

Exploring Challenges and Strategies in Promoting Korean Culture through Museum Exhibition in the United States*

Seoha MIN and Byoungho JIN

Abstract

A number of countries have attempted to promote their national image to increase global competitiveness. As one way of promoting the national image, we have focused on the museum venue, which significantly facilitates the experience of new cultures. This study explores the challenges and strategies in promoting Korean culture through museum exhibitions in the United States. By examining the presentation of Korean culture through museum exhibitions in the United States, this research will benefit other countries striving to promote their national images by maximizing available cultural resources. To achieve its research purposes, this study conducted two phases: (1) we counted, categorized, and analyzed Korean cultural objects exhibited by representative museums online to understand how Korean culture has been presented; and (2) interviews were conducted of curators currently involved with Korean art to explore challenges they have experienced in promoting Korean cultural objects via museum exhibitions. Based on the collected data, we were able to identify several themes regarding the challenges and promotional strategies of museums exhibiting Korean cultural objects. The findings of this study will provide curators and museums with practical insights into promoting Korean culture through museum exhibitions.

Keywords: museums, curators, national image, culture, Korea, cultural objects

* This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant (AKS-2014-R25).

Seoha MIN is Assistant Professor in the Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. E-mail: s_min@uncg.edu.

Byoungho JIN is Putnam and Hayes Distinguished Professor in the Department of Consumer, Apparel, and Retail Studies at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. E-mail: B_Jin@uncg.edu.

Introduction

The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, refers to the global spread of South Korean culture (Lee 2011). The Korean Wave brings in over US\$ one billion in revenue annually to South Korea through cultural exports (Kim 2010). To expand the Korean Wave to the entirety of industry, the Korean government has aggressively invested in promoting Korean culture around the world. As part of this effort, the Korean Culture and Tourism Institute (KCTI) invested 270 billion won in the “Han Brand” project from 2009 to 2011 in an effort to raise the national brand value of Korea. Despite significant investment from the Korean government, it is deemed that the Korean national image has yet to be clearly established, a notion supported by Jack Trout, founder of an international marketing strategy firm (Shin 2009). According to Trout, there is no clear product or cultural identity representing the national image of Korea in the global marketplace. In addition, several Korean designers targeting the global market have indicated that they tend to hide their cultural identity for fear of the potentially unfavorable effect it could have on their design (Min 2015). Since national image determines national success in selling goods on the global market (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006), it is in the best interest of both the Korean government and Korean firms to explore ways through which the Korean national image can be effectively promoted.

The term “national image” comprises the comprehensive images that consumers develop toward a particular country (Josiassen et al. 2013); thus, it can be created by a variety of factors, such as cultural objects, economic and political maturity, historical events, the degree of technological virtuosity, and traditions (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006). Among those factors, cultural objects often play a significant role in promoting the national image of the country of that object’s origin (Josiassen et al. 2013). It is widely agreed that Korea possesses numerous unique cultural elements, such as the pattern of *bogaji* (cloth wrapper), the color combinations of *dancheong* 丹青 (traditional multicolored paintwork on wooden buildings), and the *jagae* (mother-of-pearl) embellishment. Nonetheless, very limited studies have attempted to understand how Korean cultural objects are presented and communicated to the world. Such

understanding is critical because without it the Korean national image cannot be effectively promoted and utilized in marketing Korean brands in the global market.

As one good way to promote their culture and further their national image, a number of countries have supported museums. Museums help people come to a better understanding of and appreciation for various groups and cultures. They promote a better understanding of our collective heritage, and foster dialogue, curiosity, and self-reflection (Wages 2014). In addition, museums have enjoyed huge success in terms of increasing tourist draw. The American Alliance of Museums has indicated that there are approximately 850 million visits each year to museums in the United States, and that number continues to grow.¹ Americans from all ranges of income and education visit museums. Visiting a museum has become a significant venue for experiencing a new culture. Therefore, through museum, a country might make significant strategic use of its cultural objects to promote the national image worldwide.

Nevertheless, numerous museums have experienced challenges, such as financial pressures and difficulties in curatorial management (Paroissien 2006). Naturally, such difficulties hamper the promotion of culture through museum exhibitions; therefore, strategies to overcome such difficulties must also be explored. Hence, the purpose of the study is to explore challenges and strategies in the promotion of Korean culture through museum exhibitions in the United States. We focused on the American museums because of that country's large tourist numbers and its impact on global cultures. The term "Korean cultural objects" used in this study refers to objects from Korea that are representative of the Korean culture, to include both ancient and contemporary objects. To achieve the research purpose, this qualitative study conducted two phases. The first phase included an analysis of the Korean cultural objects exhibited at representative American museums and interviews with curators currently involved with Korean arts. Curators were

1. American Alliance of Museums, "Museum Facts," accessed August 10, 2015, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts>.

interviewed because they are experts who examine materials and make them available to visitors within the museum context (Kotler and Kotler 2000). Curators are also agents who exhibit cultural objects as well as promote a certain culture through museum exhibitions. Despite the significance of the group, there has been little research exploring curators' perceptions of cultural objects; thus, the topic is worthy of being explored.

The majority of countries around the world have limited numbers of cultural objects available for museum exhibition, and Korea is no exception. Nevertheless, the Korean government has made an active effort to promote Korea's national image through museum exhibitions, realizing the important role of museums in promoting Korean culture. Therefore, this research will also provide insights to other countries striving to promote their national image by maximizing their available cultural resources. In addition, it will provide valuable insights to future researchers wishing to continue to explore this subject.

