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## **The limits of soft power**

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**Thesis I:** Entertainment is no substitute for foreign policy, and the soft power of culture industries cannot replace the hard power of arms.

**Thesis II:** The power of the culture industries is no proxy for the power of art.

**Thesis III:** Only serious art that possesses a transcultural power can adequately address the great historical and political questions that confront nations at war or states embroiled in chronic conflict.

Distinguishing between art and the output of the culture industries in this way is unfashionable among contemporary intellectuals. So is any regard for the conventional force of arms. Intellectuals are not averse to violence – they habitually romanticize militant political movements with brutal agendas and militia armies – but regular organized military force leaves them cold. They look askance at the hard power of standing armies and navies. This attitude has a number of consequences, one of which is the idealization of the soft power of entertainment industries.

Such a viewpoint is a variant of Immanuel Kant's idea that nations that trade together do not go to war with each other (Kant 1970: 93–130). This is not true, and scaling back the thesis to focus on the trade in cultural commodities does not make it any truer.

Those who suggest that soft power can replace arms, and that political goals can be achieved by the avuncular influence of culture industries, direct their arguments at the United States in particular. There is no need, proponents say, for the US to use force to remove bestial dictators or theocratic thugs from power. The same end – the institution of democracy – can be achieved by American entertainment industries: film, television, popular music, games, and so on. These industries have massive foreign markets, and they portray or insinuate attractive lifestyles. These are lifestyles that can only be

reproduced under democratic conditions. Teenagers who want to play rap music are not going to be able to do so if tyrannical regimes like the Taliban are in power.

I disagree with this argument – principally because it confuses entertainment with history. It assumes that the political game is comparable to a computer game. It is not. The two are incommensurable. I do agree, though, that democracy *is* fertile ground for culture industries. I will demonstrate that presently with reference to the rise of South Korea's culture export industry in the late 1990s, which was (in part) a product of the country's democratization that began in the preceding decade. Having said that, however, powerful culture industries – and there are now several centers of these across the world – have no political effects whatsoever. Methodologically speaking, I disagree completely with the notion, made popular by cultural studies, that cultural consumption is a political act, or at least an act with political significance. Spiking one's hair, or listening to naughty lyrics, or gyrating to unusual rhythms has mild social implications but no political consequences at all.

I say this as a methodological Platonist who has argued elsewhere that Plato was correct to say that we can understand different political regimes according to their aesthetic form (Murphy and Roberts 2004; Murphy 2001). But I am also still sufficiently in agreement with Theodor Adorno to say that we need to distinguish carefully between the effect of culture industries and the effect of culture. They are two different beasts. Culture – in the sense of the strong culture of art – has enormous political effects in the long run. Culture industries sometimes produce art. Pop music, for example, has a thread of art that runs through it, as does film and occasionally television. But that is not to say that the culture industries producing pop music and films produce art. They produce commodities, they are an industry, and any art that comes out of them is a by-product of the industry. Akira Kurosawa's cinema is art – startling art at that – but it is also exceptional and not the norm of the Japanese film industry.<sup>1</sup>

Such distinctions are important when we consider something like the Korean Wave. It is now one of a number of successful culture industry centres around the world. The first was Hollywood, still the dominant centre. The second, arguably, was London of the 1960s. Followers have included Bombay's Bollywood and most recently Seoul's Korean Wave culture industry. What do these have in common? First is the export of culture.

Second, related to the first, is their location in portal cities and city regions. Portal zones typically develop in proximity to seaboards, great rivers or deltas, seas or lake systems. Many are co-extensive with insular, peninsula, or archipelago societies. Examples range from Taiwan and Singapore to the English and the Dutch, the various Baltic societies, the coastal zones of Australia and America, and Japan and Hong Kong. Portal regions are incubators of world cities that combine export industries and culture production.<sup>2</sup> Export is the essence of a portal zone. The concentration of cultural production in these places is the obverse of that export role. A city that exports also imports. As a mirror of the export of commodities, these cities import people – more specifically they import talent, sometimes from overseas, sometimes from rural hinterlands. South Korea's large-scale rural to urban migration is a typical example of the latter. Culture production thrives on such importation.<sup>3</sup>

