


Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads

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In her seminal work, “Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads,” Olga Fedorenko presents an incisive and compelling exploration of the advertising industry in South Korea, a domain where artistry intersects with commerce under the overarching shadows of politics and societal norms. This meticulously researched tome delves deep into the complexities of an industry that is both a reflection of and a catalyst for cultural and economic transformations in a rapidly evolving South Korean society. At the heart of Fedorenko’s narrative lies a critical inquiry into how advertising, often dismissed as merely a tool for market manipulation, in fact, plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values, consumer identities, and even political discourse. Through her lens, the South Korean advertising industry emerges not just as a mirror to the nation’s burgeoning capitalist ethos but also as a battleground where notions of freedom, censorship, and consumer citizenship are continuously negotiated and redefined.

Given that Fedorenko’s investigation comes at a time when South Korea’s economic landscape is becoming more and more characterized by digital innovation and global integration, which presents new challenges and opportunities for advertisers, it is particularly timely. This book is more than a mere academic treatise; it is a vital contribution to understanding the intricate tapestry of South Korean society, where traditional values coexist and often clash with modern capitalist imperatives. It offers a nuanced understanding of the symbiotic relationship between advertising and cultural identity, making it an essential read for those seeking to comprehend the dynamic interplay of commerce, culture, and communication in contemporary South Korea.

Fedorenko’s dual role as an observer and a participant in the advertising industry shapes her perspective in this book. Her approach is characterized by a critical yet empathetic understanding of the industry, balancing the theoretical frameworks of media studies with on-the-ground insights from her interactions with advertising professionals in South Korea. This dual lens allows her to dissect the complex interplay between the commercial objectives of advertising and its broader cultural implications. This integrated approach resonates with the work of scholars like McFall (2004), who emphasize the importance of understanding advertising as a cultural and economic phenomenon rather than solely a marketing tool. Her methodology in this work is both comprehensive and interdisciplinary, drawing on a range of sources, from historical archives to contemporary case studies. Fedorenko’s analysis transcends mere surface-level critique, delving into the subtleties of how advertising reflects and shapes societal norms and values. Her methodology enables her to delve into the nuances of advertising as both a reflection of and an influence on societal norms and values, a theme central to her narrative. Her work, in this regard, parallels Schudson’s (1984) perspective on advertising as a cultural window, offering insights into societal changes and consumer culture.

Her critical approach is not just descriptive but also prescriptive, offering insights into the potential trajectories of advertising in South Korea. Fedorenko’s narrative is imbued with a sense of cultural empathy and contextual understanding, reflecting her deep engagement with South Korean society. Her work stands out for its ability to connect the micro-level details of advertising campaigns to the macro-level dynamics of cultural and societal change. It is this interplay of the micro and the macro that forms the crux of her analysis, making “Flower of Capitalism” a seminal contribution to

the study of advertising in a global context. Fedorenko meticulously crafts a narrative that chronicles the evolution of the South Korean advertising industry, intertwining it with the nation's socio-political changes. The book is divided into various chapters, each addressing distinct aspects of this evolution.

In particular, this book provides a profound examination of the cultural and societal implications of advertising in South Korea, particularly under the transformation brought about during and after the presidency of Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013). The significant changes in advertising regulation during this period marked a departure from a more controlled and public-interest-driven advertising industry to a more liberalized, market-driven model. This shift had deep ramifications for the cultural fabric and societal norms in South Korea. The Constitutional Court's rulings in 2008, which positioned advertising within the realm of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression, marked a pivotal moment in South Korean advertising history. This decision signaled a move away from the traditional model where advertising was seen as a public service medium, accountable to societal needs and values, towards a model where commercial interests and freedom of expression took precedence. This new orientation was not only a legal shift but also a cultural one, realigning the advertising industry's values and practices with neoliberal ideologies.

Fedorenko critically examines these shifts, highlighting how the dismantling of earlier structures like KOBACO and KARB, which had once externalized the public interest logic in advertising, led to the erosion of the hegemonic status of this logic. The author astutely points out that while these changes appeared to benefit broadcasters, they in fact favored advertisers and advertising agencies, giving them more freedom and control over content. This shift had complex implications for South Korean society, as it challenged the long-standing belief that advertising should serve a broader public purpose beyond mere commercial gains. The book also explores the repercussions of these changes on the political and media landscape in South Korea. The transition towards a more market-centric model of media and advertising was met with criticism and resistance from various sectors of society. Concerns were raised about the decline in critical reporting, increased sensationalism, and the growing influence of advertisers, especially large conglomerates (*chaebols*), over media content.

Fedorenko's analysis delves into the complex interplay between advertising, media, and politics in contemporary South Korea. The author illustrates how advertising, once a tool for democratic participation and societal critique, has become more commercialized and less accountable to public concerns. This transformation, as Fedorenko argues, reflects broader shifts in South Korean society, where neoliberal values increasingly overshadowed traditional ideals of public service and collective welfare. "Flower of Capitalism" offers an incisive critique of the cultural and societal implications of advertising in South Korea, revealing how shifts in regulatory and economic paradigms have profound impacts on societal values, media content, and the public sphere. The book underscores the significance of understanding advertising not just as a commercial enterprise but as a crucial element in the tapestry of societal and cultural dynamics.

In "Flower of Capitalism," Olga Fedorenko offers an insightful comparative analysis of South Korean advertising, placing it within a global context while highlighting its unique characteristics and cultural nuances. The book's comparative perspective is especially evident in its exploration of the aspirations and realities of advertising practitioners in South Korea, where Fedorenko uncovers a blend of local and global influences shaping the industry. The author delves into the aspirations of regular advertising practitioners in South Korea, portraying their endeavors as not just commercial but also deeply entwined with cultural and intellectual aspirations. The presence of a portrait of Karl Marx in an advertising director's cubicle serves as an example of this and represents the fusion of ideological goals with business goals. The presence of Marx's image in the workspace of an advertising professional is emblematic of the complex blend of intellectualism, political consciousness, and commercialism in South Korean advertising.