Literature Review

Significance of National Image in the Global Market

Nations have their respective images, images that often consist of the positive core values of the nation in question (Domeisen 2003). National image has been defined as the psychological image of a country in the minds of consumers (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006, 32); thus, multidimensional images such as the country's economy, people, technology, products, constitute the whole picture. A national image formed in the consumer's mind will naturally be associated with products from that particular country whenever a consumer encounters them (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006, 15). This is especially true for brand products that are new to consumers. Consumers, with no established image related to a new brand, will most likely associate the new product and its attributes with the national image of the country in which it was made. For example, when consumers are introduced to a piece of clothing made in France, they will assign attributes to that clothing stemming

from the “Made in France” images in their mind. In the field of clothing, “Made in France” generally carries the image of high quality, fashionable design, and luxuriousness. New clothing brands from France definitely benefit from such an image. In this way, a well-established national image can significantly affect the formation of positive brand images from a wide range of national industries.

Korea’s national image is, to a large extent, based on recently emerged Korean corporate brands such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundai (Anholt 2000). As such, global consumers’ perceptions of Korea’s national image may be formed primarily through Korean brands and products. Despite the growing popularity of Korea’s contemporary pop culture, such as K-pop, and increased tourism to Korea among global consumers, just how global consumers perceive Korea’s cultural heritage is very little known. To better understand how Korean culture is presented to global consumers, this study explores how Korean cultural objects are exhibited at museums outside of Korea.

Cultural Objects Exhibited in Museums

The most widely accepted definition of a museum is that of the International Council of Museums (ICOM): “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”² Displayed objects have the power to pull in the viewer, convey the authentic experience of the object, and evoke viewer attention (Karp 1991, 16–17). Therefore, museums provide visitors with a gateway to experience and deepen their understanding of a given culture.

Despite the growing prominence of Korean culture globally, Korean cultural objects are considered relatively little known in the United States (Rub, Govan, and Tinterow 2014, viii). Within this context, curators of

2. International Council of Museums, “Museum Definition,” accessed July 1, 2015, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition>.

Korean art have made significant endeavors to provide the US audiences with the opportunity to experience Korean culture through museum exhibitions. This effort really began in 1979 with an extensive exhibition titled “5,000 Years of Korean Art” that the South Korean government promoted (Lin 2016). The main objective of this exhibition was to introduce a continuous narrative of Korean art and to further present South Korea’s political credibility through cultural legitimacy (Lin 2016, 383). The exhibition traveled to eight cities in the United States and attracted a total of some 2.26 million visitors (Lin 2016, 383). The effort to promote Korean culture through museum exhibitions continues today. Three museums in the United States—Philadelphia Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—organized a comprehensive collection highlighting Korea’s Joseon dynasty and exhibited it as a traveling exhibition in 2013 (Woo et al. 2014). In order to better support such efforts, it is necessary to understand what kinds of challenges curators experience and how they overcome them in the process of organizing exhibitions on Korean cultural objects.

Roles of Curators

The status of the curator has risen to that of a professional custodian of a museum with curatorial responsibilities (Horie 1986, 267). Even though there is a certain complexity in describing the role and tasks of the curator, “the primary function of the curator and/or museum has been variously described as scholarly/scientific investigation, education (in its widest sense), and the safe custody, including conservation, of objects” (Horie 1986, 269). Curators take great efforts to make the visual presentations and concepts of exhibited objects clear enough for their visitors. For instance, artwork on the walls of museums should be carefully arranged because the diversity of elements among displayed artwork can create tensions that may affect the entire wall and even overpower the final arrangement (Smith 1997, 9). They must also craft messages for a specific context and write in easy-to-understand language that make difficult concepts accessible but without a hint of condescension (Trench 2013, 31). Moreover, curators need to acquire the

knowledge and skill to handle works of art without damaging or even ruining them. Sometimes, the use of cases, vitrines, and cabinets are essential to showcase certain types of objects (Smith 1997, 85). Curators also organize workshops and seminars for visitors to assist their understanding of the theme of an exhibition.

In addition to the traditional roles of curators discussed above, curators often engage in attracting visitors. As museums are part of the non-profit sector and depend on governmental organizations, curators need to present their prosperity to them by increasing visitor numbers (Gilmore and Rentschler 2002, 745). Therefore, marketing strategies have been used to increase visitor numbers and the curator's role has expanded from one of custodial emphasis to one of marketing (Gilmore and Rentschler 2002, 758).

Methodology

To explore challenges and strategies in promoting Korean culture through museum exhibitions in the United States, this study was conducted in two phases: (1) we visited online as well as onsite collections of representative American museums to explore how Korean cultural objects are presented; and (2) we interviewed curators who have curated Korean cultural objects to explore challenges in promoting Korean cultural objects in the United States. Considering the significant number of museums and visitors worldwide, American museums have been selected as representative of sample throughout the world.

As the first step, we categorized and analyzed Korean cultural objects that are presented in online collections by representative museums to understand how Korean culture has been presented. The three museums—the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston—were selected as representative American museums based on the breadth and depth of the Korean cultural objects they possess. The three museums each have separate pavilions dedicated to Korean art and are also ranked among the most visited art

museums in the world.³ In addition, most curators who participated in our interviews recommended visiting the above three museums due to the high volume of Korean cultural objects they possess. In July 2015, we counted the number of Korean cultural objects through the online collections of the three museums. This number was compared to those same museums' collections of Chinese and Japanese cultural objects, since together these three countries are considered influential Asian countries due to their soft power.⁴ Furthermore, we visited the three museums to determine how and what kinds of Korean cultural objects were exhibited from January to May 2015.