The impressive thing about the Korean Wave culture export industry is how quickly it boomed. The South Korean government began to invest in the entertainment industry in the late 1990s. There was a political dimension to this. Imports of Japanese cultural goods had officially been banned for decades, originally a nationalist response to the bitter history of Japanese colonialism in Korea. Importation of American films had also been restricted initially by the authoritarian Park administration, keen to discourage their democratic ethos. With the passing of time, trade protectionism and economic nationalism coalesced with these political motives. Starting in the early sixties, America began to press for liberalization of the film trade. While some notional trade liberalization took place in 1980s, tacit trade barriers remained effective. The administration of president Roh Tae-woo in 1988 took steps, this time successful, to liberalize the film import trade with the United States. Almost a decade later in 1996, local film production controls were also liberalized. Then in another major step in 1998, further restrictions on the importation of foreign cultural products including trade with Japan were relaxed in stages through to 2004. Irrespective of official policies, foreign films, games and music circulated widely on the black market in South Korea. But trade policy was driven by nationalist sentiment as much as by commerce or practicality. Consequently, in lock-step with liberalization, in 1998 a five-year plan was developed to build a South Korean entertainment industry. This was a way of satisfying nationalism, practicality and commerce in one hit. It proved remarkably successful, perhaps because it did actually manage to reconcile the competing interests of national pride, common sense and global

export. Nationalism in a way was refocused. It moved from a puritanical model of cultural censorship and trade protection to a state-sponsored liberal model of international free trade based on the sale of pop culture, some of it quite libidinous. In the event, Korean pop music and melodramas rapidly found large audiences in China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Singapore. The term Korean Wave itself was a Chinese coinage.

The reason for the success of Korean cultural exports naturally varied in different markets, but one overarching reason was that South Korea is an exporting nation. Much of its GNP comes from exports. Cultural commodities in that respect are no different from other commodities. Price was clearly a determinant in early export efforts. In the year 2000, Taiwanese television networks would pay US\$1000 for an hour of South Korean drama compared to US\$15,000–20,000 for a Japanese drama. Price competition is a key to entering markets, though not necessarily for long-term success in those markets. By 2005, South Korean melodramas like *Winter Sonata* commanded US\$7000–15,000 per hour compared to US\$6000–12,000 for a Japanese drama (Onishi 2005a).

Thus there were obviously product as well as market reasons for the success of Korean television dramas. One Korean executive summed it up this way:

The basic reason people love “Winter Sonata” is that it is really similar to the dramas they used to make in the 1960s but they don’t make anymore. Most trendy dramas in Japan now target people in their 20s, so TV viewers in their 40s and 50s have nothing to watch. And those people are the ones with money to spend.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, older viewers in Western countries, bombarded with the unpleasant voyeurism of young people’s ‘reality’ television, could only sympathize with the middle-aged Japanese – finally something to watch! And watch they did. Not only in Japan, but also in Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and as far afield as Uzbekistan, the appeal of the Korean melodramas captured large audiences.

The Korean Wave was greeted with the usual naïve expectations of soft power. Here's a classic example of journalistic credulity from February 2005:

For the past 100 years, Korea and Japan have enjoyed the bitterest of relationships. A harsh colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945, in which the Japanese tried to suppress and even eliminate Korean culture, led to years of anger and acrimony. Following independence in 1945, Japanese culture was largely banned in South Korea, while prejudice against Koreans was the norm in Japan. But over the past year, Korea and Japan have grown enamored with each other's culture in a way that would have seen [sic] scarcely possible just a short time ago. (Russell 2005)

So old antagonists hug and make up? Let's see... in October 2005 the Japanese prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, one of the great Japanese leaders, visited the Yasukuni Shinto shrine – the nationalist war memorial, where Class A war criminals responsible for Japanese war atrocities are buried. In response the South Korean government promptly shelved a summit meeting in December between the prime minister and Korea's president planned for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Busan, South Korea.

In 2002, Japan and Korea co-hosted the soccer World Cup, and Korea advanced further than Japan in the competition. Some Japanese were happy with this, and others disapproved. While thousands of middle-aged Japanese women mobbed Korean melodrama stars, the popularity of Sharin Yamano's manga *Hating the Korean Wave* captured another side of national feeling:

The book centers on a Japanese teenager, Kaname, who comes to have a "correct" understanding of Korea. It begins with a chapter that says South Korea's soccer team cheated to advance in the 2002 World Cup; subsequent chapters show how Kaname realizes that South Korea owes its current success to Japanese colonialism. "It is Japan who made it possible for Koreans to join

the ranks of major nations, not themselves,” Nishio [Kanji Nishio, a scholar of German literature and honorary chairman of the nationalist Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform], says, claiming that Japan even gave Koreans their identity because “they had no pride in their history”. (Onishi 2005b)

