

# Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Sport: A Case Study on Michelle Wie

Yang Young-Kyun

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This paper examines nationalism in Korean popular culture in the era of transnationalism by delving into the case of Michelle Wie, a Korean-American and a global sports star. I focus on the mass media's representation of her both in Korea and the U.S. I also explore the responses of people in both countries, paying special attention to the discussions in cyberspace. Analysis of Korean newspaper articles reveals a strong ethnic nationalist sentiment that reflects the atmosphere of Korean society. In contrast, the U.S. mass media has never raised any issues about her nationality, because, according to the civic nationalist view that is popular in the U.S., there is no room for doubt about it. The hottest topics of discussion about her in several Korean websites are her nationality and Korean mass media's handling of her. Debates are ongoing between those who stick to the viewpoint of ethnic nationalism and those who maintain a civic nationalist view. Here we witness the encounters of two nationalisms not only between the media in Korea and the U.S., but also among internet users in Korea. The latter may be interpreted as Koreans moving away from the traditional, descent-based, and emotional nationalism in Korean society.

*Keywords: Cyberspace, media representation, nationalism, sport, and transnationalism.*

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## Introduction

It was a clear, early summer day; June 1, 1999 to be precise. There was a baseball match between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Pittsburgh Pirates at the Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, in which Park Chan Ho was the starting pitcher for the Dodgers. He had become a notable player in American Major League Baseball and a hero in Korean society since he became the starting pitcher for the Dodgers in 1997. The Korean people and the mass media went crazy showing strong nationalistic color over his remarkable performance. Hundreds of Korean people in the U.S. went to the ballparks to root for him, and

Korean broadcasting stations televised all of his games live. We, the Koreans who lived in Pittsburgh, also organized a supporting squad that consisted of several hundred people; most of the participants were Korean students.

We sat together and cheered and groaned at each ball as Park Chan Ho pitched ball after ball. But my mind was actually in a very complicated state. I hoped that he would play well enough to win. At the same time, however, I did not want him to win the ball game because I had been a devoted fan of the Pirates for eight long years. In the seventh inning, the game was tied at three, and he was replaced by a pinch hitter. At last the game was concluded with the Pirates' win. I was satisfied with the results of the game because Park Chan Ho performed fairly well and got a quality start while the Pirates won the game. But it seemed that others had a different idea. Even after Park left the mound, most of us rooted for the Dodgers. A few fans of the Pirates were upset and booed us. The ballpark guards appeared around our seats to protect us from possible aggressions.

A basic idea for this paper began to formulate with this episode. Why did the majority of Korean spectators at that game cheer for the Dodgers even after Park was out of the game? Did they have any reason to wish for the Dodgers' win over the Pirates? On the other hand, why should I cheer for the Pirates even though I was just a sojourner who stayed there to study? Then, why should I cheer for Park enthusiastically in the first place? Did he not play for the Dodgers, the foreign baseball team, and get paid tons of money? Was this anything to do with Korea, or us, after all? Similar questions can be raised about the cases of other Korean Major League players, Korean golfers in the PGA and LPGA Tours, Korean soccer players in Japan and Europe, etc. Those questions are located at a point where the lines of research on sport, nationalism, and transnationalism intersect.

Recently, sport has emerged as one of the important objects of research in the social sciences. For one thing, millions and millions of people watch TV, read newspapers, and surf websites everyday to follow their favorite sports teams and stars. Sport is also now both very big business and the object of political disputes; it has long been considered a vehicle of ethics (MacClancy 1996: 1). Most of all, many social scientists, including anthropologists and sociologists, are focusing on the fact that sports create, represent, and reinforce people's identities. That is, sports provide people "with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others" (MacClancy 1996: 2). People often exhibit their local or national identities, social status, and masculinity or femininity through

sport.

Among the links between sport and identity, we may find the closest one in sport and nationalism. Recently, however, with the intensified impulses of globalization and transnationalism, the significance of nation-state, nationalism, and national identity is said to be diminishing; at the same time, the link between sport and the expression of nationalism is weakened. This results from such trends as the emergence of an increasingly homogeneous global sporting culture, the growth of populations that cross the borders of nation-states, the weakening loyalty of people to their nation-state, and increasing ethnic movements, etc. The situation of Korean society is not an exception. The dominant impact of commercialism and the mass media in the sporting arena can be found in many Korean athletes who expand their field of action overseas as well as many foreign athletes who enter Korean society.