In the second phase, curators who are currently involved with Korean art were interviewed to explore the challenges they had experienced in promoting Korean cultural objects via museum exhibitions. The in-depth interview was employed as a research method because it is considered a universal approach of systemic inquiry that enables us to gain a glimpse of the view through which the interviewee sees the world (Gubrium and Holstein 2001, 105). Curators were chosen as interviewees because they are the primary agents to select and exhibit objects. In order to recruit curators for the interview, we developed a list of museums that deal with Korean cultural objects to explore curators in Korean art. We then visited the websites of these museums for the contact information of museum curators as well as those currently involved with Korean art. We then sent interview requests electronically to the curators. Through this process, we were able to recruit and interview three curators. In addition, one of us attended a national conference on Asian art as a way to recruit more curator-interviewees, and sent

3. "The Most Visited Art Museums in the World," *Art Newspaper*, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com>.

4. Joseph Nye (2004) defined and explained the concept of soft power in this book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. According to Nye, soft power is the ability of a state to influence the actions of another through persuasion or attraction, rather than coercion. Jonathan McClory (2010) reported that only three Asian countries (Korea, Japan, and China) were found among the top 20 countries worldwide in terms of their use of soft power. Among these 20, Korea was ranked as 19th, China as 17th, and Japan as 15th.

interview requests to attendees of the conference via the conference listserv. As a result, six more curators were recruited as interviewees at the conference site. A total of nine curators were interviewed, all with the experience of curating Korean art in their respective museums. This sample size is appropriate for this study as the number of museums that deal with Korean cultural objects in the United States is limited. Besides, the analysis of interviews achieved saturation (Hodges 2011). The participant background information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Background of the Interviewees

Participant	Curatorial experience in Korean art	Participation in workshops held by the Korea Foundation	Experience taking charge of arranging an exhibition of Korean art	Interview setting
Participant A	Less than 1 year	No	No	Researchers' office
Participant B	More than 10 years	Yes	Yes	Curator's office
Participant C	More than 10 years	No	Yes	Curator's office
Participant D	More than 10 years	Yes	Yes	Conference site
Participant E	More than 5 years	Yes	No	Conference site
Participant F	More than 10 years	Yes	Yes	Conference site
Participant G	More than 10 years	Yes	Yes	Conference site
Participant H	More than 5 years	Yes	No	Conference site
Participant I	More than 10 years	Yes	No	Conference site

Interview questions that were asked of the curators included: (1) Have you curated Korean cultural objects? If so, please describe your experience; (2) How many Korean cultural objects does your institute possess? Please compare this number to objects held by your museum from other Asian countries; (3) How do you perceive Korean cultural objects compared to those of other Asian countries? and (4) What are some challenges you have faced in promoting Korean cultural objects via museum exhibitions? Each interview lasted approximately one hour and a compensation of US\$50 was provided to each interviewee. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim after receiving permission. The interviews were conducted either in Korean or English to accommodate participants. The data from interviews conducted in Korean were transcribed and translated into English by us, who are fluent in both languages. The interviews were conducted between December 2014 and April 2015 at either a curator's office at a museum, at our office, or at a conference site.

We analyzed data to create meaningful interpretation through the following steps. First, we read transcriptions of the interviews thoroughly, line by line. Following Creswell (2012), we then focused on an interesting phrase or sentence from the interview and recorded what was learned. Second, we conducted analytical coding. Several categories were developed for each research question. For each category created, we wrote a detailed description. Third, we examined and compared patterns with categories. In addition, we compared connecting patterns across categories (Spiggle 1994). Based on this analysis, we were able to discover and develop the broader inferences of the research.

Results and Discussion

Based on the data collected, we explored the current status of exhibited Korean cultural objects in the United States.

Current Status of Korean Cultural Objects in the Museums

We counted the numbers of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese cultural objects that were presented in the online collections of the three representative museums. The three keywords—Korea, China, and Japan—were entered into the search function of each online collection. The cultural objects include prints and drawings, jewelry, ceramics, textiles and fashion art, maps, and photography throughout human history.

The analysis of the data clearly reveals that in all three museums the number of Korean cultural objects is relatively small compared to Chinese and Japanese cultural objects (Fig. 1). Indeed, the number of Korean cultural objects exhibited in these museums falls well short of the number of exhib-

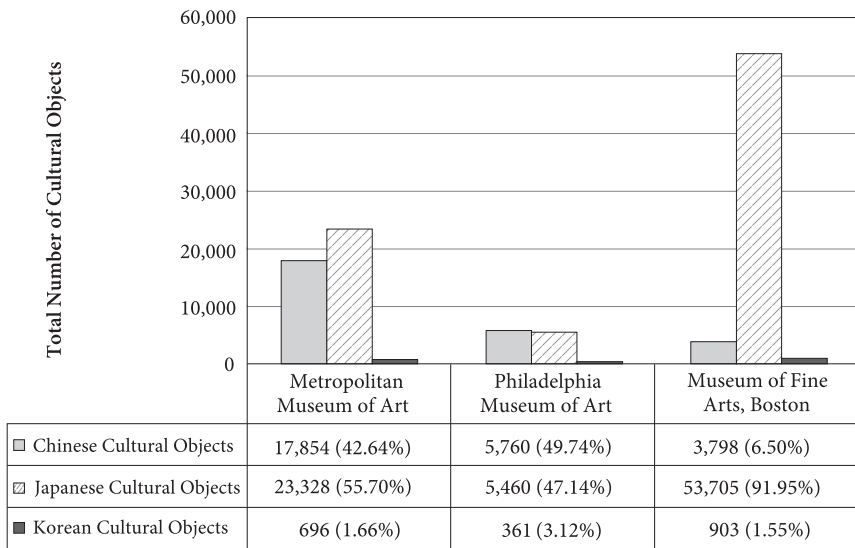


Figure 1. The number of East Asian cultural objects in the three representative museums.