The proposition implied here is not that Japanese opinion was ‘for’ South Korea or ‘against’ South Korea during the 2002 World Cup. It was *both*. As Victor Cha notes: ‘The two countries competed so vigorously for the rights to host that they frightened FIFA officials into choosing neither solely; then after that, they virtually ignored each other as co-hosts’ (Cha 2002:4). It would be foolish to suggest that antagonism between Japan and South Korea was not severe. And yet the Japanese still managed some grace: ‘After their national team was eliminated, the overwhelming team favorite among Japanese was the Cinderella South Korean team. Polls showed as high as 60 percent of Japanese rooted for Korea’s advancing to the Cup final’ (ibid). That does, however, beg the question of the *other* 40 per cent of Japanese. In the end, though, arguing about whether Sharin Yamano was the exception or the rule is beside the point. For what is exhibited here are two incommensurable logics. One of the logics is that of *Realpolitik*, in this case the ‘distribution-of-spoils’ politics of FIFA. The other logic, that of distraction or diversion, is displayed in sports entertainment. It is perfectly possible for both to be represented strongly in national attitudes, just as it is possible, indeed normal, for national attitudes to be contradictory.

When looking at Japan’s contradictory pop culture love and pop culture demeaning of Korea, we could simply say that the Japanese have conflicted attitudes towards Korea, just as there are some Americans who like the French and others who dislike them. Yet, in the end, ‘likes and dislikes’ have little political traction and little impact upon culture industry markets. Opinion polls often show America to be widely disliked throughout the world, but this dislike has no discernable effect on the popularity of its films and music. In fact there is a plausible argument that the idea of crashing planes into the World Trade Towers on 9/11 – the ultimate criminal act of anti-Americanism – was borrowed from endless images of the like in Hollywood films. Public opinion is overrated as a determinant of politics, not least because of its inherently contradictory nature. This is especially so in matters of high politics, when the fate of nations is at stake. Strong

partisan views may influence the course of events and may dramatize political developments but such views are rarely decisive in the great turning points of history.

It was Winston Churchill who once pointed out that 'a political leader responsible for the direction of affairs must, even if unchanging in heart or objective, give his counsel now on the one side and now on the other of many public issues'.<sup>5</sup> While consistency in ordinary life is a marker of rationality, consistency in the world-historical domain leads to dogmatism, irrationalism, and extremism. Rationalism does not enable the kind of politics that is capable of resolving great historical antagonisms. This is not to say that politics on the grand historical stage is arbitrary or irrational – or for that matter weak-kneed or spineless. Rather, and more simply, it deals with what is un-decidable. In ordinary affairs, political actors make decisions. A Japanese citizen decides that she is either 'for' or 'against' Korean sovereignty over some rain-swept islets. Millions of decisions of this kind are made continuously. They are the staple of everyday politics. Yet in exceptional moments, such matters become un-decidable. So that what was once impossible becomes possible while still remaining in some sense not possible. The ordinary mode of politics involving decisions and attitudes is suspended while an exceptional mode of politics comes into play. This other, extraordinary, mode of politics is enigmatic. It blends, or strangely loops, 'for' *and* 'against'. A classic example is the case of Richard Nixon, the anti-Communist American President who opened up American relations with Communist China.

Such doubling – being *both* 'for' *and* 'against' – is a characteristic of the human imagination at work in both politics and art.<sup>6</sup> This is why it makes good sense to speak of the 'art of politics'. This is also why a strong distinction needs to be drawn between the artifacts of the culture industry and works of art. The two overlap but they are not identical. A melodrama and a comic series are culture industry products and principally entertainments. Some entertainments are local, and some can be exported across borders. Some nations, South Korea being one of them, have the knack of exporting their entertainments. Others do not. But this should not be confused with the export of culture, which is a much more profound thing, and much more difficult to do. An entertainment is not culture in the strong sense of that word. Strong culture is a function of art. I know it is popular to talk about filmic arts or comic arts but the trouble with this is that it muddles the boundary between art and entertainment. Doubtless there are works



of art and entertainment that slide across that boundary. Nonetheless it is an important boundary to insist on, because it helps us understand why the Korean Wave is never going to make a decisive difference in relations between Japan and Korea, and why reliance on soft power in international relations is an illusion.

Entertainments have only incidental things to tell us about politics. In January 2005 yet another old conflict flared up about the group of islets called Takeshima in Japan, and Dokdo in South Korea. Like all disputes between neighbours over islands, these are symptoms of a deeper antagonism. The journalist David McNeill wrote an interesting column about this for *OhmyNews*:

For us *gaijin* (foreigners) here in Japan, the depth of feeling in these disputes with Korea and China over what look like rocks in the middle of the ocean can be difficult to grasp, so as I often do in cases like this I turned to my neighbors to gauge popular opinion. “Take-what?” said Mrs. Shimoda in the house on my right. “Oh, Takeshima, that island off the coast somewhere, right? I don’t know much about it but it doesn’t seem very important, does it?” What about Mrs. Kuno on my left. Was she jumping up and down in front of the television waving a *hinomaru* flag and cursing the Koreans? “I’ve no idea what it is about,” she said. “But I hope it won’t stop Korea from sending over those TV dramas. I’m a big fan of Yon-sama”. (McNeill 2005)

What McNeill intended us to draw from his column was a lesson on the wisdom of ordinary people and the mendacity of politicians. Indeed he went on to make that explicit:

Over the five years I’ve been living here and working as a journalist, I’ve tried this exercise many times and never failed to be surprised by the gap between what I see on television and the opinions expressed in my own neighborhood. Most Japanese, frankly, couldn’t care less about these disputes and when they do

have opinions they are often very much at odds with those of their so-called political representatives.

