shameful about the disqualification of their son from military service that they tried to pay to get him into the military. Failing the physical examination for new recruits may thus be considered as a sign of inadequate, if not defective, manhood.

31. Mr. Hwang recalls pooling in money with other friends to sponsor a friend's circumcision at the age of 28. They considered the operation a necessity for a man to be considered an adult and thus extended help.
32. As Kandiyoti (1994: 207-8) observed, the utter helplessness in the face of total, arbitrary authority may bring about a "consistently deferential posture—the placatory and disarming stance of the boy."



Having listened to the stories and experiences of fellow conscripts, he went in the hope that it would give him the comfort and relief he so much needed before returning to the harsh life in the Marine Corps. The discrepancy between the sense of powerlessness, both imposed and self-initiated, and the demands of a strong and self-reliant masculinity may not only instill an inherent insecurity in the search of manliness, but may also encourage confirmations of manhood from other arenas. Brothels are one such venue. Other informants recall regular visits to brothels as the only occasions to let off steam—get drunk and have sex with women. Soldiers are often given special discounts in brothels near military bases since they are regular customers. One informant recalls having such a visit to the brothel paid for with the special allowances that had been given by the army following their extended duties during the 1988 Olympics. The use of prostitution has become almost embedded as one of the military rituals in the maintenance of masculine *esprit de corps*.

*c) The Modern Christian*

Christianity has become a type of "ethical nationalism" dedicated to the democratic, anti-colonial, anti-authoritarian struggle for a modern nation-state (Wells 1990)<sup>33</sup> since the late 19th century. Though an imported religion, it has been successfully "Koreanized" (Baker 1998) through ideological reinterpretation and ritual practice and enjoys a widespread following of 25 percent of the population.<sup>34</sup> The identification of Korean national identity with Christianity has created the idea among certain sectors that, purified by extraordinary suffering, Koreans are the latest chosen people of God and that Korea is destined to be the next centre for world Christianity (e.g., the Unification Church).

33. K. Wells (1990) analysed its development and termed this Protestant form of nationalism as "self-reconstruction nationalism."

34. Or 51.8 percent (11,807,000 people) of the religious population as of 1995 (Korea Overseas Information Service 1997).

Christianity became identified with modernization and nationalism in Korea at a time when the nation was eager to ward off Japanese encroachment (Baker 1998: 117-8). The introduction of medical and education facilities by the first Protestant missionaries in the late 19th century helped lay the foundation for a modern Korean nation. During the colonial era, Christian groups took an active part in the anti-Japanese nationalist resistance movement, expressing loyalty to both their religion and their nation. Efforts to Koreanize Christian concepts culminated in the emergence of a *Minjung* theology in the early 1970s, calling on Christians to help the *minjung* ("masses") to overcome oppression.<sup>35</sup> Christians defiant of the government's denunciation of North Korea also openly called for national unification. Myongdong Cathedral in central Seoul and other churches have continued to provide a critical sanctuary for anti-government protestors during the military dictatorships. President Kim Dae-jung himself has been known to be a "devout" Christian hated by the military regimes. Visions of a modern Korea shared by the educated classes find refuge and support in Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

Four out of the ten Korean interviewees profess to be Christians, but most people in this cohort have some knowledge of biblical teachings from school, friends, or experiences of attending church services. The concept of "love" is emphasized in Christian teachings, and the ability to "love" is what connects the individual spiritually with others and with God. Christianity also helps in the idealization of "romantic love" as a modern form of heterosexual relationship. Christian ethics adapted in modern Korea effectively buttress the idea of sexual purity, deterring any deviation and incurring much fear for it with the concept of "sin."

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35. A Hegelian interpretation of oppression focusing on consciousness rather than a Marxist interpretation is central to this politicised theology (Baker 1998: 122).

36. Though Christianity did become iconoclastic in dedicating itself to the elimination of the neo-Confucian mentality, culture and political system, as demonstrated in Christians' efforts to alleviate women's oppression, it has adopted much of Confucian values and formalism (Moon O. P. 1998).

