

Advertising Paekdusan: An ethnography of travel in contemporary South Korea

Introduction

‘Advertising makes sense because culture makes sense.’

Shovelling smoke (2004), **William Mazzarella**

Through an ethnography inside one of Seoul’s advertising agencies, my research aims to investigate how travel images of North Korean destinations are produced in South Korean advertising organisations and are commoditised (and consumed) as Korean cultural products. The study of the relations between advertising images and the commoditisation of culture is a growing field in anthropology. In this respect, anthropologists Leiss et al. have highlighted five historical frames through which advertising has used culture to sell commodities since the end of the nineteenth century (in Johnson, 2008).¹ Their ‘fourth’ and ‘fifth’ frames, respectively, the process of commoditising one’s identification with a local culture (mainly from the 1970’s to the 1980’s) and the reactive process of commoditising one’s claim for individual creativity as a form of independence from a local culture (mainly from the 1990’s onwards), have received most attention and have been the subjects of a large number of recent anthropological studies on advertising and cultural commoditisation. For instance, Miller’s study of non-alcoholic beverage campaigns in Trinidad emphasises that, before putting forward a product’s utility, advertising often amalgamates it with a series of complex peripheral social attributes familiar to its targeted consumers, as a means to promote it as a local cultural commodity (1994 and 1997). Foster, in his research on soft drink consumption in Papua New Guinea, underlines the importation and representation of new social categories (such as American youth culture) in the local advertising campaigns of global commodities, as a means to generate new cultural identification possibilities among local communities (2002 and 2008). Mazzarella’s work on consumerism in India highlights the use of already existing cultural forms and values by local advertising companies, thereby reinforcing the stereotypical perception of local cultural differences on a global scale (2004). Since the 1990’s, by deconstructing the visual and semantic content of ads and campaigns, anthropologists have attempted to identify the impact of advertising industries on specific populations in terms of global modernity and local traditions. One of the main anthropological debates with regard to advertising concerns its propensity to represent a distortion between people’s real existences/experiences and the idealised, yet probable, lives represented in global and local campaigns. More specifically, anthropologists have been concerned with a significant consequence of this distortion, namely, that by being exposed to images of (mainly) Western cultures in commercial ads, local communities have started to perceive themselves as ‘commoditisable’ products that could be exchanged or replaced (Foster, 2008). Concerns for issues related with the impact of commercial campaigns on non-Western consumers, have resulted in three different approaches to the anthropology of advertising. First, some anthropologists have argued that consumers are mere recipients of intentional global and/or capitalistic schemes, which commoditise a population’s cultural values and, consequently, generate desire to exchange and consume them (Foster, 2002; Mazzarella, 2004). Secondly, others have asserted that advertising seems to have no impact on local consumers who, by actively responding to selling strategies, demonstrate that they are not the end point of the advertising process (Miller, 1994 and 1997). Thirdly, some anthropologists have argued that consumers are, paradoxically, virtually non-existent and considered irrelevant to the internal politics at play between the advertising agencies and their clients (Moeran, 2006). This debate illustrates the inherent choice of ethnographic focus that anthropologists have to make as they approach advertising: ads and campaigns either require anthropological enquiry by being analysed as finished products that have specific effects on a given population (*consumption*, cf. Foster, 2002; Mazzarella, 2003; and Miller, 1994); or as social facts determined by a number of practical, economic, social, ideological and temporal conditions of

¹ Their first three frames are the use of cultural idolatry in newspapers and magazines (mainly from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth), the iconological process of associating products with symbolic cultural attributes in radio ads (mainly during the 1940’s), and the promotion of interpersonal advancement and/or cultural narcissism in TV adds (mainly from the 1950’s to the 1960’s).

possibility inherent to any given advertising organisation (*production*, cf. Miller, 1997; and Moeran, 2006). My D.Phil. research contributes to this debate by investigating both sides of this consumption-production spectrum within South Korean society, where advertising companies are greatly solicited in the production of travel images for domestic tourism.

Indeed, in 2010, some 31 million South Koreans have taken part in organised domestic tours within their territory, which makes just under 1.6 trips for every ROK citizen. This compares with 1.6 trip for every Japanese citizen, 1.7 for every UK citizen and 0.4 for every Croatian citizen. Since the beginning of the 1990's, eager to mobilise its only natural resource (i.e. its own population) to maintain economic growth, the ROK government has completely waived all travel restrictions. As a result, there has been a growing infatuation for both outbound and domestic tourism, particularly among the nation's middle-class in major urban areas. One of the most popular destinations for South Korean domestic tourists is a place that is, paradoxically, not located within the nation's territory: *Paekdusan*, a mountain on the border between China and North Korea, which has been visited by hundreds of thousands of South Koreans since the Sino-South Korean relations were normalised in the 1990's. This could be explained by looking at two social factors. First, the IMF (Asian Financial Crisis) of 1997 has led South Korea to look for new strategies to maintain its growth such as the advertisement of Korean culture to its own population. In the late 1990's, South Koreans were told that they had lost their traditions (shamanism, rural landscape, ancestral practices, etc.) in the rapid industrial development of the 1960's - 1980's. Secondly, during the same period, travel agencies started developing advertising campaigns representing some parts of the Korean territory as the last remains of an 'earthly heaven' Korea had supposedly once been. As a result, I argue that the growing interest in North Korean locations as travel destinations among South Korea's middle-class in urban areas and the changing perception of the South Korean domestic territory by the South Korean population, are widely driven by the increasing production of South Korean travel advertising which commoditises both South *and* North Korean destinations alike as *Korean* cultural products.