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections>; Philadelphia Museum of Art, <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/search.html>; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, <http://www.mfa.org/collections>.

ited cultural objects from Korea's two neighbors—China and Japan. Of the total exhibited cultural objects from the three countries (China, Japan, and Korea), Korean cultural objects account for only 1.66 percent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 3.12 percent at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and 1.55 percent at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Thus, it is apparent that visitors to these museums do not experience much exposure to Korean culture compared to the cultures of Chinese and Japanese.

In addition, we visited the three museums to better ascertain how and what kinds of Korean cultural objects were displayed between January and May 2015. We found that the number of Korean cultural objects as well as the size of Korean pavilions were smaller than those of Chinese and Japanese. For example, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, assigned one room for Korean art, seven rooms for Chinese art, and three rooms for Japanese art.

Challenges in Presenting Korean Cultural Objects through Museum Exhibitions

Analyses of interviews revealed five themes regarding challenges curators have experienced in relation to the display of Korean cultural objects, namely, the small number of Korean cultural objects available for museum exhibitions, a lack of documentation for Korean objects, limited sources of funding in the curatorial process, and the subtle aesthetics of Korean art.

1) Small Number of Korean Cultural Objects Available for Museum Exhibitions

The findings from the first phase are supported by interviewee statements. Participant G briefly stated that a relatively small number of Korean cultural objects are available as compared to the number from China and Japan. Participant B explained the reason for the small number as follows:

Lots of Korean cultural possessions were lost due to several conflicts, such as the Imjin War (1592–1598) and the Korean War (1950–1953). Especially, cultural property made out of flammable materials was lost at that time. Also, there was little support for artists and craftsmen during

the period of Joseon due to Confucian ideology. At that time, people did not respect the value of art. Thus, artists were not able to develop their business and be successful due to ideology.⁵

Another interviewee noted:

There are not a lot of Korean objects outside of Korea, other than in Japan, so it's a challenge if you want to educate people using objects which are representative of the [Korean] culture.⁶

Eight curators who had experience organizing exhibitions of Korean art agreed that the ancient Korean objects are significantly more expensive compared to those of other countries due to their limited number. They indicated that they were unable to acquire sufficient Korean objects due to the price, which was a direct cause of the slim chance of having Korean objects exhibited.

We only purchased the Joseon period painting because we could never have afforded a Goryeo painting.⁷

If there is a similar level of two objects where one is from Korea and the other is from another country, an object from Korea is about three to four times more expensive than the other. So why would we want to purchase Korea objects? This question is very hard to answer.⁸

The high cost of Korean objects causes them to be repeatedly exhibited in the United States. In addition Korean objects must often be acquired on loan as there is only a small number available to exhibit, and this complicates the process. This often hampers curators who wish to exhibit Korean objects in their museums, and the result is that museum visitors do not have sufficient opportunities to be exposed to Korean culture. This is reflected in comments such as:

5. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

6. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

7. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

8. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

Quite often exhibition projects use the same objects again, and again, and again. If you're in the Asian art business, quite often you see the same objects for every big show of Korean art. There are only a set number of things available.⁹

[The lending process is] never simple, no matter what it is. . . . Maybe they want to use it for another project, so they don't want to lend it to you. Maybe they only want to lend one and you want to borrow three. There are always complex negotiations that take place.¹⁰

2) Lack of Documentation for Korean Objects

Material objects have their own symbolic meanings and guide people to understand the real-life experiences associated with them (Hodder 2012, 395). Every material item of culture has the potential to communicate the stories behind it, so the effort to establish and document material culture is critical. However, Participant G indicated that the efforts of the Korean government and cultural institutes are not satisfactory and that they should be more attentive to establishing and documenting Korea's material culture.

Of course, the biggest weakness of Korean art is absolutely the small number of objects. In addition to this, I would like to state that Korean objects have not been sufficiently documented. If Korea does not have enough objects, they [Koreans] need to be creative and imaginary. After the [Korean] war, Korea has had opportunities to collect and establish Korean cultural objects and explore the interesting stories behind the objects. However, I think the effort has been not enough.¹¹

3) Limited Sources of Funding for the Curatorial Process

The interviewees indicated that curators go through a curatorial process to decide which country and which period they are going to exhibit. In partic-

9. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

10. Participant E, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

11. Participant G, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

ular, curators need to consider possible sources of funding and how to approach those sources since they have to raise funds or turn a profit in order to keep the museum running. Participant B indicated that there were over 30 curators in her museum, each with their own expertise. If she wanted to arrange a new exhibition on Korean art, she had to negotiate and persuade the rest of the curators due to the museum's limited resources:

Most museums in the United States are private not public. Thus, we have to make our own profit or raise funds to run the museum.¹²

Another noted:

In this case, you would pick something related to Korea. . . . You need to find objects that satisfy your criteria, whatever it is, whether it's the medium or time period, make a list, and then you have to negotiate with the places that own them, the institutions that own them.¹³

4) Subtle Aesthetics of Korean Art

When we asked about the distinctiveness of Korean art, all participants answered that the question was difficult to answer. Participant B stated that the three countries—China, Japan, and Korea—belong to the same cultural area and have had mutual influences. Thus, the distinctiveness of objects from these respective countries may be difficult to recognize in the eyes of the general public. Interestingly, four participants agreed that the general aesthetics of Korean art were subtle compared to those of Chinese or Japanese art. Participant B explained that she could force visitors to appreciate Korean art. If it does not look visually appealing to visitors, they may not give it any attention. This may result in less opportunity for Korean objects to be exhibited. Since museums provide visual experiences of other cultures to visitors (Alpers 1991), the subtleness of Korean art may hamper effective communication of its aesthetics to the general public:

12. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

13. Participant E, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

I can recognize the difference because that is my major [Korean art]. For example, Korean *jagae* (mother of pearl) is from abalone unlike *jagae* from other Asian countries. Is the general public able to recognize the difference? I don't think so. They may just think it is from one of the Asian countries.¹⁴

I think the aesthetic aspect of Korea is very subtle and it's hard to recognize if they [the general public] have no knowledge about it. When I see Joseon ceramics, they are surrounded with all white while the colors are very simple and definitely there are some aesthetics associated with it. But again, it's really hard to recognize.¹⁵

How can you differentiate Korean art from other art? I think one of the things that is very, very special about Korean cultural objects is that they are subtle. I think that is the biggest challenge for people who don't know anything about Korean art.¹⁶

Strategies in Promoting Korean Cultural Objects through Museum Exhibitions

Based on the discussion regarding the above challenges, possible strategies in promoting Korean cultural objects through museum exhibitions were also discussed. Analyses of interviews revealed four themes: (1) the continuous and substantial support from government institutions; (2) construction of a cultural context through museum storytelling; (3) inclusion of diverse cultural objects in exhibitions; and (4) application of creative marketing strategies to promote Korean culture.

1) Continuous and Substantial Support from Government Institutions

Participants indicated that continuous governmental support was critical in promoting a national culture outside of that culture's natural boundary. As a

14. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

15. Participant I, interview by authors, April 15, 2015.

16. Participant F, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

successful example, participants mentioned the generous supports of the Korea Foundation. Among the nine interviewee-participants, seven had participated in workshops supported by the Korea Foundation.¹⁷ From 1994 to 2013, the Korea Foundation supported curators outside of Korea to introduce and teach Korean art and culture. Participants D and G recalled that their participation in workshops held by the Korea Foundation were highly successful:

For quite a long time, the annual curatorial workshop in Korea was held. The Korea Foundation collaborated with the National Museum of Korea, some private museums, and universities to train curators at museums in Europe and North America, Latin America, and Australia about how to deal with Korean art by giving them direct exposure to art, architecture, museum collections, and landscapes.¹⁸

The Korea Foundation has played a significant role in promoting Korean culture worldwide. They supported curators outside of Korea for about 15 years, and this was almost the first time that curators had been supported for such a long period of time. We visited Korea, attended several workshops, participated in several field trips, and took lectures about Korean art for about two weeks. It was very intensive and helpful.¹⁹

It [the Korea Foundation workshop] went on for 15 years, and I attended 13 of the 15 annual meetings, which were 10-day to 2-week workshops that were like graduate seminars. We had the best scholars [whose expertise is Korean art] in Korea. Each year, we talked about some aspect of traditional, classical, modern, and contemporary Korean art. The first

17. The Korea Foundation is a South Korean government institute that promotes a better understanding of Korea in the global community and seeks to strengthen friendship between Korea and other countries. The foundation has supported the establishment and expansion/renovation of Korean galleries in major museums around the world in order to establish exhibition space for Korean culture and arts (Korea Foundation, "Support for Overseas Museums," originally accessed on August 10, 2015 from http://en.kf.or.kr/?menu=553_2015, but the link is no longer available.).

18. Participant C, interview by authors, January 5, 2015.

19. Participant G, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

year was about ceramic traditions, the next year on Joseon court culture, another year on the arts of Buddhism. The workshops were of such good quality that I feel like now I have a PhD in the subject.²⁰

The participants indicated that they had had no connection to Korean collections prior to participating in the workshops. Because of the Korea Foundation's generous support, they have been able to develop networks with museums that possess Korean cultural objects as well as curators in Korean art. Among nine participants, five participants indicated that such long-term support is highly critical to promoting Korean culture to curators and future visitors to their museums. Participant G indicated that due to the Korea Foundation's continuous support, the number of curators and faculty members teaching and researching Korean art has been growing, which was highly rewarding for her as a Korean.