What is implied here, of course, is that these politicians support things like Koizumi's visits to the war shrine or the agenda of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform and its lobbying to remove reference to Japan's wartime atrocities from high school texts – while 'the people' are innocent 'good souls' who rise above the prejudices of their political representatives (while, at the same time, voting for them).

The difficulty with this 'good soul vs bad politician' homily is that it compares the incommensurable – the television melodrama consumer on the other hand and the participant in political history. One belongs to the province of the culture industry, and the other to the empire of culture. They are not the same thing. They do not operate on the same level, in the same way, or with the same rhythm. This brings us back to the question of culture, and what it is. It is not entertainment. At a minimum culture is about three things: war and peace, tradition and modernity, the secular and the sacred. In the cases of both Korea and Japan, this is certainly true. The things that unite the two countries and that simultaneously divide them are these issues.

### ***War and peace***

Let us take the question of war first. From the Korean side there is the justified loathing of Japan's war record. From Japan's side there is the casting of atrocity from mind – for to do otherwise would be to become passive before history. Sorry is a hard word to say without an accompanying cathartic narrative to expiate feelings of guilt and shame that bad deeds engender. Be wary of self-flagellating histories. They are as problem-ridden as the histories of denial. For the Japanese to dwell on their wartime record without some narrative of catharsis would mean to be paralyzed by the shame of the past and tormented into inaction by the burden of guilt. It would mean being neutered forever in international relations – sentenced, for all time, to be only ever able to fight Godzilla. Such passivity, even if it does stem from justifiable guilt, makes it difficult for a country to function as a successful modernity – and there is no doubt that Japan is an astonishingly successful modern society.

### ***Tradition and modernity***

The thing to note about successful modernity is how rare it is. Most societies have now made a nominal shift from traditional norms to modern ways. But few have made that transition successfully. Most live in and with a broken-down modernity. This makes Japan's Meiji-era reforms and their lasting effects quite remarkable – notwithstanding the catastrophe of the 1930s and 1940s and the complex issues of identity that successful modernity invariably presents us with. In Japan there is a strong feeling that the country westernized and modernized, and removed itself from 'feudal Asia'. In many ways it became – in a pop visual sense – Caucasian, not Asian. Tokyo today is a more modern city than Paris. At the same time it is common for visitors to observe the visceral dislike of 'Asians' by Japanese.

While it is different in character, Korean modernity is as remarkable as Japanese modernity and shows every sign of becoming as successful in the long run. Though it is not as aesthetically interesting as Tokyo, the modernity of Seoul is nevertheless impressive. Weber's Protestant Ethic is alive and well and thriving in South Korea. This makes it yet another model for the Chinese who are attempting to negotiate the difficult (and, for most countries, the *impossible*) route to successful modernity. Melodramas about urban Korean professionals represent a kind of modern imaginary that the Chinese – in their own way – are struggling to adapt and adopt. The television drama *The Marrying Type*, for example, relocates the 'Sex and the City' dilemmas of the single urban professional woman looking for love from New York to Seoul.

### ***Secular and sacred***

Neither the importers nor the exporters of such entertainments, though, should ever kid themselves about the power of popular culture. Entertainment's primary function is to allow us to forget. It is amnesiac. It distracts and relaxes us. That is its principal social function. What it does not do, with rare exceptions, is to answer difficult historical and political questions. That is what culture in the strong sense does. So too much talk of pop culture and soft power can obscure what matters most in a culture. In Korea's case it is like saying K-pop matters more than the phenomenal growth of Christianity in post-war Korea. It doesn't. The obverse is true.

This is not to say that strong culture always takes a religious form. It is true that the most modern society on the planet, the United States, is also one of the most religious. Yet,

while acknowledging this fact, we also ought not to forget the observation of Alexis de Tocqueville that there were always two books to be found in the American homes that he visited – Shakespeare and the Bible.<sup>7</sup> In other words, it is not religion per se that drives modernity but peculiar forms of it, forms that inhabit the space of strong culture. Secular culture, like the not-very-religious Shakespeare, can co-habit with the sacred and numinous in the same space at the same time. What is common to both the *King James Bible* and *Richard II* is a conceptual apparatus capable of dealing with deep and abiding historical and political divisions. Americans, many of whom were ‘anti-English’, nonetheless found in Shakespeare ‘a symbol of unity, a moving force, almost a directing deity’.<sup>8</sup> That is what exemplifies strong culture. It is culture capable of uniting warring parties in ways that elevates both parties to greater heights.