Because I have just started my fieldwork last August, this paper illustrates a research that can only remain quite speculative for the time being. Hence, its aim is only to demonstrate the complexity of this phenomenon by exploring the various anthropological aspects it seems to imply. As a result, this paper proposes to articulate tourism to Paekdusan in terms of the following anthropological themes: class mobility, cultural authenticity, pilgrimage and the production/consumption of advertising images. Only time will tell if these themes indeed correspond to the ethnographic reality of this phenomenon.

But before going into these anthropological theories, let me start by stating a few facts on the state of tourism in South Korea.

State of Tourism in South Korea

Outbound, Inbound² and Domestic Tourism in South Korea

At large, the anthropological literature about tourism in Korea demonstrates that it is undergoing immense development. With regard to outbound tourism, large attention has been given to South Korean tourists going to Australia, on the basis of its significant 65.2% growth per annum in 1995 reported by the Annual Statistical Report on Tourism (Ministry of Transportation in the Republic of Korea in 1996). Noted explanations to such growth were given by Shin and Tucker who identified it as an understandable consequence of the softening circulation policies for South Koreans travelling outside their territory (in Lee and Park, 1998). Shin and Tucker show that up until the early 1980's, South Koreans were only allowed to travel outside Korea if they were 50 years old or older, accompanied by their spouse and if they had placed ₩2 million at the national bank of Korea as a

² 'Outbound' and 'Inbound' tourism are sub-sections of International tourism. Outbound tourism refers to residents who travel outside their own country while inbound tourism refers to travellers who arrive in a different country than their own.

deposit (Ibid.) They argue that during the Park years the government only focused on inbound tourism as a source of national income and was very much concerned with keeping its population within the territory in order to maintain its growth. Thus, South Koreans had to wait until the end of the 1980's to see all the travelling restrictions completely waived. With regard to inbound tourism, *The Encyclopaedia of Tourism* mentions a growth in arrivals from 1.6 to 4 million between 1986 and 1996 and a \$1.5 to 5.4 billion increase in earnings over the same period (2000). Indeed, as the 1988 Olympic Games approached, South Korea opened its boundaries to an incoming flow of foreign visitors. This may have made South Koreans want to define the terms of their own tradition while, at the same time, discovering other cultures and societies.

With regard to South Korea's *domestic* tourism, attention has been paid to sustainable infrastructure as a reaction to the fast industrialisation that the country has undergone since the 1960's. As Korea used to be predominantly rural and agricultural, tourism studies have been carried out on the consequences of its rapid transformation into an urban-oriented nation. By the 1990's, Korea became one of the top twelve economies in the world but this had an impact on rural areas such as declining incomes, depopulation and environmental degradation (Hong, Kim and Kim, 2003). In 2005, the *Environmental Sustainability Index* ranked Korea 122nd out of 146 nations (Choo and Jamal, 2009). As a result, following the Environmental Friendly Agriculture Promotion Act of 1999, the Korean government turned its attention to organic farming as a way to potentially solve rural/urban inequalities, generate additional income to farmers and contribute to environmental sustainable development. Over the last 10 years, this has led to the considerable expansion of urban agriculture and ecotourism infrastructures throughout the country.

Tourism to Paekdusan

Located on the border between China and North Korea, Paekdusan is the highest mountain of the Korean Peninsula and of Northeast China. It is a volcanic mountain which, after a major eruption in 969 AD (± 20 years), generated a caldera now filled with water and known as 'Heaven Lake' (천지). Paekdusan was known for hiding Pegae Hill, Kim Il-Sung's famous campsite during the struggle between the Korean People's Revolutionary Army and the Japanese colonial forces between 1936 and 1943. It is also Kim Jong-Il's and Kim Jong-Un's proclaimed birthplace, even though Soviet records have recently belied this information. More generally it is mythically associated with the essentialist legend of Korean people's birth as a nation. According to this mythology, Paekdusan is the place chosen by the God Hwan-ung to descend to earth and engender the Korean people more than 4,300 years ago. In his research on nineteenth century travelogues depicting journeys to Manchuria, Dr. Jo Yoong-hee underlines that (mostly Western) travellers perceived Paekdusan and its vicinity 'as the place where Korean and Chinese historical contexts were mingled rather than a place which presented restrictions for people with an explicit border line' (2010: 135). He argues that this dominant perception, at the end of the nineteenth century, progressively gave way to the (Chinese, Korean and Western) perception(s) of a hybrid location situated at the intersection of two nations. This transformation most likely influenced Paekdusan's contemporary ambiguous status as a touristic destination. Indeed, by selling trips to 'Paekdusan', when in fact they technically can only take their customers to Changbai san, South Korean travel agencies advertise package tours to Paekdusan as a hybrid practice astride between two forms of tourism, i.e. *outbound* (territorially speaking) and *domestic* (culturally speaking).