After ten years of support, they [the Korea Foundation] wanted us to talk about Korean cultural objects in our museums [at the workshops held by the Korea Foundation]. The results were very surprising. There was huge progress over ten years. Some curators even cried. Due to the small number of Korean objects that museums owned, they [Korean objects] did not get enough attention from us. However, now we know lots of stories regarding them and have networks to communicate with other curators in Korean art. Due to their continuous and generous support, the number of experts and curators who engaged with Korean art has increased in the United States. Also, the number of faculty members who are teaching and researching Korean art has increased in the United States. It takes a long time to promote one culture in the world. . . . I believe that the Korea Foundation did a great job because they supported us from a long-term perspective.²¹

Some governmental institutions want to see results immediately. For example, after giving financial support to us, they want to see results in several months. But it never works in that way. I know funding is allocated

20. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

21. Participant G, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

annually at such institutions, so it might be difficult to do that [support from a long-term perspective]. But continuous support is very important, especially in the fields of culture and art.²²

2) Construction of a Cultural Context through Museum Storytelling

Participants admitted that they often hesitated to put on an exhibit of Korean art due to the small number of ancient Korean objects available for exhibitions, as well as their lack of documentation. In this regard, storytelling is an important strategy to promote Korean culture to museum visitors, as mentioned by several participants. This argument is supported by DiBlasio and DiBlasio's (1983) explanation about museum storytelling, wherein they describe it as an ideal vehicle for recreating the intellectual and emotional aspect of objects to visitors. In order to create an exhibition narrative, Participant E indicated that curators needed to be creative in developing an engaging cultural context.

The issue is that there are so few [Korean cultural] objects in the United States. Most of them are in Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Because there simply aren't the numbers, it's important to interpret them [Korean cultural objects] in their own context coming from China, and then exporting it in their context to Japan. The Japanese imported them, but they took what aesthetic they liked. So they [the cultural objects from three countries] created an interesting relationship. Thus, curators should see objects in a broader perspective and explore context and relationships with other cultures.²³

I've always presented in our Asian gallery some modern contemporary Korean works in relationship to classical and traditional. . . . The piece that so caught my attention is something she [a Korean contemporary artist] calls "translated vases." The form, the pieces she's using, are basic traditional forms. I positioned this piece with other Korean cultural

22. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

23. Participant E, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

objects. . . . It became one of the most favorite objects in our museum collection for our public school groups and general visitors.²⁴

To create a cultural context for Korean cultural objects, Participant D emphasized the importance of providing perspective as well as learning about relevant cultures that surround Korea:

There are still a lot of curators who are trained in contemporary art who are unfamiliar with a lot of Asian contemporary art. They will naturally try to buy it for their collections because they're comfortable. Similarly, a lot of Asian curators don't have experience with contemporary art. That becomes a problem. I would say that the Korea Foundation workshop, the curators that I met there . . . because they saw Korean art as both traditional and classical as well as modern and contemporary, the different workshops actually introduced us to all of them.²⁵

3) Engagement with Diverse Cultural Objects for Exhibitions

Participant B explained that she could not force visitors to appreciate Korean art. If an exhibition is not visually appealing to visitors, they may not give it their attention. Therefore, it is critical that an exhibition be visually interesting. As one strategy of doing this, four of the interviewed curators included diverse Korean cultural objects in their exhibits. In particular, three curators noted that visitors have great interest in objects of living culture, especially costumes:

Visitors generally have lots of interest in clothing objects in the exhibition. So we try to have these in the exhibition.²⁶

I think currently costume and textile exhibitions, but especially costume exhibitions, are incredibly popular. Part of that is because of recent television shows like *Project Runway* promoting knowledge about design and clothing. Part of it is also that the most popular exhibition ever in the his-

24. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

25. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

26. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

tory of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was Alexander McQueen. Because it became so popular, then everybody else paid attention to the fact that that's something that's popular and there are lots of people who want to do what's popular. Once something is popular, it is more interesting that way.²⁷

In addition, Participant G described several exhibitions with diverse Korean cultural objects that she had worked on as examples. She admitted that exhibitions with diverse cultural objects attract visitors' attention and help them more easily understand Korean culture:

We did hold an exhibition about Korean comic books in New York. When people think about comic books, usually Japan comes to mind, so all the participants mentioned that they had no idea there were comic books in Korea. It might sound weird, but it is a natural response from visitors who are not familiar with Korean culture. Therefore, it will be important to create exhibitions that draw people's attention to what is contemporary as well as unexpected.²⁸

4) Application of Creative Marketing Strategies to Promote Korean Culture

Five participants, who were in charge of arranging an exhibition about Korean art, emphasized the importance of creative marketing strategies to promote Korean culture to museum visitors. Participant B arranged one of the largest exhibitions of Korean art a few years ago with support from the Korean government. She described the strategies that she applied when marketing the exhibition:

Surprisingly, the exhibition was incredibly successful. It was recorded as the most visited exhibition at that time. Also, the exhibition raised the most funds of all special exhibitions in the past. Everyone, including myself, was so surprised with this result because we thought general visitors might not be interested in Korean art. We borrowed the best pre-

27. Participant F, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

28. Participant G, interview by authors, April 13, 2015.

served painting from the National Museum of Korea and exhibited it in front of the exhibition place. We advertised this as a “once in a lifetime experience.” We made every effort to attract visitors to the exhibition.²⁹

As she stated, understanding who is going to visit the exhibition is important to making the exhibition successful.³⁰ In particular, visitor demographics and their level of knowledge regarding Korea should be determined. Based on this knowledge, curators can curate exhibitions that attract visitors’ attention and can develop relevant marketing strategies. Participant B described two cases as examples:

I think the exhibition was such a huge success because of our efforts to understand our visitors. We knew that visitors might not have lots of information about Korean culture. So we told them that you could learn about Korea from the exhibition without any background knowledge. As part of our efforts, we used a device. Through using the device, visitors were able to print out their names in Korean. They really liked that. At first, we only had one device. However, there was always a really long line to use it, so we added one more. I think this helped visitors become interested in Korean culture.