### Maintaining the Great Divide: Whores and Wives

Ideals of female purity grounded in Confucian traditions and Christian ethics find a ready counterpart in the construction of military manhood that glorifies male vigor. To maintain the hypermasculinised identity bolstered by the military, the female body becomes the hyper-eroticised "other" to be conquered or the hyper-feminised (desexualised) to be protected. These gender images are reproduced in my informants' construction of the difference between their wives and the prostitutes—the former's lack of interest in sex that necessitates their use of the latter,<sup>37</sup> through whom they could fulfill their "natural" sex drive and erotic interest. Similar to Arab cultures studied by Cohen (1971), gender segregation and dichotomous gender constructions provide few opportunities for an unhindered, informal meeting between young members of the sexes before marriage, and very little sexual guidance is provided by parents or by any other socialising agent. However, "underlying and complementing the overt austerity of (Arab) sexual life there (are) covert patterns of gaining sexual release" for men, and one of them is institutionalised prostitution (Cohen 1971: 221).

To my informants, sex with prostitutes is different from sex with non-prostitutes, girlfriends, or wives. Different individuals use different ways to demarcate the boundary, though there are some elements in common. Regular condom use with prostitutes is professed only by married informants. Single informants practise safer sex in a haphazard fashion. Oral sex is a basic service in commercial sex, but few men would even try to suggest oral sex with his wife or girlfriend lest they will be rejected as "abnormal." Mr. Ma (30, engineer, married with one son) says that his wife of over one year was too shy to let him look at her genitals, so he has a desire to look closely at those of every sex

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37. There is still a large conceptual gap between the "whore" and the "virgin," though the young generation is daring a more open negotiation of the disparity. Recent statistics (Choi 1998) showing fewer Korean men are having their first sexual experience with prostitutes illuminate this change. See note 5.

worker he pays for. Married informants say that prostitutes have provided them with a chance to try out things they have learnt from pornography, things that they would not dare to suggest to their wives. Dr. Oh (37, professor, married with one son) says, "You know, sometimes it is very difficult to ask your wife to do certain things for you, especially if she is an intellectual." Thus, sex with a "professional woman" (sex worker) is a kind of sport, while sex with one's wife is for communication and intimacy. "It is two different kinds of sex," he says. The division is necessary because he can make demands on sex workers whom he considers "dirty," something he will not do with his wife. The division is further considered by Dr. Oh to be beneficial to his married life because he learns things from the "professional women" that help him to "satisfy" his wife.

Thus, the divide between "good" and "bad" women is strengthened while these informants are allowed to play out their different masculinities—as proper, loving husbands and virile members of the male group—as the case may be.

### Glory of Virility, Fear of Impotence

The desire for women that is celebrated in the male group is one of conquest and control rather than intimacy. Mr. Ha (30, engineer, single) was teased by his peers for desiring to "only" lay down in the arms of a female sex worker rather than participate in the act of sex.

This old fellow (*ajotssi*), if he goes there, he just wants to sleep, he doesn't think about doing it with the girl but just wants to sleep with her. (*Just sleeping with a girl?*) Just sleep together. I go because I want to do it (have penetrative sex), I want to hug and drink so I go...but this old chap goes there to sleep...he wants to lie down together (with the girl).

The "accusation" was only replied to with some defensive mumble. Such teasing (highlighting the unmasculine act of "just lying down" and calling the single man an "ajotssi," used only for married and/or older men) is a way of reinforcing the masculine code of behaviour, confirming the claim to superior masculinity by "penetrative sex" over "just lying down" with a woman.

The preoccupation with male virility and masculine prowess generates with equal strength an anxiety of non-optimal performance or impotence, easily detectable in Korean men's generous consumption of virility tonics from dog meat soups to Viagra,<sup>38</sup> and other consumer products such as "virility underwear."<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the Korean informants have a significant preoccupation with "satisfying the woman." Several informants echo the view that "the necessary condition to make me happy (is that) I have to satisfy her, otherwise, I will not be happy." In other words, prostitution is a way of confirming one's virility and identity as a man by the observable (and ostensible?) pleasures one can give to a woman. However, none of the informants confess to ordering the women to respond in a particular way; most of them say half-jokingly that it is not necessary (possibly suggesting their satisfactory performance) or that it is not appropriate to do so lest the women give them a hard time (possibly subverting his power as a client and as a man at the same time). Even though the men pay for sexual access to these women's bodies, their concern lies not so much with the services that the women may actively provide or the expression of their manly desires,<sup>40</sup> but with the exercise and proof of their masculine might.