With regard to Paekdusan, the anthropological literature is virtually non-existent. This might be explained by the fact that the mountain could not be visited by South Koreans until the normalisation of South Korean and Chinese relations in the 1990's when China granted South Koreans access to it through Manchuria. Moreover, tourism to Paekdusan should also be considered in the light of South Korea's 'Sunshine Policy' towards North Korea, i.e. Kim Dae Jung's 1998 decision to strengthen the bond between the two nations. This policy, which ended in 2008, was designed to reach

out for North Korea on the basis of a tripartite principle.³ Even though this policy did not concern Paekdusan directly, it is still worth considering in this research since it succeeded in granting South Koreans access to another North Korean Mountain for touristic purposes, i.e. Gungang san. This might have influenced North Korea to punctually tolerate South Korean tourists to visit the North Korean side of 'Heaven Lake'. Moreover, in 2005 Kim Jong-Il gave his permission to the Hyundai Asan Corporation to start developing a tourist market to a limited number of tourists on the North Korean side of the mountain. English-speaking guidebooks on North Korea are usually written by authors who have been granted access to North Korea on special arrangements with the North Korean government. Their mentioning of the 'holy mountain' strikes by their dithyrambic remarks, describing it as a spectacular scenery, 'the cradle of the Korean nation', and a proud national symbol of the leader's headquarters during the guerrilla (1936-43) who: 'with mercurial powers, /.../ led his armies to thousands of victorious battles against the Japanese' (Willoughby, 2007: 198). Since then, over a hundred thousand South Koreans have made the trip (Harris, 2007). However, perhaps because of the quite recent nature of the phenomenon, there is a clear lack of literature on this journey. Moreover, considering the small number of ethnographies about tourism, the gap in anthropological research related to the South Korean tourism to Paekdusan is not very surprising. Nevertheless, since it involves a high number of complex social, political, economical, territorial, historical and cultural variables, which will be discussed in the course of the next chapter, the small amount of general research concerning it, is quite striking.

Now, let us turn to the anthropological theoretical background, which might help articulate tourism to Paekdusan in terms of Korean society. The first theme that I would like to cover is South Korean society's class mobility.

Class Mobility

Confucianism, Class and Yangban model

Korean anthropologist Lee, depicts a conceptual dimension through which one might attempt to understand the development of domestic tourism in South Korea: Yangbanization. Sometimes compared to the Samurai Warriors, the Yangbans used to designate (especially during the Koryo and Choson dynasties) upper-class individuals associated with political prestige and social standing on the basis of patrilineal agnatic heredity. They scrupulously followed puritanical Confucian principles and were also regarded for their elegance and dignity. There has been a growing interest in unravelling the ways traditional Confucian culture was transformed and recreated as part and parcel of modern South Korean society in recent years (Shima, 1992) and special attention has been paid to the Yangban model and its contemporary metamorphosis. Today, Yangban is mostly used as a title of respect towards men and even though the model no longer exists as a formal institution, 'there is a discernible tendency to try to assimilate one's lifestyle with that of Yangban' within South Korea's rural population (Lee in Toshio, 1998: 195). Furthermore, anthropologist Toshio demonstrates that in contemporary South Korea, Yangban is now a status that commoners are able to acquire through the endorsement of associated behaviours. He shows that, through linking a relative to a Yangban lineage and through the observance of Yangban lifestyle, one might be recognized as such. Anthropologist Nakagawa shows for instance that written genealogies (chokpo), first made in the fifteenth century as exclusive Yangban possessions, are being composed and recomposed by many contemporary South Korean families in order to associate their own ancestral lineage to the Yangban class (1997). Similarly, Lett's analysis of South Korea's 'new' urban middle-class (1998) shows that the middle-class population present in urban areas exhibits upper-class characteristics in its daily occupations (family, taste, lifestyle, marriage, education, etc.). She argues that this tendency reveals the inheritance of a traditional disposition, directly linked to the Confucian legacy of the Yangban model, which consists in constantly seeking higher status. Building on this literature, my research will explore the relations between the process of Yangbanization and the growing infatuation for domestic tourism in South

³ 1) Armed provocation by the North will not be tolerated, 2) the South will not attempt to absorb the North in any manner and 3) The South actively seeks cooperation with the North.

Korea. Drawing on Lett's argument, tourism to Paekdusan will be considered as a potential distinctive mark of status elevation and social transfiguration practiced by the modern Yangban gentleman (or gentlewoman) in a sort of 'Grand-Tour' of the South Korean 'territory'. This aspiration to seek a higher status is alternatively thought to be either the 'logical result' of recent favourable political and economical factors linked to South Korea's rapid growth (Kurz and Müller, 1987; Lipset and Zetterberg, 1959) or, on the contrary, something connected to unfavourable recent industrial factors since there seems to be no significant increase in people's social chances in recent years (Abelman, 2003).