American Protestant theologians in the early nineteenth century envisaged a world with three centres: America, Europe and East Asia. This prediction proved astonishingly accurate. The wealth of the modern world – whether we account for this in per capita measures of GNP, technological innovation, or social prosperity – is concentrated in these three regions on their maritime peripheries and especially in their portal cities from Amsterdam to New York to Shanghai.<sup>9</sup> The gap between the maritime rim of the Big Three and the rest of the world grows larger ever day. More than two hundred years ago, Americans – meaning principally those who lived on the Eastern Seaboard of the United States – saw the coming ascendancy of the Big Three very clearly. Every bit as interesting was the view, which accompanied this American Protestant futurology, that the prospects of Europe were less promising in the long run than those of East Asia. Mercantile America, from early days, took East Asia very seriously (Van Alstyne 1974). Even more revealing, much of America’s outreach across the Pacific to East Asia in the nineteenth century was done by missionaries. Consider this in the context of contemporary South Korea. Thirty per cent of the population of South Korea today is Christian, and it has the second largest overseas missionary cohort in the world after the United States – 14,000 strong (Onishi 2006). Most interesting of all, Korea today is sending Christian missionaries to China.<sup>10</sup> This is a risky business considering the wariness of China’s ruling party of any alternative organized system of belief.

Successful modernity, as I have observed, is a rare thing. The world is filled with many examples of ailing and clapped-out species of modernity. In part, this is because of the

luck of geography. The most functional modern societies (which are not to be confused with the most loved) are commonly port or littoral societies whose economies have developed around one or more of the following: extensive seaboards, great river and delta systems, seas or vast lake systems. Island, peninsula, and archipelago societies figure prominently in their ranks – Korea and Japan, Taiwan and Singapore being prime contemporary examples. Venice, the Low Countries and Britain are key historical counterparts of the East Asian portals. American wealth has long been concentrated around its seacoasts and Great Lakes. This concentration becomes ever more accentuated with the passage of time (Rappaport and Sachs 2003).

In short, modernity thrives best on the world's maritime circumference.<sup>11</sup> But geography is not the only important factor. History, and historical luck, also plays its part. Had resource-rich North Korea not become a hermit state during the Cold War, leaving South Korea bereft of natural resources, it is unlikely that South Korea would have become a mercantile-industrial, export-orientated state, in which a once-dominant landlord class and a society based on an extended family system have retreated, to be replaced by apartment-dominated urbanism and an education-intensive social system. The mix of city and knowledge, urbanism and intellectual capital in a peninsula state is a good example of the kind of society that succeeds in the modern world.

The case of South Korea also illustrates another peculiarity of successful modernity. When the Communists grabbed control of North Korea, this looked like a case of historical bad luck. Korean families were divided and the North was turned into a withdrawn and menacing state that enslaved its citizens. Yet, as Machiavelli observed, virtue is what you make of your fortune – whether that fortune happens to be good or bad.<sup>12</sup> What makes a society virtuous in Machiavelli's sense – able to master fortune and ride its ups and downs – is strong culture. Sometimes strong culture expresses itself through the medium of art, sometimes through philosophy, and sometimes through religion. It was Hegel who observed the crucial stimulating role that art, religion and philosophy play in highly dynamic societies.

What allowed South Korea to capitalize (literally) on its (bad) fortune? Calvinism imported from America played a part; so did Christianity more generally. Korean Christians took a leading role in the resistance to the Japanese Occupation, and became

a major social force after World War II.<sup>13</sup> Around twenty per cent of South Koreans are Protestants and ten per cent are Catholic. There is a clear relationship between the extraordinarily rapid spread of Christianity in Korea after 1945 and the emergence of a highly energetic Korean modernity. What is being suggested here is not that the Protestant ethic equals capitalism, but rather that great and dynamic societies have an enigmatic culture core.<sup>14</sup> Protestantism in South Korea in part provides this because of the Protestant metaphysic in which individual conscience and free will are combined with a powerful sense of predestination and necessity.