We also performed various programs that attracted their attention. I knew that many young visitors are interested in K-pop, so I arranged a “K-pop night.” We invited famous Korean dancers who have performed in New York and had a performance in front of the museum. We had about 5,000 persons in the audience that night. It was a huge success. Also, we had a “K-drama night” every Wednesday and played famous Korean dramas at the museum.³¹

In addition, Participant I indicated that souvenirs inspired by Korean culture need to be designed and marketed carefully to promote Korean culture to visitors. Her argument is supported by Cummings and Lewandowska

29. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

30. Participant B explained that, generally, the success of an exhibition is measured by the number of visitors it attracts and the amount of funds it raises.

31. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

(2001), who argue that visitor purchases from museum shops are both a systematic acquisition of nostalgic collectibles and a personal reminder of the museum visit. Kent (2010) conducted in-depth interviews to explore visitor experiences in museum shops and found that museum shops help create experiences that can supplement the museum's educational purpose as well as serve as a return to the everyday world of familiar objects. In this regard, a souvenir purchased from a museum shop represents the visitor's experience in a museum. Thus, well-designed souvenirs may increase visitor perceptions of the museum as well as its inspiring culture.

When I was in New York, I visited a design fair for souvenirs. There were lots of souvenirs at that fair and most of them were sponsored by their own countries. I saw one souvenir from Korea and it was extremely expensive compared to the others. It was a wholesale venue, so it should not have been that expensive. Its designer's bio said it was designed by a famous person and had certain design qualities, etc. But the quality did not look like that. I thought it was overpriced and not successfully marketed. Korean souvenir companies need to consider their consumers and audiences.³²

Conclusion

National image is defined as the psychological picture of a given country as it exists in the mind of a consumer (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2006). If the Korean national image were positively established, designers and companies could benefit from that image and would not hesitate to label their products "Made in Korea." As in the example provided earlier in this article, since a well-established national image could significantly affect the formation of positive brand images from a wide range of national industries, governments put forth great efforts to establish and promote a positive national image. In this regard, this qualitative study has focused on cultural objects exhibited in museums because of their significant influence in building a

32. Participant I, interview by authors, April 15, 2015.

national image for visitors. The purpose of the study was to explore challenges and strategies in the promotion of Korea through displays of its cultural objects at museum exhibitions in the United States. To achieve the research purpose, we analyzed Korean cultural objects exhibited at representative museums in the United States and explored challenges faced in organizing such exhibits through interviews with nine Korean art curators at major American museums.

Participant B explained, “Japanese curators started working on establishing a set of Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, from the 1890s. On the other hand, Korea started promoting Korean art after the 1988 Seoul Olympics. As you can see, there is a 100-year difference between the two cases of Japan and Korea. Therefore, it is inevitable that there exists a significant discrepancy between Japan and Korea in terms of the number of cultural objects for museum exhibitions.”³³ Since the period of establishing collections of Korean art has been relatively short compared to Japan, continuous efforts to promote Korean cultural objects are needed. In addition, deliberate efforts from the South Korean government and institutions to document Korean cultural objects will be needed to overcome the challenges discussed above. In particular, they need to be creative in exploring strategies of promoting Korean cultural objects through museum exhibitions due to the small number of Korean cultural objects available in the world. In these efforts, it will also be important to educate the general public on the subtle aesthetics of Korea art.

These findings have implications for the Korean government, which is willing to support Korean culture through museum exhibitions. All participants strongly agreed that the Korea Foundation has done a great job introducing and teaching Korean culture to curators. They point out that Korean divisions in US museums have been gradually established and their establishment owes greatly to the continuous and active support of the Korea Foundation over the past 15 years. Participant D even mentioned how grateful he was to the foundation that asking for further support makes him uneasy. He remarked, “Actually when we organized the summer exhibition

33. Participant B, interview by authors, January 2, 2015.

of our Korean traditional classical and contemporary objects, I intentionally did not go to the Korea Foundation for funding because they have already done so much for us beyond what we could possibly expect.”³⁴ In this regard, the Korean government must strive to maintain its support for the curators from a long-term perspective, to continue its success in promoting Korean culture through museum exhibition. Another perspective that requires attention is mitigating the language barrier. Among the nine curators interviewed, only two curators were native Korean speakers. Therefore, active support for translating Korean art-related contents from Korean into English are also recommended in order to make them easily available to all curators.

Further, there are implications for curators who wish to organize successful exhibitions on Korean art. First, curators need to carefully construct a cultural context through museum storytelling. To do so, they need to make the exhibition visually attractive to visitors, employ crosscultural comparisons, and describe how the objects are made. Second, curators need to include diverse cultural objects in their exhibitions. In particular, the curator-participants emphasized the power of exhibiting clothing and textiles in attracting visitor interest. Third, it is crucial to apply creative marketing strategies to promote Korean culture. Social media marketing is one good strategy to improve the presence of exhibitions as well as attract visitors to exhibitions on a daily basis. Through utilizing social media platform and IT technology, it is possible to identify the demographic information of visitors, which in turn can help to customize the effort to target as well as broaden the exhibition audience.