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38. Viagra was approved by the Korean Food and Drug Administration in August 1999 for sale in local pharmacies from October onwards on physicians' prescription. According to a newspaper report (*Choson Ilbo*, August 6, 1999), the Korean market for treatment for impotence is estimated at 20,000,000,000 won. With the introduction of Viagra, the market is expected to have a 3- to 4-fold increase. Local products launched their own offensives against the upcoming onslaught of Viagra, with one produce called the SS-cream (against premature ejaculation) planning to advertise "the secret tip" of becoming "invincible"—to use both SS Cream and Viagra simultaneously. The dominant discourse guarding the moral superiority of marital sex tries to check the growing public fascination with the new product, with some proponents suggesting that Viagra should only be purchased with wives' approval.
39. Underpants for men that have been specially designed to enhance virility, ubiquitous in all home shopping magazines that are distributed free to a large number of households.
40. Allison (1994: 183-6) found that Japanese clients' desire is "not so much for a woman whose desires are sexual and female as for the type of woman who, for

## Alcohol, Food, and...(hushed) in Male Rituals

### a) The Male Peer Group

The shaping and expression of male desires in prostitution use should be understood in the context of male rituals. The focus here is drinking rituals among male peer groups<sup>41</sup> (defined usually by the same age or same year of entry into school, company, or the military), for which prostitution use often acts as "the final integrative act" (Fordham 1998). In fact, among my informants, drinking with colleagues or friends from high school and/or university with whom there is a strong sense of identification is the most common prelude to prostitution use.<sup>42</sup> An understanding of the nature and organization of these two types of male groups will throw light on their significance to individuals, as well as their participation in their rituals.

In Korea, entry into a company as an employee usually means more than taking up a job. Though permanent employment is on the decline, the management makes sure that the new employee identify with the company, which in turn often identifies its prosperity with that of the nation as a whole. Individual loyalty to the company is constructed as inseparable from loy-

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money, is willing to indulge the man in the expression of *his* desires"(constructed as being manly) (1994:184).

41. The gender, occupation and financial resources of the group, as well as the occasion of the gathering determine the form and content of social rituals in Korea—though they always centred on commensality of alcohol. The behavioral code for consuming alcohol also varies with the constitution of the group—the presence of senior members oblige the juniors to serve, receive, and consume a drink in particular ways expressing deference.
42. Though similar to Japanese businesses (Allison 1994), visits with business partners to hostess clubs or engagements in other forms of commercial sex may seal a deal as well as provide for future dealings, it has been less frequently cited by my informants. This is possibly related to their occupation and position at work. An exception is Dr. Ho who invited the six young employees of his new venture business to dinner and then to the red-light district in Yongsan—"It cost much less than going to a room salon and it took much shorter time. I felt the responsibility to bring them somewhere, and they could not reject my offer."

alty to the nation, and its inculcation constitutes a main objective of initial corporate training for new recruits. Training often lasts longer than a month, regularly placing the trainees collectively in a training camp, putting them as teams through a series of mental and physical tasks, in an attempt to cultivate loyalty and solidarity. The common identity that builds up at this stage will be reinforced both at and off work. Besides those evenings out initiated by seniors, which cannot be declined out of courtesy and deference, the peer group will also gather of their own accord, away from people of seniority so that they can be relieved of the necessary language and behavioural codes of deference. In the case of mixed-sex grouping, the numbers of participants will dwindle as the group moves across different drinking venues until a "core" is left. A close male peer group in the workplace, as my five informants from the same company (four men of the same age, with a "very kind" senior who is single), evolves out of these frequent drinking rituals.

The other common form of male peer group is alumni from the same class in high school or university and, less frequently, the military. The familiarity of the group facilitates ease of interaction and the long-term relationship engenders much trust. The connections that one establishes through these alumni groups, however, are usually multiple and often extremely useful for networking. Regional origins, high schools, and universities attended are important bases for establishing useful connections in Korean society. For example, one informant has been introduced by his high school friends, one of whom a regular partner on visits to *tallenjujom* (karaoke), to two new jobs when he became dissatisfied with his current job. Dr. Oh has been visiting *tallenjujom* almost monthly with his friends from the same prestigious university—friends who enjoy equally high status in the same profession as Dr. Oh.

The male peer group usually meets to drink. The usual drinking places are, in order of escalating costs: *soju* (a Korean whisky) house, beer houses, *tallanjujom* with or without hostesses, "room salons," etc. The costs are normally shared among the peers/

friends,<sup>43</sup> or the men may take turns paying. The rituals of commensality and the collective drunkenness couple with the production of an exclusively male rhetoric<sup>44</sup> in the consolidation of the male group and its collective masculine identity. Experience in the military is the staple of conversation among a group of drinking Korean men.<sup>45</sup> This is the space where everyday sanctions are relieved and a different "hegemonic masculinity" emerges—that of the emotional, rowdy and/or virile man, depending on the context.