However, it is also reported that the relationship between sport, nationalism, and national identity seems to remain fairly strong. In Korea, people and the mass media become as excited about Korean athletes abroad as they do for the matches of Korean national teams. In addition, there is a tendency to segregate the “imports” or “mercenaries,” as foreign athletes are called in Korea, in professional sports, such as basketball, baseball, and soccer. These foreign athletes are discriminated against when all-star team members are selected or individual performance awards are granted. Then how strong is nationalism in Korean society in a contemporary transnational world? Is there any change in the strength and appearance of nationalism or national identity in Korean society? I have attempted to find answers to these questions in this paper.

Nationalism is the political doctrine which assumes “that humanity can be divided into separate, discrete units—nations—and that each nation should constitute a separate political unit—a state” (Spencer 2002: 391). The membership of nationhood is usually grounded on the idea of a group of people with a shared culture, often a shared language and history, etc. That is, nationalism is closely related to the idea that people can be naturally classified as belonging to discrete, bounded cultures or societies.

Nationalism and the vision of human cultural difference on which it is based are treated as self-evident features of the world. There are two kinds of nationalism that can provide the basis for membership of nationhood that make us define the limits of specific national identity. One is ethnic nationalism that assumes natural origin of a nation. It is also often bound up with language and, in some instances, race. The other is civic nationalism that celebrates citizenship within

particular political entities, not membership in supposedly natural human associations (Bairner 2001: 3).<sup>1</sup> Even though these two types of nationalism are conceptually distinguishable, they overlap substantially in reality (Kellas 1991: 52).<sup>2</sup> Namely, it is impossible for us to find an ideal form of each type of nationalism in any society. Ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism are mixed, and in some cases, they compete against each other in certain societies.

The relationship between sport and nationalism is inseparable. We celebrate our national identity through sport. We shout for joy or draw a sigh after international sporting events, which unite the members of each nation. “It is as if the imagined community or nation becomes more real on the terraces or the athletics tracks” (Jarvie 1993: 75).<sup>3</sup> But the relationship between sport and nationalism is not simple and straightforward. As Bairner (1996: 322) shows us, the relationship in Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, and Sweden, differs in each context depending on the role of nationalism itself. The relationship also varies according to the type of sport. For example, in the United States, baseball, American football, and basketball have different implications concerning their relationships with national identity (Bairner 2001). Sports stars and nationalism are closely related as well. Jackson et al. (1998) locates the politics of racial and national identity of Michael Jordan and Ben Johnson in the context of the U.S. and Canada.

Transnationalism overlaps globalization but it is usually regarded as having a more limited scope. Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in global space, transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states (Basch et al. 1994; Hannerz 1989: 66-75). Thus, the term “transnational” is used, for example, when referring to the migration of nationals across the borders of one or more nations (Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1986). “The “nation” in transnational usually refers to the territorial, social, and cultural aspects of the nations concerned”

1. Elsewhere, Smith (2002) calls the former “ethnic-genealogical nationalism” and the latter “civic-territorial nationalism.”
2. Kellas (1991) proposes the concept of social nationalism that lies somewhere between these two types of nationalism. “This type of nationalism stresses the shared sense of national identity, community, and culture, but outsiders can join the nation if they identify with it and adopt its social characteristics” (52).
3. However, we should not overemphasize the importance of sporting nationalism. In the case of Scotland, it is found that sporting nationalists do not correspond with political nationalists. It may be more appropriate to regard most Scots as 90-minute patriots (soccer), 80-minute patriots (rugby union), 18-hole patriots (golf), or 60-over patriots (cricket) (Bairner 1996:322).

(Kearney 1995: 548). Although transnationalism has existed for centuries, the transnationalism of today is new in its extensiveness and intensity, which has been facilitated by the recent development of transportation and communication technology. Transnationalism in the world of sport is apparent. According to Wong and Trumper (2002: 169), “sports play an important role in both undermining and strengthening the uncertain character of today’s nations and national identities.” Ivan Zamorano, Wayne Gretzky (Wong and Trumper 2002: 168-194), Hideo Nomo (Hirai 2001), and Park Chan Ho (above in this paper) all embody the transnational flow of capital and people and, at the same time, serve as national icons for the formation and reinforcement of national identity.