Cultural Authenticity

Kinship and Cultural 'authenticity'

Another trend in anthropological literature, which may help understand tourism to Paekdusan is the analysis of its Korea's kinship structures and how they can explain changes in South Korean society at large. Anthropologist Yoo identifies that most scholars concerned with Korean kinship and community structures have defined traditional Korean society as either based on hierarchical agnatic patrilineality or on associative community (1998). Indeed, they usually distinguish between two normative systems of Korean culture, i.e. the kinship system, which is lineage-oriented, formal, hierarchical and Confucian; and the community system that, is informal, egalitarian and reciprocal (Kim, 1964; Brandt, 1971; Deuchler, 1992). However, according to Yoo, these systems are based on inadequate samples as most of these Korean kinship studies have been focusing on the analysis of elite lineages at sites renowned for their Yangban groups. Instead, Yoo endeavoured to research the living patterns of the masses by going to Nammang, a coastal village located on Yongju Island, where he discovered an associative agnatic system which had not been identified elsewhere in Korea. Yoo argues that Nammang families encourage the nuclearisation of their household as soon as possible in order to multiply food resources, because the village system follows a communal ownership which states that only households, as single units, are allowed to claim a fishing-ground share (1998). This indicates that equality is based on the number of households and not on the number of people within them. This social structure blurs the distinction between the traditional Confucian kinship system and the communitarian structure usually made by other anthropologists. Indeed, in the traditional Confucian model, the household's eldest son was to take over the house and the family name whereas the younger brothers were encouraged to leave early in order to form branch families (economic primogeniture). However, as Yoo shows on Yongju Island, because the children are encouraged to leave very early on, it is usually the youngest son who ends up staying at home and who, consequently, takes over the household, cares for the parents, assumes headship and, *in fine*, inherits the house. Moreover, as a result of these hierarchical changes, ancestor's rites do not have to respect senior lines of superiority. The division of the ritual roles in Nammang, (i.e. determining who addresses which ancestor), as opposed to that of the Yangban-Confucian model, which is supposed to follow a strict patrilineal agnatic hierarchy, is administrated among all children regardless of gender or seniority (1998: 132). A similar kind of role division was also reported on the Cheju (Sato, 1973) and Chin islands (Chon, 1977). By bringing historical insight on Nammang's hybrid kinship system, Yoo demonstrates that what can be perceived as a break from tradition in several island communities is, however, a more ancestral kinship *modus operandi* than that of the Yangban-Confucian kinship model. Indeed, his analysis of Korean historical documents shows that at least until the fifteenth century there was no distinction between daughters and sons as genealogical ancestors nor was there any difference between first and junior sons (1998: 133). Furthermore, he demonstrates that 'increasing insistence by the central government caused the custom of rotating ritual services for ancestors to gradually disappear until it only remained in remote areas such as islands' (1998: 133).

This literature about Korean kinship structures raise questions about contemporary South Korean notions of tradition and cultural *authenticity*, which brings to mind Anderson's articulation of the notions of tradition and nationalism. He defines 'Nationalism' as 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (2006 [1983]: 6). According to him, nation

states are composed of people who imagine their communion with other members of the same nation without ever having the possibility to meet/hear/see them all. What links them to one another is their common idea of a mutual background, i.e. a tradition and a culture confined within the boundaries of the nation. In E. Gellner's view, nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness [but] it invents nations where they do not exist' (1964: 169). Anderson further argues that the 'invention' of territorialised traditions corresponds to the limits of the new nation states. In other words, these contemporary traditions have lost the 'authenticity' of the ancestral cultural codes on which they are based. However, according to Sahlins, one might perceive these theories of 'invented traditions' as anthropological nostalgic yearnings, influenced by recent 'afterology studies' (i.e. post modernism, post structuralism, post colonialism, etc.). Because partisans of these 'invented traditions' theories approach culture as a disappearing phenomenon, they perceive contemporary traditions as mere performances of past traditions that have themselves vanished. Furthermore, the 'Horror' of globalisation leads these anthropologists to perceive global cultural practices such as commoditisation, cultural hybridity and cross-communities interactions as unauthentic forms of culture (1999: 403-404). Sahlins argues that, according to these claims of 'invented traditions', culture has been the ideological instrument of class (and gender) differences, capitalism, colonialism, the State or, yet again, nationalism (Ibid.) In this respect, I will engage with this debate on 'invented traditions' and argue that the values of Korean 'traditions' and 'authenticities' used in the creation of advertising campaigns for domestic tourism in contemporary South Korea have not been invented to serve nationalistic and/or capitalistic purposes, thereby positioning myself in favour of Sahlins' argument. Indeed, through the few interviews I have been able to conduct within the short amount of time I have been in Korea, I have been almost systematically told that Koreans' attachment to Paekdusan had very little to do with a nationalist sentiment per se. On the contrary, it had to do with the concept of '신령', which one might translate by 'spirit of the mountain'. This insight from travellers demonstrates that a trip to Paekdusan serves a more 'sinlyong-based' purpose, which I have been told could not be simply be described as 'spiritual', than a nationalist one. Koreans are connected to Paekdusan in terms of 'sinlyong', not in terms of their nations. A trip to Paekdusan is a journey that most Koreans desire to undertake. In this respect, one might want to approach it as a form of modern Korean pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage

There are a large number of anthropological studies on the similarities between tourists and pilgrims (Cohen, 1988; Shields, 1990; Reader, 1993 and 2005). Both the pilgrim and the tourist move from a familiar place to an unknown place, usually quite distant from one another. Their shared objective seems, *in fine*, to engage with a sacred value that will reward them with a sense of accomplishment. Anthropologists have primarily approached the practice through its religious aspect. Notably, van Gennep presents pilgrimage as a rite of passage with a large number of liminal attributes such as homogenisation of status, sense of communion, ordeal, simplicity of dress, and transitory and temporary release from the mundane (1909). However, V. Turner identifies it as being only 'luminoid' since it is not an obligatory social mechanism as is the case for other rites of passage (Turner and Turner, 2011). Elsewhere, Eade and Sallnow define religious pilgrimage as a multitude of discourses engaged by social actors who compete for meanings and understandings (1991). They argue that it considerably reinforces existing tensions between the various groups involved in it, and that group pilgrimage leads to standardisation of beliefs and practices through a sense of communion. Aziz criticised the undifferentiated aspect of this approach. Her experience of pilgrimages in India and Nepal led her to argue that every pilgrim is more motivated by his/her own interpretation of the practice than by the group's collective experience (in Reader, 2005: 30). With regard to these dynamics between individual and group experiences in pilgrimage, anthropologists have also been intrigued by the distortion between the *imagined* and the *experienced* landscapes. For instance, Coleman in his research on Victorian pilgrimage to Palestine, analyses the writings of these nineteenth-century pilgrims on their journey to the holy land. When they arrive in front of the cultural landscape they had previously imagined while reading the Bible, Coleman identifies a conflicting impulse for observation and participation and argues a link between the experience of pilgrimage and ethnography (2002). With regard to the landscape of the pilgrimage as a composition between

aspirations and perceptions, a key reference is Reader's analysis of a Japanese domestic pilgrimage, as it could provide a good comparison with South Koreans' tourism to Paekdusan. In his research on the Japanese journey to the numerous temples of Shikoku, one of the four main islands of Japan, Reader argues that pilgrimages are phenomena not only generated by the pilgrims themselves but also by various peripheral social actors such as the relevant religious authorities, the people who take care of the site, those who provide support and services to pilgrims, etc. (2005: 5). This allows him to observe the dynamic process between the pilgrim and all the surrounding social factors that make the pilgrimage possible. In that sense, Reader argues that pilgrimages appear to be mainly determined by a number of external social variables that allow the physical and emotional landscape of the journey to be experienced (Reader, 2005: 48-52).

However, by mainly considering pilgrims in the midst of their spiritual practice, this literature overlooks the possible relations between a pilgrimage and a non-spiritual journey. Indeed, in the light of what D. P. Martinez underlines when she refers to pilgrimage as a 'continuum of travel in which the spiritual /.../ dominates at one end and the secular at the other' (in Rodriguez del Alisal et al., 2007: 175), what this literature does not consider is the potential connections with temporal, mundane or heritage tourism, i.e. in the case of Paekdusan, the possibility for a pilgrimage to be both a 'sinlyong-based' pilgrimage and the modern syndrome of the hopes for potential reunification between North and South at the same time. More specifically, the pilgrimage to Paekdusan through China might be meaningful in itself because it precisely does *not* go directly through North Korea. This pilgrimage is thus rendered possible by the very negation of what it represents, i.e. the division of the territory between Northern and Southern spheres. In that sense, drawing on Reader's observation of pilgrims on bus tours to the various temples of Shikoku, I will test the assumption that South Korean tourists on package tours to Paekdusan deliberately wish to experience the *journey* itself as a cathartic experience of the current Korean division.

Mythology – Geomancy

Moreover, pilgrimage to Paekdusan is often associated with essentialist descriptions. Recent literature has described it as a kind of earthly heaven that has generated myths of ancient Korea. Many records have described the mountain with striking melodramatic superlatives representing the site as a paradisiacal landscape. The following text is an extract from a 2006 collection of Korean mythologies:

'Perennially wrapped in deep silence and shrouded in mystery /.../ the holy mountain of the Korean nation [is] set in a land of romance /.../ in a paradise where its people drew a fine picture of their future' (Hwang, 2006: xxv, xxx).

The main legend associated with Paekdusan is that of Tan'gun.⁴ According to this myth, Hwan-ung, son of Hwan-in, god of all and ruler of heaven, descended to earth accompanied by three thousand followers onto Paekdusan in 2333 BC. He met a bear, which he transformed into a woman in order to give birth to their son, Tan'gun, powerful leader of the Korean people. At the age of 1908, Tan'gun is thought to have returned to Paekdusan and become a Mountain God. This tale of Korea's 'ancestral' leader is often associated with myths and legends of a 'pure nation', i.e. that of a quiet and peaceful village next to Paekdusan where commoners who respected Confucian values of loyalty, hard-work and simplicity settled. However, historical studies have demystified the essentialist aspect of this legend when they demonstrated that Paekdusan as a 'symbol' of wholeness and purity was a quite recent phenomenon. Schmid in particular shows that it is only in early 1907, that editors of *Hwangsong Sinmun*, a very influential Korean Imperial Gazette running from 1898 to 1910, called on their 20 million compatriots to build an eighty thousand square mile fortress of independence on the area directly surrounding Paekdusan 'as an image of impenetrable defensive shell' (2002: 2001-2). Schmid underlines that it is only then that Paekdusan became the traditional refuge for the hermit kingdom. Schmid links this directly to Korea's need to embrace the Western perception of the nation

⁴ The oldest record associating Paekdusan with this myth of the (Korean) origins is to be found in the *Samguk Yusa*, ca. 1280s.

state and its modern borders,⁵ as Korea's northern limit was more contestable than the relatively unambiguous eastern, southern, and western frontiers.⁶