Alcohol is used for the breaking down of barriers, both with others and within oneself.<sup>46</sup> It is expected to bring out the "true selves" of the men that have to be concealed in everyday life. All should drink hard and there is a variety of rites and encoded pouring practices to that end. The drinking of *p'okdanju* ('bomb cocktail' made with a shot of whiskey dropped into a glass of beer and consumed in one shot) in a ritual of compulsory commensality is one such example. The practice dates back to 1980 when the then military "elites" led by former president Chun Doo-hwan seized power.<sup>47</sup> While getting drunk is tolerated, those who lose control (by dosing off or vomiting) and fail to partake in the group usually get chided. Drunkenness grants one immunity from acts or behaviour that would normally be criticised. Therefore, "under the influence," a man may seize the chance to

43. In the Korean language, "friends" (*chin-gu*) refer only to people born of the same year.

44. Female military personnel accounts for 1.4 percent of all officers and non-commissioned officers as of the year 2000, a figure that is expected to rise to 5 percent by 2020 (*Korea Herald*, July 1, 2000).

45. For those who have not been to the military for one reason or another, these peer group gatherings often pose a threat to their masculine identity and valid membership in the group. Some people gather stories about the military and boast about them as if they were their own experiences, but of course risk further humiliation if found out.

46. As found by Allison among Japanese clients to hostess clubs (1994: 44-5) and Fordham in Thai men's consumption of alcohol which "allows the creation of an internal liminal state paralleling that of the drinking rite" (1998: 100).

47. Shouting "wihayo" meaning "for" (health, peace, success, etc.), the soldiers and soldier-turned-politicians used to toast with *p'okdanju*. One has no right to make



abandon the demands of "manly pride" and propriety, and could cry, sing, dance, or get vulgar and rowdy. The catharsis serves to strengthen the bonds between the drinking men.

Drunkenness and male camaraderie in the company of hostesses creates a social and temporal space where the normative is not only dismissed, but negated. Alcohol consumption and drunkenness prior to visiting any sex business is almost ubiquitous among Korean male groups. I once met with a group of Korean men between the ages of 30-45 from the same work place. They were throwing a small party for my friend's promotion. Incidentally the topic of my research raised much interest among the six men present and a discussion on sexuality, ethnicity, and nationalism followed. After rounds of *soju* and Korean BBQ, they decided to visit a *tallanjujom* with hostesses. I offered to leave but they insisted that I join them. Just before we were about to enter, the most senior member of the group paused and reminded me, "Remember, whatever you see inside, don't take it as normative." For the next two hours inside the karaoke room, the four hostesses in their early twenties "entertained" the group by telling sex jokes and playing along with the sexual bantering as they fended off the physical encroachment of the men (mostly from the most senior man present), as we sang and danced to music in front of a ceaseless stream of images of frolicking naked white women from the TV screen, and rounds of *p'okdanju* were consumed, I came to understand Cumings' astonishment on a visit to a *kisaeng* house in 1960s, "I had no idea that the gap between Confucian formalism and raunchy substance was a chasm like this (Cumings 1993: 173)." I partook of the merriment as best as I could,<sup>48</sup> and reminded myself that

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his or her own *p'okdanju*. There must always be a designated or volunteer mixer to concoct the drink, which all the participants in the drinking party must drink one by one without exception. It is the undisputed top drink at luxurious places such as the room salons and *tallanjujom* where expensive imported whiskeys are used. The military, parliament and the prosecution are the three main places where the odd drinking culture has flourished (*Korea Times* June 19, 1999).

48. The most difficult part was to deal with the tensions that arose from the blatant power differences between myself as a woman and the hostesses. While they sat

what I was witnessing should be taken as a flight from the moralism and formalism in Korean society—the “normative” world.

However, the silence surrounding Korean men’s use of prostitution is significant. Men do not go out for the explicit purpose of visiting prostitutes. Except for business reasons, it is only with the closest of friends and peers that they might end up going to prostitutes after rounds of drinking—for “everything is exposed.” Informants insist that no one in Korea would ever go to a sex worker while *sobri*—the alcohol is necessary to either relieve them of their “Confucian” constraints, or be used as an “excuse.” The male group usually becomes increasingly inebriated moving across different establishments until someone proposes to “go to the end” (*kkutkkajikaja*). Mr. Yoon (30, engineer, single), who is said by his friends to be the usual initiator, repeats that it is “100 percent on impulse” that they go to visit prostitutes. “They all concur, ‘Let’s go!’ as if they have all been waiting for it,” he comments on other peoples’ response. The male group thus becomes an organic entity in which a visit to the brothel is the culmination of a “natural” collective upsurge of sexual desire. The secrecy that follows further reinforces the collectivity. “The next morning, we would come into the office and look at each other, laugh, and then we don’t talk (about the night) anymore.” The knowledge and experience are muted but shared within the group, sealed with a laugh. The virile masculinity enacted by collective transgression of the moral code is valued only within and by the peer group.