I will examine the issues of nationalism, transnationalism, and sport in Korean society through the case study on Michelle Wie, a global celebrity athlete of the twenty-first century. She was born in Hawaii of Korean parents and is a second-generation immigrant. She is the focus of mass media attention not only in the U.S. but also in Korea despite the fact that she is a citizen of the U.S. But why? In order to answer this question, I have analyzed the media’s representation of her both in the U.S. and Korea. How do Koreans respond to this phenomenon? What discourse on this is going on in Korean society? I searched for the answers through casual interviews with people around me and mainly through analyzing the messages on internet bulletin boards.

## **Representation of Michelle Wie in the U.S. Mass Media**

She was born on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1989 in Hawaii as an only child of Byung Wook (B.J.) Wie and Hyun Kyung (Bo). Her father moved to the U.S. from his native South Korea in 1983, and had received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania by 1988. He is now a professor of Transportation studies at the University of Hawaii. Her mother is a real estate agent and former amateur golf player in South Korea. Michelle first held a golf club at four and a half years old. She hit balls with a ten-finger grip, but could drive the ball over 100 yards. She played her first 18-hole round when aged seven, scoring 14-over-par.

Michelle began playing in tournaments when she was nine years old. At the age of ten, she shot a 64 and became the youngest golfer ever to qualify for the USGA (United States Golf Association) Women’s Amateur Public Links. She won Hawaii State Women’s Stroke Play Championship at the age of eleven. When she was twelve in 2002, she became the youngest player to qualify for an

LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) event, the Takefuji Classic. In 2003, she became the youngest winner of the US Women's Amateur Public Links Championship at the age of thirteen. In the Kraft Nabisco Championship in March, she shot a 66, tying the LPGA record for the lowest round by an amateur in a major championship. This year, at age fourteen, she played in the PGA (Professional Golf Association) Tour's Sony International Open as the only woman in the field and missed the cut by one stroke. In this event she shot 68 in the second round, the lowest score ever by a female competing against men. She was among eight players selected to the U.S. Curtis Cup<sup>4</sup> team, the youngest player in the seventy-two-year history of matches for women.

She was very famous in Hawaii, but she rose to nationwide stardom in 2003 at the age of thirteen. Now she is famous worldwide.<sup>5</sup> One word that is most frequently associated with her in the media is "phenom." Other words include "prodigy," "awesome future," "Hawaiian phenom," "teen phenom," "the 14-year-old sensation," "the 14-year-old Hawaiian star," "the long hitting 14-year-old," "wonder Wie," and so on. She constantly appears in the US press. Two basic factors make her a star: her age and long-hitting.

As we have seen above, she was the youngest in her field. Her achievements, in connection with her age, are often compared with other top golfers' performances. For example, Tiger Woods was fifteen when he won his first national title and sixteen when he played his first two PGA Tour events. Jack Nicklaus was seventeen when he won his first national title, the National Jaycees. Nancy Lopez won the regional title of the New Mexico Women's Amateur at twelve, but she was fifteen when she won the 1972 United States Junior Girls.<sup>6</sup> This means that Wie is already ahead of the career timetables set by everyone else.

Several topics related to her age often appear in the media. One is her career path. She played seven times on the LPGA Tour in 2003, missing the cut only

4. Women amateur golfers, one team from the U.S.A. and one team from Great Britain and Ireland, compete in the Curtis Cup Match. The Match began in 1932 and is conducted every two years, alternately in the U.S. and Great Britain/Ireland ([www.curtiscup.org](http://www.curtiscup.org)).
5. She was named Laureus World Newcomer of the Year as the youngest ever to win the Laureus. The winners were selected by the ultimate sports jury—forty-one members of the Laureus World Sports Academy. Among these legends of sports were Boris Becker, Sergey Bubka, Bobby Charlton, Sebastian Coe, Nadia Comaneci, Michael Johnson, Michael Jordan, John McEnroe, Martina Navratilova, Jack Nicklaus, Pelé, Mark Spitz, Katarina Witt, and Deng Yaoping. The awards ceremony was held on the Lisbon Coast on May 10, 2004, and watched by a global TV audience of 350 million ([www.laureus.com](http://www.laureus.com)).
6. These are from the New York Times article on June 28, 2003.

once. She also played against men on the Canadian and nationwide tours, although her only victory came at the U.S. Women's Public Links. Some people think she appears at the LPGA Tour events too much, i.e., she is being pushed too hard too soon. And they also think it is necessary to know how to win. Annika Sorenstam said, "You need to play with your peers. You want to win trophies when you're young." She also figures that playing routinely against pros "can't be good for your confidence." In a similar context, some compare her with Tiger Woods who won 37 times as an amateur. He did not play on the PGA tour until he was sixteen and made his first cut in a professional tournament when he was nineteen. His father said, "When Tiger turned pro, he didn't have to learn how to win ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com))." However, others think that her age does not matter as long as she plays well enough to compete in the LPGA Tour. Michelle's father said, "She always wants a new challenge. She wants to win more USGA events. Her focus is on the LPGA" ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com)).