This allowed Schmid to underline that the Choson understanding of their territory did not match the Western notions of sovereignty as it was mainly based on geomancy. The northern limit to the Korean state had been settled in 1712 after a mission launched by the Kangxi emperor who decided, along with the Manchu emissary, that the Yalu and Tumen rivers were to serve as limitations between the Manchu and the Choson territories. Since the eighth century geomantic principles were perceived by Koreans as critical tools to enhance individual or national fortune through the study of propitious locations. According to these thoughts, mountains were like arteries that conducted inner energies from the earth (Ki) to the lands of the peninsula and had direct consequences on people's behaviours (2002). These geomantic practices perpetuated until the end of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan started targeting geomancy as an old kind of knowledge that could not compete with modern rationality. Paekdusan had to wait until the 1980's post-economic growth period, to progressively be re-considered the most important mountain within the Korean territory. According to the interviews I have already conducted in Korea, Paekdusan seems to now be considered a sacred/ancestral Korean value, contemporary crystallisation of the people's hope that Korea would produce heroes as it did in the past (Hwang, 2006). It is now an emblem of the territory's limits as well as a metaphor for potential further conquest. On that note, during a trip to Paekdusan, Kendall mentioned observing South Korean tourists mixing the water from 'Heavenly Lake' with dirt from Cheju Island, the southern limit of the Korean territory, perhaps 'in an act of magical reunion' (2009). She also mentioned that some tourists at Paekdusan made quiet offerings to family members who had gone missing in the North. Drawing on this literature, I hope to study how practices at the site are influenced by the various representational strategies deployed by the South Korean travel industry as it advertises trips from Seoul to Paekdusan through China.

To do so properly, I will take a look at what anthropology has to say about the consumption and the production of advertising images.

Advertising

The Anthropology of Advertising – Consumption

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the main anthropological debates with regard to the study of the relations between advertising images and the commoditisation of cultural values is its propensity to represent a distortion between people's real existences/experiences and the idealised lives represented in global and local campaigns. A growing body of anthropological literature critically analyses advertising images as finished products, which serve capitalistic purposes. Significant progress has been made by Foster whose research on how global commodities are being advertised locally, studies the advertising of soft drink brands in India, Nepal and Papua New Guinea (2002 and 2008). Foster demonstrates that soft drink consumption is being advertised locally as a positive evidence of cultural strength, i.e. the capacity for a community to honour its own traditions while, at the same time, becoming modern (2008: 46). Foster builds his argument on the analysis of specific targeting strategies. For instance, by looking at teenagers' soft drink consumption, Foster emphasises the ethnocentric impact of these advertising campaigns: namely, the emergence of youth culture as a social group in societies which had no such category before the advertising of these global products. The US youth culture, Foster argues, has been taken up as a new collective identity through the emergence of soft drink commercials. He further argues that soft drink campaigns suggest to teenagers an illusory link between choosing 'soft drink A' over 'soft drink B' and the acquisition of their independence. In that sense, by advertising global commodities, these campaigns create new social

⁵ This reminds of the debate between Anderson and Sahlins on 'invented traditions' mentioned earlier in this paper.

⁶ With the exception of various islands (see p. 57).

categories along with generational issues and an allegedly ideal solution to a teenager's identity conflict (2008: 94).

Another major reference in these debates is William Mazzarella who, as he conducted research on India's advertising industry, also focused on the process through which commercial images become cultural commodities (2004). By analysing the use of Kama Sutra values in the advertisement of condom brands by Indian agencies, Mazzarella demonstrates that consumerism is a formal system that both appropriates and produces cultural differences. In that sense, advertising appears as the institutional means through which cultural specificities are being identified and advertised. It never creates anything new but reinforces stereotypes. Mazzarella builds on structuralist approaches to the advertising industry (Vara Langholz Leymore, 1975), arguing that what appears to be obvious and straightforward in advertising is the manifestation of a highly regulated sign system that uses symbols in the hope to exchange both values and money. In that sense Mazzarella argues that, since advertising is using values that are not new, it is a practice that does not *produce* anything *per se*. Representations of goods are mere signifiers with no inherent meaning; it is the positioning of their cultural *values* within an advertising image that gives meaning to a campaign. Mazzarella, building on the work of Sahlins, emphasises that goods have no objective material features but are independently determined by 'cultural logic'. Because it draws on cultural icons, advertising effectively addresses a specific targeted culture: 'advertising makes sense because culture makes sense' (2004: 25). Drawing on these assumptions, I will test Mazzarella's argument that, in advertising companies, no cultural value is ever used against any social norm and that it *mirrors* the society in which it takes place. Advertising is an institution that reflects society through the use of its conventions and limitations. In that sense, it is an *institution*⁷ that acts both as an organisation and as a norm. Furthermore, a second point made by Mazzarella that I plan to explore is his denunciation of the cult of creativity associated with the production of advertising images, and whether advertising as a practice does not create but *reinforces* the cultural image of a country on a global scale through the use of cultural stereotypes.