Participation in group rituals ensures valid membership which is extremely important in Korean society, and the self is always defined in relation to the group. “For in Korea, one’s identity is determined almost exclusively by relationships with others, whether family, clan, classmates, or colleagues. In extreme cases, misfits are virtually nonpersons—people without a society, internal exiles” (Pihl and Fulton 1993: xiv). It is important to

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exposed to the sexual bantering, fondling and groping of the men, I either sat there unscathed, or was asked to sing and dance with the men in the most respectful manner.

note that visits to prostitutes are considered normal only within the context of a male *group*, lone visitors are the deviants. In other words, use of prostitution is a legitimate part of fraternal celebration—in which one becomes both a man and a legitimate member of the group—rather than a means for satiating individual desires. The silence that marks their use of prostitution signifies the tension that individuals have to negotiate between the contradictory demands of the group and those of the larger society. Individual agency surfaces only when we examine the actual tactics that individuals engage in to accommodate these differences.

*b) Negotiating Desires*

In the family, one's sexual ventures should never be exposed. All my informants recoil at the thought of letting their parents or wives know about their use of prostitution. Mr. Park (30, engineer, single) thinks that he would become a sinner if he ran into his father in a red-light district, but he feels no moral qualms about paying for sex. A non-Christian, the act becomes a sin to him only through exposure to significant others. Alternatively, as a Christian, Dr. Oh has adopted a Cartesian understanding of the contradictions, claiming an "emotional and spiritual" faithfulness to his wife in spite of his physical engagements with prostitutes, which he considers to be a form of sport in which changing partner is the norm. He further says that this "dual mentality" has helped him ease his "guilt" over committing adultery, and thus continues to go to church with his family. Justifying his actions on one hand and admitting guilt on the other confirm his subscription to the dominant moral code.

One must demonstrate a "natural" desire for women to be part of the group, even if one does not partake of the sex. A devout Christian and an older member of the group, Mr. Hwang (33, engineer, single) always manages to leave midway between the bar and the brothel. When he was pointed out as the only virgin in the group, he almost squealed, saying, "I don't go with you to those places but I watch a lot of pornographic movies,

I am really a pornography-maniac, I always watch pornography!" The message is clear—he does have a strong sexual desire for women and should still be respected as a member of the male group. Non-compliance also takes other forms. Mr. Lee (30, computer programmer, single) has come to know some older sex workers through his girlfriend who is an activist for prostitutes' better livelihood. The knowledge of their plight has made it impossible for him to sleep with a sex worker himself, he said. After a reunion with his friends from the military, one of his friends put him in a motel room, called and paid for a sex worker to attend to him, as was the privilege granted to everybody else. Instead of declining the offer or leaving, he asked the woman to simply stay for some beer and cigarettes before they left the room together. Such non-compliance, which does not risk rupturing the fraternal fabric or alienating oneself, is just one of many tactics to accommodate one's differences within the male group.

Differences may fail to be completely resolved or accommodated, however, because of individuals' simultaneous identification with conflicting demands and desires such as those illustrated by the three matrixes of masculinity that have been outlined. Three single informants remark that the transaction usually leaves them with "a sense of emptiness." They do not hesitate to agree that sex in the context of love is the ideal, yet they either have no girlfriend or are prevented from demanding sex by respect for her. The pleasure that one derives from the camaraderie and, as one informant puts it, "the thrill of ejaculation" stands in stark contrast to this confessed "sense of emptiness." The discrepancy may be understood within the multiple and contradictory nature of desires. The collective catharsis achieved through drunkenness and transgression of sexual mores fulfills a desire to reassert one's sense of belonging to the collective male group, and to experience oneself as an organic part of the whole. However, such reinscription fails to ease the contradictions embedded in the prostitution experience for the individuals: ideals of love, loyalty, and familial harmony that they

have been brought up with *and* identified as values integral to a Korean nation have been undermined. The antithetical nature of this ritual patronage of prostitution plunges the male individual into a constant negotiation of these conflicting desires.