What makes religion in South Korea important to Korean modernity is not just Protestantism but also its coexistence with other equally enigmatic metaphysical currents, especially Buddhism. The broad pattern of Korean belief is riddled with paradox. The scholarly Confucian tradition, with its academic emphasis on text and writing, coexists with a Korean Buddhism that has mostly rejected scholastic and textual Buddhist schools for the meditational anti-discursive Seon School. The popular Korean Seon form of Buddhism is a tributary of the larger stream of Zen Buddhism. The cohabitation of Catholics and Protestants, and their insertion in a previously non-Christian society, heightens the prevailing Korean social sense of paradox. In general what we see here is the pattern of enigma that plays a crucial role in the generation of meaning in successful dynamic societies. Enigma serves as a kind of crucible of meaning. The most important advantage that an enigmatic culture source provides is to allow a society to manage deep divisions and ambiguities productively. These ambiguities may be cosmic (the relation between the profane and the sacred) or existential (the relationship between men and women), or they may be historical and political, such as the kind of divisions that lead to war. Strong culture – from Taoism to Shakespeare, Zen to Calvinism – encourages this process by helping to reconcile mighty oppositions in interesting and profound, and often *unexpected*, ways.<sup>15</sup>

The effects of strong culture are much more potent than culture industries. Yes, the heroes and villains of melodrama may have a universal appeal. Yes, the Korean Wave relays American culture industry products to China (Onishi 2006). But while it may be easier for a Chinese consumer to identify with a Korean rapper than an American rapper, the music is still post-industrialized urban inner-city American pop music. What is more interesting, however, is that both South Korea and the United States are exporting

countries. They export steel and cars, film and music, and, yes, even religion. Observe the missionary character of this religion. Missionary religion is a religion of export. I am sure that Korean rappers despise the doughty evangelicals but the paradox is that the latter make the former possible.<sup>16</sup>

Strong culture manages paradox. The great themes of strong culture are paradoxical. This is true of both Japan and the United States. The paradoxical poetics of Zen Buddhism and Shakespeare are as important to these societies as iPods and Play Stations.<sup>17</sup> Paradox also means that the most secular of societies are sometimes the ones *most* concerned with the sacred. The Jain religion, for instance, played a major role in the highly successful mercantile life of maritime Gujarat and Maharashtra India before the coming of the British. The rise of the Bollywood culture industry in the great port city of Bombay is a distant echo of this. One can say much the same of the mediating role of Taoism in Taiwanese and Singaporean modernity.<sup>18</sup>

What applies to religion also applies to art. The reason that I have insisted that we separate art from entertainment is that art understands and retails paradox in a way that entertainment does not. The paradox may be Taoist or Zen Buddhist, Pauline or Greco-Roman, Calvinist or Shakespearean – it doesn't matter. Doubtless, melodramas have the odd courtesan with a heart of gold but for the most part there is little overlap between hero and villain. Love-forlorn Korean singles may be dutifully Confucian while falling in and out of love, but this is not a dramatic paradox, anymore than the propensity of Indian melodramatic characters to fall in love in a land of arranged marriages. What I mean by paradox is what Australian television calls 'adult themes', which, incidentally, is not code-word for undressing. This is the kind of theme where the violent man is the peace-keeper, the cynic is the true idealist, and where the God-forsaken soul is the redeemer.

Entertainment cannot match the enigmatic power of art, and because it cannot it has little role in making friends of enemies. A soccer match, or many soccer matches, can not turn the profanity of bitter national foes into the sacred bond of great allies. The 2002 Soccer World Cup competition illustrates how illusory the soft power of the culture industries really is. A World Cup spectacle has drama and tension and exhilaration. It can provide a shared moment of catharsis for divided peoples. But a common sporting epiphany is not a political bridge. Take the exemplary case of what happened in 2006 in

Seoul. The Korean Political Science Association and the Korea Football Association held a conference on the subject of 'Football and International Peace'. Ron Hughes reported in the *International Herald Tribune* that:

Looking back to the 2002 World Cup, jointly held by South Korea and Japan, and forward to the 2006 World Cup in June and July, the conference brought together academics and politicians with a single theme: can soccer, which exerts enormous popular interest around the globe, be more than a temporary diversion to wars and strife?

Certainly the conference participants *thought* that sport could trump war. It was suggested – in the welcoming remarks by Hong Koo Lee, a former prime minister of South Korea – that 'the will existed to use sports as a tool to peace'. However inconvenient political reality demonstrated why in fact that was not, and was not going to be, the case. Lee's political homily may have found a ready audience among the conference goers, yet as Ron Hughes observed:

Lee's desire to unify North and South Korea did not bring the North to the 2002 World Cup, though there have subsequently been international matches between the Koreas. Mong Joon Chung, the president of the South Korean soccer federation and a moving force behind the international conference, was slightly hamstrung by events. His keynote speech drew on the cooperation between Japan and South Korea in 2002, on the historic example of a member of the Japanese royal family attending the opening ceremony, making Prince Tokamuda the first relative of the Japanese emperor to set foot on Korean soil after half a century of enmity between the neighbors. Even as Chung addressed the conference, the Korean National Assembly, of which he is a member, and the Japanese government were at loggerheads over territorial waters around a small uninhabited island in the sea between them. The sense of triumph of 2002 had lasted far longer than the games, but the



realities of politics are not for long smoothed by sport. (Hughes 2006)

*Indeed not* – simply because splendid entertainment and high politics are worlds apart. They are incommensurable and should not be confused.