Going against Foster and Mazzarella's assumption that advertising has a significant impact on consumption, Miller's analysis of non-alcoholic beverage campaigns in Trinidad shows that advertising has virtually no effect on consumers (1997). On the contrary, consumption appears as a determining factor of advertising production. By studying how commodities reach consumers, Miller observes that what is emphasised in advertising campaigns is not the utility of a particular product but, rather, a complex amalgam of peripheral attributes that advertising campaigns associate with it. In this respect, Miller highlights that consumers are not the end point of the advertising process, as they constantly challenge the advertising production by reacting to the cultural attributes associated with the commodity in the packaging and selling strategies. Thus, Miller shows that these strategies have no effect on the consumers and that consumption frames production. Nevertheless, by undertaking fieldwork in one of Trinidad's advertising agencies, Miller also observed the impact of the agency's client in the process of selling his/her products. Indeed, Miller then argues that, even though it could hinder the consumers' desire and the company's actual profits, the *primary* factor of advertising production is neither profitability nor the consumers, but the client's fear of competition from similar brands (1997: 193-194). In other words, Miller argues that the *sine qua non* condition to any

⁷ In anthropology, a major debate concerns the difference between *institution* in the singular, and *institutions* in the plural. Indeed, according to Durao and Seabra Lopes, anthropologists have differentiated the concept of *institution* that often refers to an ancestral social convention implying a number of rules and behaviours, and the notion of *institutions* designating various bound entities whose structures are usually built on a number of associative hierarchical and bureaucratic relations (vol. 4, 2011). This illustrates a semantic ambiguity in the social sciences between institutions as *organisations* and institutions as *social norms* which goes back to a debate between the Durkheimian and Weberian approaches to the notion. The Durkheimian approach consists in considering modern interactions as the result of successive metamorphoses from ancient institutions (1967 [1897]). On the other hand, the Weberian approach to institutions comprises both a similar set of public rules and a notion of 'compulsory organisation' (*Anstalten*), i.e., par excellence, the State and the Church. The conceptual coexistence in the social sciences of both meanings being associated with 'institution' has led the term to both refer to norms and organisations.

advertising is the client's willingness to invest in a campaign on the basis of its competitive potential. I will build on Miller's argument (along with Moeran's similar argument, cf. below) to explore to what extent commoditisation is ruled by executive decisions made by a very restricted number of individuals.

The Anthropology of Advertising – Production

A key reference in the production aspect of advertising is Brian Moeran's ethnography of Asatsu, one of Japan's leading advertising agencies.⁸ As an 'authentic' Western presence, Moeran was asked to pitch a presentation in English to a Japanese client, a company producing technological products for the American and German markets (2006).⁹ More specifically, Moeran's participation was solicited to translate market strategies into creative ads and tag lines. To do so, Moeran started his own market research by testing his ideas on American and German people he knew in Japan and eventually came up with a tag line that he thought the client could use indefinitely and that was not subject to fashion: *'It's in the name'*. This experience led Moeran to make two main observations. On the one hand, the whole process of making ads appeared as "a matter of talk" (2006: 37). Indeed, from surveys and questionnaires to interview focus groups, from market analysis to presentation speeches and creative strategy, advertising seemed to be determined by communicational exchanges. Using Goffman's terminology, Moeran argues that advertising requires a series of successful 'impression managements', all parts of a much ritualised cultural performance. On the other hand, no matter how much market research was done, the client always had the final say in the decision of launching an idea into the campaign. More specifically, this decision was made by a very restricted number of (senior) individuals from the client's company. These two facts combined, led Moeran to assert the following argument: a successful advertising pitch is determined by how well an advertising agency will be able to predict what the client will want to see in the campaign.¹⁰ Thus, Moeran argues that, in reality, the consumers are virtually absent in the production process of an advertising campaign. In that sense, the 'creative' aspect of advertising, far from being a spontaneous flash of successive ideas only limited by social and economic variables, actually consists in manipulating ideas inside the restricted framework of what the client expects.¹¹ It is a marketing approach to creativity, which is constrained by the internal politics of the client's organisation. The system of production thus shapes what is authentic and creative in advertising (2006: 112-113). I will draw on this literature as I hope to study one of Seoul's advertising organisations involved in the production of travel images, by testing whether the targeted consumers have any influence on the production process of tourism advertising campaigns. Furthermore, I will test whether cultural values are indeed selected by only a few individuals among the client's company. More specifically, I plan to investigate at what level of the production process of a tourism campaign, is decided that North Korean destinations should be advertised as domestic Korean destinations for South Korean tourists. This will also be the opportunity

⁸ As an economic anthropologist, Moeran had initially planned on observing the accounting division of the company. However, after being told that this division was too difficult to observe because of the confidentiality of the company's clients, he was introduced to another aspect of the advertising production process.

⁹ The client, (which Moeran refers to as 'Frontier'), was facing three problems in their American and German markets at the time: 1) even though they had been pioneers in technological innovation, they were regarded as less technological than Sony; 2) their clientele was significantly older than their competitors'; and 3) potential customers could not see any conspicuous difference between their products and the products of competitive brands. Asatsu required Moeran's help as a native English speaker, to create an advertising campaign that could change the prestige and corporate image of their client's brand.

¹⁰ In the case of Frontier's American and German markets, if Asatsu had known what cultural values the few individuals in charge of Frontier's final decision associated with their own product in North America and Germany, the advertising agency would have been able to efficiently manage their impression on their client and, most likely, would have been able to sign a contract.

¹¹ In this case, the client wanted to associate their brand with the concept of 'nature'. The images chosen to represent nature corresponded to what the client perceived to be American and German representations of nature. Even though the use of this stereotypical value was strongly criticised by Moeran and other Westerners, the Japanese client dismissed their claims for inaccuracy and decided to use what he perceived as typical representations of the American and German cultures.

to highlight the relations between creativity, authenticity and the use of cultural stereotypes by South Korean tourism organisations.