### Sexualizing Nationalism and the Eroticised White Woman

The nation, however, becomes the foundation of a unifying desire for these Korean men that has been projected onto the body of the eroticised white woman. All my informants express a strong curiosity about white women's bodies and their sexuality—while some seek to realise the fantasy, others rest content with the fantasising. I would argue that this desire has been sustained by a fantasy of conquest nurtured by the historiography of Korea as a nation constantly under the threat of foreign domination. Confucian ethics that emphasise female purity, the conception of a pure Korean race coupled with masculinist nationalist identification of the female body with national boundary combine to inscribe the nation onto female bodies as the penetrable. Korean women who have been compelled to provide sexual services to foreigners—"comfort women" for Japanese armies, or "Western Princesses" and "Western Whores" for GIs are considered outcasts for "betraying" the race and the nation (Moon 1997; Kim and Choi 1998). On the other hand, Korean men who have sex with foreign women may beam with (national) pride—"sticking the Korean flag pole (on a foreign land)" (*taekukirulkotda*) is a popular phrase to endorse such a feat. Furthermore, sex with a white woman, popularly known as "riding a white horse" (*paekmarultada*) remains the fantasy of many Korean men. A Korean web site has a special column on overseas students who share with others their experiences of "riding a white horse," teasing the interest and envy of many. Russian entertainers, initially brought into Special Tourism Zones serving GIs since 1997, have gained a continuous flow of Korean customers in spite of their relatively high prices, and have been introduced into Korean clubs with great popularity.

a) *The Colour "White" and the Gender "Woman"*

In the imagination of the masculinist nationalist discourse in Korea, westerners have been the powerful racial "other" that has subdued one's own. The dominant narrative of South Korean history long acknowledged liberation as a gift of the allied forces, especially of the U.S., since Koreans were excluded in the liberation process itself (Choi 1993: 351). The political, military, and economic stronghold the U.S. continues to have over Korea and the nationalist discourses that target such presence effectively constitute the U.S. as this dominant "other." The recent Asian economic crisis brought Korea into heavy debt with the International Monetary Fund, which has become one of the newest embodiments of the aggressive "Western bloc"<sup>49</sup> in Korea.

General emulation of the material and democratic advancement in the West, and particularly the U.S., came to a violent halt with the 1980 Kwangju massacre in which the U.S. military had been implicated in the death of two thousand Koreans.<sup>50</sup> The 1980s were marked by tumultuous anti-government and anti-American social movements by students, intellectuals, workers, and farmers. This *minjung* movement<sup>51</sup> may be interpreted as "the emancipatory struggle from a colonial past and a neocolonial present which denigrates, if it does not abnegate, the Korean identity" (Choi 1993: 361). The key agents in this movement were university students, amongst them my informants. In other words, having experienced the heat of anti-Americanism, they are potentially much more conscious of the economic and po-

49. Personal communication with Korean friends related the saying that December 7th, 1997, the day on which the IMF bail-out was signed by the Korean government, was to be remembered as the day when Japan annexed Korea (Treaty of Annexation, August 22, 1910).

50. Though the killing was carried out by Korean troops, the approval of the US army commander was necessary in the release of the troops in question from the DMZ (Cumings 1997: 377-8; Choi 1998: 357).

51. For a detailed analysis of the social dynamics in the *minjung* movement, see Abelmann (1996); for the use of traditional gender imagery in its discourse, see Jager (1996).

litical domination of the West than other members of the population.

Mr. Choi (30, computer programmer, single) recalls an unpleasant encounter when his sense of powerlessness was reinforced by losing out to western men over the company of a group of Korean women:

We were trying to chat up some girls sitting next to us in a club, but they rejected us. Suddenly some white men came and sat down right next to the girls. The white men started chatting them up, and the girls just let them! We were furious! After we have got the cold shoulder from them, we would have felt bad enough if they said OK to some Korean men, but we felt worse because these guys were westerners. It may be because of a sense of inferiority. Westerners live better than we do, and we (Korea) needed the money from the West (IMF) to rise again, didn't we? Maybe it's because of that, but anyway, we were extremely upset. So we just left the club.