The second topic is about when she will turn pro. According to the regulations, she is not eligible for the LPGA Tour until she is eighteen years old. She would be able to turn pro earlier if she wants, like Aree Song who became a member of the LPGA at the age of seventeen. But Michelle and her parents have insisted that she will attend college, perhaps Stanford University, and turn pro after graduation. This topic is related to economics. Jane Blalock, the LPGA Senior Tour president, has estimated that Wie could earn fifty million dollars in five years in endorsement deals ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com)). For now, however, the Wies suffer from a financial burden. In 2002, Michelle's father paid more than fifty thousand dollars to cover her travels and lodging, and the situation has been getting worse. It seems that many people think she will turn pro sooner than she planned.

Lastly, the media pay attention to her everyday life. When does she get up and go to school? How long does she practice golf during the weekdays and weekends? When and where does she do her homework? How good are her grades? What does she like to do in her spare time? Her image in the media is somewhat like a monster on the golf field, but she is just like other teenage girls in other respects—she squeezes in time for hanging out at the mall, watching her favorite TV shows, catching a lot of movies, and reading the Harry Potter series. She has a very good academic record even though she does not have enough time to study ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com)).

Her asset, which the media and people talk about the most, is the ability to hit a long ball. No one on the women's tour hits the ball as far or as high as Wie. At

the 2003 Kraft Nabisco Championship, her average drive was more than 280 yards, about 25 yards longer than Sorenstam's average ([newsvote.bbc.co.uk](http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk)). Sometimes her drive reaches more than 300 yards which, according to a golf specialist, is akin to throwing a 90-mph (144km/h) fastball, running a four-minute mile, or hitting a 130-mph (208 km/h) serve ([abcnews.go.com](http://abcnews.go.com)). In addition, she does that with an effortless swing. Her nickname, Big Wiesy, was given by Tom Lehman who was blown away by her likeness to Ernie Els<sup>7</sup> in that she was tall (about 180 cm) and swung flawlessly ([www.golfdigest.com](http://www.golfdigest.com)). Els described her swing as the best of any woman golfer he had seen. Another top-golfer, Fred Couples, also praised her swing, saying, "When you see her swing—when you see her hit a golf ball—there's nothing that prepares you for it. It's just the scariest thing you've ever seen" ([www.golfdigest.com](http://www.golfdigest.com)). Along with her young age, this long-hitting swing with fluidity is the main reason why she attracts huge galleries, no matter where she plays or with whom.

The most important reason why she attracts so much attention may be that she has competed against men and plans to keep doing it. Many people think that she has a realistic shot at crossing the gender barrier because of her long drive. She averaged 286 yards at the Kraft Nabisco in 2003, which would put her in eighty-second place on the PGA Tour in 2003, ahead of 100 other male golfers tracked on the Tour's Web site, and just four yards shy of Tiger's average ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com)). However, some specialists do not accept that idea. Sports writer John Hawkins is critical of this move. He says that even though Wie is a great player, she is but a young girl. And she would not be able to compete on anything close to consistency with the best male players in the world ([www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com)). In the article on ESPN, Ray Ratto also criticizes Wie, Sony Open people, and the mass media for paying too much attention to her playing at the Sony Open. According to him, she is only one of the three female golfers who will play at the PGA Tour and she is not a top female golfer yet ([sports.espn.go.com](http://sports.espn.go.com)).<sup>8</sup>

Michelle apparently has a different idea. Playing against men is nothing new to her. She says, "It's kind of natural for me. When I was really young, when I was five, I was the only girl on the boy's baseball team. ...I just wanted to play

7. Ernie Els's nickname is "Big Easy" because of his height of 6' 3" (190 cm) and his natural, clean easy swing.

8. Annika Sorenstam was the first female golfer who played at the PGA Tour event (the Colonial) and Suzy Whaley the second at the Greater Hartford Open.

with the boys.” She also says, “I like challenges, and I think that I get really bored easily. So if I just play in the women’s tournaments and I guess play them over and over again, I think I’ll get bored of golf.” About those who are skeptical of her ability to compete with men in professional golf, she says, “I think the reason they’re saying that is because they’re truly afraid. I mean, men’s egos can be easily brought down, and I don’t think they want that to happen” (www.cbsnews.com).