Conclusion

It might be tempting to claim that the creation of a collective perception of the mountain as being ‘culturally domestic’ serves nationalistic purposes. However, this approach is problematic in many aspects.¹² First, it suggests that the use of recognisable cultural icons is necessarily the expression of a national ideological discourse. As Sahlins underlines it: introducing nationalism in this kind of equation may be the expression of a contemporary anthropological tendency embedded in nostalgia that considers contemporary codes of conduct as unauthentic forms of traditions. As highlighted by Mazzarella in the previous chapter, the use of signs in advertising may reveal ‘the state of mind of cultural politics’ and its ‘sets of rules and limitations’, but it does not *necessarily* reveal nationalistic purposes *per se* (2004: 287). Secondly, allocating this social phenomenon to nationalism also presupposes both the practical scheming of a nationalistic message through the use of various cultural symbols within advertising images, and the control over the impact of such positioning on the intended users. At this stage, both of these presuppositions are very difficult to prove. It is problematic to presuppose that the use of nationalistic values in the production process will inevitably drive (virtual) consumers to buy and/or acquire the product *for* nationalistic reasons. In the case of Paekdusan, a large number of cultural values are used to advertise it as part of the domestic South Korean territory, but there is no necessary causal relation between the use of these values by the agency and the initial desire of the tourists to embark on these tours for nationalistic purposes. Hence, at this stage of my research, the link between nationalism, the travel agency’s *modus operandi* and the tourists’ context and/or background can only remain speculated. Moreover, it seems that it has everything to do with a notion that has no correspondence outside the Korean language, the above-mentioned: ‘sinlyong’.

The possibility for domestic locations to be commoditised as traditional objects in order to serve the development of a nation’s tourism industry, has been an anthropological concern for many years (to name but a few: Bruner, 2005; Edensor, 1998; MacCannell, 1992; Urry, 1990). However, while most ethnographies are concerned with domestic destinations that are located within the limits of the nation state, case studies of specific destinations commoditised as domestic cultural objects when they are located outside a nation’s territorial boundaries, are much rarer. The case of ROK advertising parts of the Chinese territory (Changbai san) with a name technically located inside the DPRK territory (Paekdusan), is a particularly complex case study which touches a lot of burning political, social and humanitarian questions of the hour. Since North Korea usually restricts access to the mountain through its North Korean side, (and since tourism to North Korea completely stopped???) Paekdusan is not a ‘domestic’ location that South Korean tourists can experience through being *at* the destination itself. Rather, they can only experience it by *gazing at* it from its Chinese side. In this respect, my research will also explore the dominance of vision in touristic practices. I will examine whether this dominance is inherently universal to the experience of travel and, in the case of Paekdusan, whether the desire to gaze supplants other tourism impulses such as the desire for leisure, embodied effort or sociality. In that sense, since Kendall’s aforementioned observation of the symbolic practices carried out by South Korean tourists at Paekdusan is the only data available on what these tourists actually do once they reach the top of the mountain, another contribution of my research will consist in bringing more complex insight on what takes place at this destination. In this respect, my ethnography will consist in both identifying the production modes of these travel images with advertising companies *and* observing the effect of the values used in campaigns on the travellers. Indeed, the travellers’ thoughts on the matter are highly insightful. As I mentioned earlier, their

¹² I.e. this approach claims that nationalism is a modern phenomenon. This ‘modernist’ approach is usually opposed to an ‘essentialist’ approach which claims that national identity ‘has always been an aspect of social identity’ (D. Gellner, 1997: 7).

testimonies seem to transform what might be perceived as a nationalist phenomenon, into a typically Korean phenomenon linked with the notion of 'sinlyong'.

Of course after the unfortunate event that took place at Kumgang san in 2008, all tourism to North Korea from South Korea completely stopped. However, the large number of commercial campaigns that used to advertise North Korean destinations as domestic package tours to South Korean tourists, added to the growing number of South Korean urban middle-class people embarking on tours to Changbai san through China; represents an anthropological conundrum that deserves urgent ethnographic attention. Considering that the majority of ethnographies about advertising industries have focused on consumption, my study of travel images production in a Seoul advertising company aims to make an important contribution to the literature regarding the production processes through which cultural products are commoditised. Indeed, by examining how ROK advertising agencies are able to advertise DPRK destinations as South Korean domestic cultural commodities, this research also argues that contemporary institutions may operate as cultural brokers that use and/or produce traditional icons to potentially transform a population's understanding of its own culture, tradition and territorial boundaries. By conducting an ethnography in *contemporary* urban South Korea, my work will address the lack of anthropological studies about this part of the world and will explore what matters for its population today, thereby, highlighting important issues such as its continuous struggles surrounding territoriality, its growing consumerism and the roles its contemporary institutions play in its expanding travel industry. By focusing on tourism, a popular practice among South Korean urban middle-classes today, my research proposes a more emic and holistic approach than traditional anthropological studies on ROK and will hopefully lead to new insights on its contemporary society. Moreover, because South Koreans tend to associate tourism with upper-class practices (Lett, 1998) my ethnography will also lead to new insights about class mobility, personhood and local perceptions of self.

Overall, in the context of ROK's rapidly changing social and urban landscapes, my research will hopefully engage with key anthropological issues, such as the impact of advertising on tourism consumption, the role of social institutions in social emancipation and the creation of class-consciousness, and the impact of commoditisation on the changing perceptions of territorial boundaries.

Thank you.