As a female embodying the West and exotic sexuality, the white woman is open to fantasies of conquest, or revenge, by those who entertain a desire to challenge the imbalance. The strength of the fantasy comes from the multivalence of the white women (Schein 1997). Images of white women are most commonly seen in two contexts. First, they pose as icons of modernity, of western style. Advertisements of big department stores and foreign and local fashion brand names frequently feature white women stylishly clad in their merchandise, appealing to the public with her "modernity" and "sophistication."<sup>52</sup> Second, they epitomise female sexual appeal. Shops selling calendars bedeck their shop fronts with pin-up images of white women in different degrees of nakedness, and these calendars are almost ubiquitous in drinking houses and fried chicken and beer houses, especially those catering primarily for a male clientele. The white woman is the quintessential "sexy girl" in a culture where few indigenous sex icons can be found. In addition, images of white

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52. Though more local brand names are increasingly using local or Asian women in their advertising campaigns, images of white women can still be easily spotted in magazines, newspapers, subway posters etc.

women generated by Hollywood movies, and adult magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* believed to have been smuggled out of U.S. military bases, have secretly fed the sexual fantasies of generations of Korean high school boys. The media and pornography have successfully constructed the white female as an exotic sexual "other," epitomising everything that a Korean woman is "not."<sup>53</sup>

I suggest that it is both the sexual curiosity about the exotic white women, together with the anti-domination desire against the "West" that have maintained the erotic appeal of the white women. The "dominated" thus also have two fantasies to speak of: "eroticisation of anti-domination" and eroticisation of "the (dominant) Other."<sup>54</sup>

*b) Anti-domination as a Desire and a Practice*

Pointing out the use of sex as a form of conquest, Dr. Oh believes that it is a latent idea among Korean men that having sex with a white woman is compensation for the sense of inferiority towards white people felt by Korean men and Asian men in general. However, his one and only experience with an Australian sex worker has fallen short of this goal: "I felt like...I was being raped...To her, I was like a kind of unusual species, as an Oriental man, as someone who wears glasses...She asked me to turn over, something like that (put both hands forward and flip around), so I felt that I was being raped..."<sup>55</sup> "Rape" here is used in a metaphoric sense, signifying his loss of control in relation to the unexpected control that the female sex worker assumed.

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53. A young Australian woman shared with me how this stereotype of white women has caused her unnecessary hassle. A Korean boyfriend of hers, after being rejected for his sexual advances, complained, "Oh, you are just like a Korean woman!"

54. Harvey & Gow (1994) opened their introduction to the volume on sex and violence by bringing in "two central western fantasies—the eroticisation of domination and the eroticisation of "the (dominated) Other" (1994: 2).

55. It was interesting that this story provoked much laughter in the audience at the time it was presented at the AAA. There are several possible explanations for such laughter. First, the idea of a man being raped, especially when he is paying for the sex, is an unsettling challenge to accepted



Mr. Kim (33, salesman, single) dated a Russian woman whom he had met with his colleagues at the club she was working at in Pusan for six months. He recalled the looks of admiration from people on the street when he walked with the pretty blonde. Having sex with her initially fulfilled some fantasies, "I felt like I was a movie star. No. Not just pornography. But like in a James Bond movie with all the Bond girls. I felt that I was Agent 007."

However, he soon realised that his taste was not for Russian women but for Korean women to whom he could talk, and with whom he could feel more in control—for one thing, the Russian woman "was too noisy" when having sex. Six months later, they broke up, after the woman found herself a GI boyfriend. Consistent with his analysis of the mercenary attitude of Russian women in Korea, he suggests that she was able to advance from her "Korean Dream" to "American Dream" by learning to speak English with him. This remark expresses his awareness of the discrepancy between Korea and the United States.

Both the projection of sexual fantasies fed by American pornography and James Bond movies onto the body of a Russian woman, and the attempt to "compensate" for Asian subordination to Western domination by sleeping with an Australian sex worker, seem to have found the wrong targets, and even carry a tinge of irony if one puts them in the context of international politics. However, "white women" have been essentialised in the East-West binary, and as long as the white skin and blonde hair are there on a female body, they are effective colour and gender symbols of the eroticised West in the Korean context.

These are the only two men I talked to who have actually had the opportunity to realize their "fantasies," yet their experience seems to confirm the idea that "distance is essential if the

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gender power relations; second, as a member of the audience pointed out, the laughter might have sprung out of a common fear of loss of control and impotence; third, as suggested by a discussant of this article, when it was read out to an audience at an academic conference attended by a predominance of white middle class academics, their laughter could be an assertion of their presumed superiority by virtue of their race and the symbolic power of their colour, over a voiceless and impotent Asian man who failed in challenging this imbalance.

fantasy is to maintain its ability to please" (Harvey and Gow 1994: 2). Both of them seem to feel that they have had their share of sex with white women. Others continue to entertain the fantasy privately, with or without the desire to actually fulfill it. Mr. Chae (32, computer graphic designer, married) repeats that he does not find the white female body attractive at all, yet he unavoidably has certain fantasies "to watch," but not "to do." The distance has to be maintained. Mr. Park confesses a sense of inadequacy—he fears that his penis is "too small to satisfy" a Russian woman since she must be used to the larger ones of white men. The woman thus becomes the medium through which his virility is compared with that of his white counterpart.