This study explored curators’ perspectives on exhibiting Korean cultural objects. While such perspectives are meaningful, as curators are the gatekeepers in the transfer of cultural images and knowledge to the general visitor, it would also be worthwhile to explore the effectiveness of Korean cultural object exhibitions at international museums from the perspectives of museum visitors. For a deeper and accurate understanding of visitor perceptions of Korean cultural objects, a survey of diverse populations is encouraged. A thorough investigation of successful cases of exhibitions of Korean

34. Participant D, interview by authors, April 12, 2015.

cultural objects would also facilitate our understanding on the subject. It would also be beneficial to explore external factors affecting the organization of exhibitions on Korean cultural objects. Given that Korea's national image is largely formed by large corporate brands, such as Samsung, this may not reflect the true image of Korea. For a balanced national image of Korea, it is imperative to understand the most effective ways of promoting and communicating Korea's cultural aspects. We hope this exploratory study can spark a wider interest for future studies in this important area.

REFERENCES

- Alpers, Svetlana. 1991. "The Museum as a Way of Seeing." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 25–41. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Anholt, Simon. 2000. *Another One Bites the Grass: Making Sense of International Advertising*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- _____. 2010. *Places: Identify, Image and Reputation*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Creswell, John W. 2012. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummings, Neil, and Marysia Lewandowska. 2001. "Art: The Value of Things." *Critical Quarterly* 43.1: 109–114.
- DiBlasio, Margaret, and Raymond DiBlasio. 1983. "Constructing a Cultural Context through Museum Storytelling." *Roundtable Reports* 8.3: 7–9.
- Domeisen, Natalie. 2003. "Is There a Case for National Branding?" *International Trade Forum* 1 (March): 14–16.
- Gilmore, Audrey, and Ruth Rentschler. 2002. "Changes in Museum Management: A Custodial or Marketing Emphasis?" *Journal of Management Development* 21.10: 745–760.
- Gubrium, Jaber, and James Holstein. 2001. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hodder, Ian. 2012. "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture." In *SAGE Biographical Research*, edited by John Goodwin, 393–402. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Hodges, Nancy. 2011. "Qualitative Research: A Discussion of Frequently Articulated Qualms (FAQs)." *Family and Consumer Science Research Journal* 10.1: 90–92.
- Horie, C. Velson. 1986. "Who Is a Curator?" *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 5.3: 267–272.
- Jaffe, Eugene D., and Israel D. Nebenzahl. 2006. *National Image and Competitive Advantage: The Theory and Practice of Place Branding*. 2nd ed. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Josiassen, Alexander, et al. 2013. "The Halo Model of Origin Images: Conceptualization and Initial Empirical Test." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 12.4: 253–266.
- Karp, Ivan. 1991. "Culture and Representation." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 11–24. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kent, Tony. 2010. "The Role of the Museum Shop in Extending the Visitor Experience." *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 15.1: 67–77.
- Kim, Minja. 2010. *Hangukjeok paesyeron dijain-ui jedaum chatgi* (Finding the Je-daum of Korean Fashion Design). Seoul: Seoul National University Press.
- Kotler, Neil, and Philip Kotler. 2000. "Can Museums Be All Things to All People? Missions, Goals, and Marketing's Role." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 18.3: 271–287.
- Lasser, Ethan W. 2012. "An Unlikely Match: On the Curator's Role in the Social Work of the Museum." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27.3: 205–212.
- Lee, Changhyun. 2011. *Gukga beuraendeu-wa hallyu* (National Brand and Hallyu). Seoul: Korean Studies Information.
- Lin, Nancy. 2016. "5,000 Years of Korean Art: Exhibitions Abroad as Cultural Diplomacy." *Journal of the History of Collections* 28.3: 383–400.
- McClory, Jonathan. 2010. *The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power*. London: Institute for Government. Accessed July 1, 2015. http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20new%20persuaders_0.pdf.
- Min, Seoha. 2015. "Korean Fashion Designers' Use of Cultural Expression and Its Influence on Their Design." *Fashion Practice* 7.2: 219–239.
- Nebenzahl, Israel, Eugene Jaffe, and Bahtisen Kavak. 2001. "Consumers' Punishment and Rewarding Process via Purchasing Behavior." *Teaching Business Ethics* 5.3: 283–305.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

- Paroissien, Eric. 2006. "Contribution aux assemblages hybrides (boulonnés/collés) —Application aux jonctions aéronautiques" (Contribution to Hybrid Assemblies [Bolted/Glued]—Application to Aeronautical Junctions). PhD diss., Université Toulouse III—Paul Sabatier.
- Rub, Timothy, Michael Govan, and Gary Tinterow. 2014 "Foreword." In *Treasures from Korea: Arts and Culture of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392–1910*, edited by Hyunsoo Woo, viii–ix. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum Distribution.
- Shin, Heonchul. 2009. "Marketing geojang Jack Trout Samsung-Hyundai cha-e ppyeo apeun joeon" (Jack Trout's Painful Advice to Samsung and Hyundai). *Maeil Business Newspaper*. Last modified December 11, 2009. <http://news.mk.co.kr/newsRead.php?year=2009andno=639178>.
- Smith, Lawrence. 1997. *The Art of Displaying Art Painful*. New York: Consultant Press.
- Spiggle, Susan. 1994. "Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 21.3: 491–503.
- Trench, Lucy. 2013. *Gallery Text at the V&A: A Ten Point Guide*. Last modified September 3, 2013. http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf.
- Wages, Joan. 2014. "Why Museums Are Important." *Huffington Post*. Last modified February 18, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joan-wages/why-museums-are-important_b_6355710.html.
- Woo, Hyunsoo, et al., eds. 2014. *Treasures from Korea: Arts and Culture of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392–1910*. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum Distribution.