Only the art of paradox can answer the question: how can you get along with a nation that has subjected your country to great cruelty and brutality? That question is a political question, and those whose business is high politics cannot rely on melodrama to answer such a question. Moralizing about how history is written doesn't help either. A history that admits what everyone already knows anyway – the incontrovertible crimes of war – does not fulfill the role of strong culture. An honest admission of horrible brutality is necessary in order to establish an accurate factual historical record but it is not a resonant act of historical-political imagination. The latter must transform national horror into universal beauty. If it does not achieve this, then whatever role it might play, it is not an act of strong culture, and thus has only a limited historical-political value.

For example, it cannot do what the story of Oscar Schindler in Thomas Keneally's powerful novel of his life does – reconcile the history of the Germans and the Jews.<sup>19</sup> Schindler was a dissolute, gambling, profiteering, alcoholic, womanizing playboy who was a transculturally good person who saved the lives of his Jewish factory workers in Nazi Germany. He was good in a way that most people are not good. He was good by being bad. He was a paradox.<sup>20</sup> He was not the hero or the villain of a melodrama but the enigmatic good–bad, bad–good character of art (Murphy 1994:105–118). Art in this sense is the antithesis of the 'anti' ideologies that are the dominant form of political ideology throughout the world today. 'Anti-American', 'anti-Japanese', 'anti-Korean' sentiments are of a type. They are cartoons of morality: specious and infantile. Melodrama cannot reverse this kind of thinking. Art can, but art is difficult, rare and slow to burn.

So what do we do in between time? The aggrieved feelings of Korea and China toward Japan will not break into war as long as American hard power remains a formidable presence. It took 150 years of hellish wars for the Germans and French to reconcile. The hard power of the unloved third party, the United States, guaranteed that reconciliation –

as it guarantees peace in East Asia today. The day when this is no longer necessary is the day when a trans-culturally good person is a common hero-anti-hero to Japanese, Koreans and Chinese alike.<sup>21</sup> We await the East Asian Shakespeare with a Zen cast of mind to immortalize this enigmatic character. Until that day, be thankful for hard power.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the late 1970s, the greatest of all Japanese film makers was considered 'un-bankable' by Japanese producers, and had to go abroad to finance his films.

<sup>2</sup> See Peters, Marginson and Murphy, *Creativity and the Global Knowledge Economy* (2009), chapter 6; Marginson, Murphy and Peters, *Global Creation: Space, Mobility and Synchrony in the Age of the Knowledge Economy* (forthcoming), chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> The history of Hollywood is the history of actors coming from rural Minnesota and directors from Taiwan. The impact of such migrations, not least internal migrations, is evident in the cultural history of many places. David Landes (1999: 365) observes, in the case of Japan, the energizing impact that the practice of *sankin kotai* (alternate residence) had on economic creativity. Edo was the largest city in the world in the eighteenth century. 'The movement of several hundred *daimyō* and their families from provincial han to Edo and back made for constant stir, an exposure to strange places, and new commodities...'

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Park, Vice President International Business at Korea's CJ Entertainment, quoted in Mark Russell 'Korea-Japan relations: A thaw of bad relations has the two nations sharing cultures', *The Hollywood Reporter.com*, 15 February 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill did not think that there was any absolute or natural law that dictated a side in politics. See Winston Churchill, 'Consistency in Politics', *Thoughts and Adventures* (1948).

<sup>6</sup> On the role of doubling in the human imagination, see for example Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Dell, 1964); Albert Rothenberg, *The Emerging Goddess: The Creative Process in Art, Science, and Other Fields* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Douglas Hofstadter, *I am a Strange Loop* (New York: Perseus, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume Two, Part Three, Chapter Ten, Notes.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is Ashley Horace Thorndike's, from an address to the British Academy in London in 1927. See Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (2004: 7).

<sup>9</sup> See Peters, Marginson, and Murphy, *Creativity and the Global Knowledge Economy* (2009), chapters 1 and 6; Marginson, Murphy and Peters, *Global Creation: Space, Mobility and Synchrony in the Age of the Knowledge Economy* (forthcoming), chapters 1–3.