The intensity of the fascination as well as the symbolic distance that has been maintained between the fantasised object and the self constitutes part of the "self-other binarism" (Schein 1997) that has to be understood within Korea's history of transnational engagements. The "Other" as aggressor has had a prominent presence in Korea's history and nationalist discourse till the present day. In dominant historiography, the nation's fate has been continuously shaped by foreign ambitions since the modern era—from Japanese colonialism, to American neo-colonialism, to international predation (IMF and foreign investors) on the national economy. The eroticisation and racialisation of foreign domination are increasingly paralleled by ambitions of anti-domination, or desires for "compensation" since Korea's official entry into the global arena with the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The Korean people have, like the Chinese people analysed by Barme (1996) in the post-1989 era, emerged with a new sense of self-importance and worth with power and money, developing a "desire for strength and revenge" against the slights that they and their nation have suffered (Barme 1996: 207). The "West," real or imagined, encoded in "whiteness," becomes the target against which Koreans are eager to prove themselves. However, if each sexual encounter is taken as a trial of one's competency as a man, sex with the "eroticised white woman" may further

intensify existing fears of inadequacy and challenge, for what is at stake is not only personal, but also national honour and vigor.

The "otherness" of foreigners has yet to be actively incorporated and absorbed to play down on the "self-other" binarism that so dominates the construction and reproduction of the Korean identity. As Murray (1999) found with Martinicans under French neocolonialism, there is no recognition "of the possibility that desire could be constituted mutually, a strategy that distances any possibility of experiencing the other's subjectivity, aiding in the prevention of any subjective similarities between penetrated and penetrative identities" (Murray 1999: 169). The gendered distinction between the penetrated and penetrative is not only embedded in various social and moral discourses in Korea, but also in the historiography of Korea, and continues to be reproduced on a daily basis in dominant nationalist discourses, particularly in the face of the continuing presence of the 37,000 U.S. troops in Korea, the entry of foreign investors, and the inflow of western, and to a lesser extent Japanese products, cultures and morality. Yet these transnational political, economic, and cultural engagements simultaneously generate the potential for change. As Schein (1997: 477) has observed with the growth of a global consumer society in China, the effect of the saturation of cultural space with Western presence may be the beginning dissolution of a self/other binarism between Korea and the West, through the recognition of the subjective similarities between the dominant and the dominated.

### Conclusion

The masculinisation of power generated by discourses and institutions of Confucianism, the military, and Christianity in modern Korea has defined men as desiring subjects and women as desired objects. Use of prostitution can thus be understood to be part of Korean male ritual that has been shaped by the dichotomous gender ideals. The sexuality of men and women has been scripted on very distinct terms and generates much

tension in the pursuit of pleasure for both. Ironically, the construction of male sexual desires embedded in rituals of the male peer group sometimes turn Korean clients' use of prostitution into a kind of "male sex duty" (to the group and the women) rather than "male sex rights" (over women) (Pateman 1988). This echoes with Kandiyoti's (1994) analysis of segregated society in the Middle East, where "behind the enduring façade of male privilege lie profound ambiguities which may give rise to both defensive masculinist discourse and a genuine desire for contestation and change" (Kandiyoti 1994: 212). The apparent "domination" that sex workers' clients exercise is underlined by a constant fear of challenge and denial, as well as guilt.

Premised on the recognition of multiple masculinities, and that hegemonic masculinity is shaped consistently by the struggles to define it, this article has sought to explore how men participate, experience, and understand their sexualities within these struggles. Sexual desires of Korean men are hardly private matters. Through the inscription of individual bodies to nationalist projects of Confucianism, Christianity, and the paradoxical militarisation for unification with North Korea, individuals become the site of contests and social change. By relating men's experiences of use of prostitution in the context of contesting discourses that connect the individual to the nation, I have further tried to examine how private desires can be shaped by transnational forces throughout history, and also how individual sexual expressions may be understood as embodiments of grander concerns of the nation.

Figure 1



Hangyora News, September 10, 1999

A popular cartoon illustrating the complex behavioral patterns of middle-class Korean males in their various transformations.

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