Fedorenko also suggests that this complex fusion reflects the "spirit of the times," particularly the influence of the 386 Generation (those who participated in the 1980s social movement) in South Korean society. This generation, which moved from being a force challenging oppressive social structures to a dominant influence in cultural institutions, embodies a unique blend of leftist values and

mainstream middle-class aspirations. The author posits that these contradictions and generational shifts have significantly influenced the advertising industry in South Korea, leading to a distinctive aesthetic and political orientation. This comparative perspective is critical in understanding how South Korean advertising differs from its Western counterparts.

While market logic and consumer psychology frequently serve as the main driving forces behind advertising in the West, South Korea's unique historical and social context also serves as a canvas for cultural expression and political commentary. The aspirations of South Korean advertising practitioners go beyond mere commercial success; they seek to integrate intellectual and cultural dimensions into their work, mirroring broader societal values and transformations. Fedorenko's analysis thus provides a nuanced understanding of how South Korean advertising navigates the tensions between global trends and local cultural dynamics. By situating South Korean advertising within both a local and global context, the author illuminates the multifaceted nature of the industry, where commercial imperatives intersect with cultural values and political histories, creating a unique advertising landscape that is both globally connected and distinctly Korean.

The book excels in portraying how South Korean advertising has evolved from a tool of commercial promotion to a significant cultural force, reflecting and influencing societal values and political changes. Fedorenko's in-depth exploration of the industry's history, particularly during periods of intense political upheaval and economic transformation, offers invaluable insights into how advertising has intertwined with broader socio-political narratives in South Korea. The author's approach to analyzing the aspirations and realities of advertising practitioners in South Korea is particularly noteworthy. By showcasing the blend of commercial, cultural, and intellectual elements in the work of these practitioners, Fedorenko provides a unique window into the internal dynamics of the industry. This approach not only distinguishes South Korean advertising from its global counterparts but also underscores the profound impact of cultural and generational shifts on the industry.

In the vein of rigorous academic inquiry, future research emanating from 'Flower of Capitalism' should incisively explore the intersection of K-culture's global popularity with the cultural narratives of the wider East Asian region, especially considering the advent of new generational dynamics. This research could benefit from a comparative framework reminiscent of the depth found in Iwabuchi's 'Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism' (2002), providing a critical analysis of cultural exchanges and influences. Additionally, incorporating psychological and sociological dimensions, as seen in Twenge and Campbell's 'The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement' (2009), would offer valuable insights into the individual and collective identities shaped by these evolving cultural phenomena. Such an approach, blending cultural studies with a deep understanding of societal shifts, promises to unravel the complex tapestry of modern East Asian cultures in the context of global digital influence and generational change.

In conclusion, "Flower of Capitalism" is a significant contribution to our understanding of advertising's role in contemporary societies. It challenges readers to consider the broader implications of advertising beyond its commercial function, highlighting its capacity to mirror and mold societal values, cultural identities, and political ideologies. Her ability to connect micro-level details of advertising campaigns with macro-level societal changes positions "Flower of Capitalism" as a significant contribution to advertising studies, echoing the sentiments of scholars like Moeran (1996) on the cultural implications of advertising practices. The book is a compelling read for scholars and practitioners in media studies, advertising, and Korean studies, as well as for anyone interested in the intersection of commerce, culture, and communication. It stands as a testament to the transformative power of advertising in shaping public discourse and societal norms, particularly in a rapidly evolving and culturally rich landscape like South Korea.

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Buddhist Historiography in China

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While there have been many publications on the historical narratives of Chinese Buddhism, including both introductory and technical academic books, Kieschnick's *Buddhist Historiography in China* is a rare book that attempts a comprehensive historical analysis of the worldviews and beliefs which shaped Buddhist writings of history, particularly those in premodern China. Kieschnick presents us with new perspectives to consider in the study of Chinese history and religion.

Here I will summarize this book and offer some additional thoughts. This book begins with an introduction, has six chapters entitled "India," "Sources," "Karma," "Prophecy," "Genealogy," and "Modernity," and ends with a conclusion. In the introduction and conclusion, Kieschnick sets forth a rubric of four useful themes for exploring the distinctly Buddhist characteristics of Buddhist historical narratives as follows:

The first is "time." Buddhist writers of history everywhere almost all adopted a cyclical theory of time in accordance with Buddhist doctrine. "On the grandest scale" of "hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands of years," the world "looped in circles punctuated by the appearance of buddhas" (p. 3). At first, Buddhist teachings, practice, and enlightenment are all present, but in the course of time there come to be no more enlightened persons, then there are no more practitioners, and in the end the Buddha's teachings are lost. Thus, the world is covered in ignorance, chaos, and suffering, yet in time there will again be the emergence of a new Buddha and this cycle will begin again. Some scholars "have invoked the prevalence of a cyclical view of time to explain why premodern South Asian writers produced so few works of history" (p. 6). In contrast, Buddhist historians in China "give an occasional nod to cyclical time" but "their sense of time is, in the end, overwhelmingly conventional" as they order their histories "chronologically, according to dynasty and reign title" (pp. 192–3). According to Kieschnick, Chinese Buddhist historiography can be divided chronologically into the following three phases and four genres:

- (1) "The first phase of Buddhist historiography, from roughly 500 CE to 1000, was dominated by prosopography, in particular, collections of biographies of eminent monks grouped according to shared qualities" (p. 193). "The representative work in this genre is the *Biographies of*