<sup>10</sup> Protestant Christianity is growing very rapidly today in semi-legalized conditions in China. See the very revealing report on this development by Carol Lee Hamrin, 'China's Protestants: A Mustard Seed for Moral Renewal?'. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, May 13, 2008. Available from:

[http://www.aei.org/research/Tocqueville/publications/pubID.27992.projectID.29/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.aei.org/research/Tocqueville/publications/pubID.27992.projectID.29/pub_detail.asp)

Harmrin notes: 'There were fewer than 1 million Protestants and over 4 million Catholics in 1949—a little over 1 percent of China's total population of 450 million. By 1965, there were far fewer practicing Christians, of course, as Mao Zedong pursued his policy of escalating persecution. Yet, by 1980, the total was back up to 4 million and growing. As of 2005, Christians were approaching 5 percent of the population, four-fifths of them Protestants, all with virtually no public support or access to China's mass media—and with the majority not registered with the government. Projections for 2020 show even more growth, with a jump to 10 percent or even more.' The size of China's Protestant surge, and the parallels with South Korea, suggests not only the onset of yet another massive chapter in the history of the Protestant spirit of capitalism, long after Protestantism has dimmed in its European homeland, and at a time when European Protestantism seems to be almost irrelevant.

<sup>11</sup> See Peters, Marginson, and Murphy (2009) chapters 1 and 6; Marginson, Murphy and Michael Peters (forthcoming), chapters 1–3.

<sup>12</sup> N. Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Collins, 1972), chapters six and seven.

<sup>13</sup> The majority of the members of president Syngman Rhee's first post-1945 cabinet were Protestants. Rhee was a Methodist.

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<sup>14</sup> John Carroll's sociological re-telling of the Jesus story, *The Existential Jesus* (2007) is a classic account of the way in which religion creates this kind of enigmatic cultural configuration.

<sup>15</sup> Whether we understand the aspect of the unexpected in terms of the swift shifts that occur in Shakespeare's 'sudden thought' or else the 'sudden enlightenment, sudden cultivation' (*dono donsū*) emphasized by the Seon Master Toeong Seongcheol (1912–1993) is moot.

<sup>16</sup> Some Korean rappers are Christian and give thanks to God in album credits. But that simply points back to the strange relationship between twentieth-century American popular music and evangelical religion. American evangelism is one of the key sources of American popular music – American soul music, for instance, is secularized American gospel music. Yet secular singers, even ones with religious beliefs, rarely have displayed much patience with evangelical views. There are some exceptions, such as the musicians who were members of California's Vineyard Fellowship cohort (most famously Bob Dylan) in the 1980s. The norm, though, is exemplified by the following: in the dying days of his failed US presidential bid in 2004, the wooden patrician Democrat John Kerry called on Bruce Springsteen to save his campaign. Both Springsteen and fellow Kerry supporter ex-president Bill Clinton lit up Kerry's sullen campaign stage with gestures and flourishes borrowed straight from the book of evangelical performances. The effect, it should be noted, was only to make Kerry look even more leaden than he already did. The further irony was that evangelism was a *bête noire* of American Democrats, who regularly castigated their Republican political opponents for appealing to evangelicals.

<sup>17</sup> On the role of Zen-influenced paradox in Japanese business culture, see Peters, Marginson and Murphy (2009) chapter 9.

<sup>18</sup> The majority of the Overseas Chinese in the Dutch East Indies and Malaysia came from southern Fujian. Taoism was significant amongst this group, reflective of the concentration of Taoists in the Fujian and Canton Provinces. In the twentieth century, the principal concentration of Taoists was to be found on Taiwan. This is a result of the fact that Taiwan was sinicized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with a great emigration of persons from nearby Fujian Province. Most Taiwanese speak Taiwanese Minnan, a variant of the language of South Fujian Province. A popular take on the economic success of East Asian states in the second half of the twentieth century was to dub these states or their strategies 'Confucian', explaining their successes in terms of Confucian-influenced social and political ethics. However, the kind of creative forces needed for successful modernization are more readily understood as a function of intuitive, holistic, aesthetic modes of thought that are much closer in nature to Taoism or Zen Buddhism than they are to the virtue-ethics of Confucianism. Because such intuitive-aesthetic modes of thought are primarily non-discursive, their social influence is often tacit rather than explicit, though no less efficacious for that fact. This is discussed in further detail in Marginson, Murphy and Peters (forthcoming), chapters 1–3.

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<sup>19</sup> Keneally's novel (*Schindler's List* 2003) is far more interesting than Steven Spielberg's more well-known film.

<sup>20</sup> In an analogous way, the Korean Seon Buddhist emphasizes the middle path between good and evil or mass and energy. Everything flows into oneness, and every contradiction is harmonized in a singularity.

<sup>21</sup> On the nature of the trans-cultural good person, see Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame* (1985).