What do the golf fans think about this topic? Just after Wie missed the cut by only one stroke at the Sony Open in January 2004,<sup>9</sup> Internet users were asked whether Wie should accept another sponsor’s exemption to the PGA Tour event. The majority of respondents wanted to see more of Wie on the PGA Tour because they thought she deserved another shot. Some of them were thrilled to be witnessing someone capable of breaking the gender barrier and changing a sport. On the other hand, several said that even though they believe that she would become an amazing golfer, they also believe that it was better for her to concentrate on the amateur and the LPGA Tour events for a while.

Why does she become the focus of people’s and the media’s attention? She is a young, tall, and slender girl with the most powerful but soft swing in women’s golf. And she is not afraid of the challenge to break the age and gender barriers at the highest level of the sport. Moreover, she has the personality necessary to become a star: She is daring but poised, she loves the lime-light, she handles interviews without breaking a sweat—unforced, untutored, and straightforward. The fact that she’s from the U.S. will have tremendous appeal, because international players dominate the LPGA Tour despite the fact that interest in women’s golf is growing. Her Korean heritage will also be advantageous because she can be one of the cultural icons that represent the ideal image of the U.S. as a multi-ethnic but harmonious country,<sup>10</sup> and because she can be a tremendous appeal to the rapidly growing Asian golf market. To conclude, Wie has the Woods-like appeal to transcend sports.<sup>11</sup>

9. She took 47<sup>th</sup> place in a field of 97 men, which means she beat 51 male professional golfers.

10. Examples of people playing such roles include Michael Jordan (Jackson et al. 1998) and Tiger Woods (Andrews and Jackson 2001).

11. The comparison between Michelle and Tiger is constantly made. Several articles that cover this topic can be found: “Move Over, Tiger” (ABC), “Wie and Tiger: Different Path... But Same Destination?” (ESPN), “Wie May Be Biggest Wiz Kid since Tiger Woods” (ESPN), “She Already Has Tiger in Her Sights” (New York Times), and so on.

## Representation of Michelle Wie in the Korean Mass Media and Cyberspace

The history of golf is very long. Though it is not clear where it originated, modern forms of golf began in Scotland; the first golf club and tournament were founded in Scotland in 1744. The golf course was first designed for 18-holes in Scotland in 1764. The history of golf in Korea traces back to 1897 when Englishmen, hired as customs officers, made a six-hole golf course inside the customhouse at Weonsan Port. In 1924 Kyungseong club was organized as Korea's first golf club. The Chosun Golf Association was established in 1937. The Korea Professional Golf Association was established in 1963. In 1978 the women's section was established in the KPGA and developed into the Korea Ladies Professional Golf Association in 1988. In the same year, Ku Ok Hee won the LPGA event, the first international win.

Since Pak Se Ri won four LPGA Tour events including the U.S. Women's Open and the McDonald Championship in 1998, many Korean female golfers followed her footsteps and became a dominant force in the LPGA Tour. In 2003, one-third of all rookies who qualified for the LPGA card were Korean, and half of the top ten rookies were Korean. Korea had the largest number at eighteen among the foreign players in the LPGA Tour (twelve Aussies and ten Swedes) in the same year ([www.commonkore.com](http://www.commonkore.com)).

The growth of golf as leisure and sport has been remarkable in Korea. In 1971 about 300,000 people played on just ten golf courses. The numbers increased to about 4,400,000 players and fifty-one courses over the next twenty years. The numbers almost quadrupled in 2003 to 15,000,000 players and 180 courses. Although the social discourse on golf is still negative, it has been popularized.<sup>12</sup> The most important reason for this may be related to money: The level of GNP and the number of golfers show a positive co-relationship ([www.golfdb.co.kr](http://www.golfdb.co.kr)). The success of Korean female golfers in the LPGA Tour may contribute to this trend. People think that the golfers are enhancing the national prestige of Korea, so they and the media pay close attention to the golfers' performance.

12. The negativity stems from the fact that Korean people think golf is a luxury, environmentally harmful, and affiliated with corruption, etc. (Koo 2003; Lee and Park 1998). One survey research reports that 86% of Korean white-collar workers intend to learn to golf in the future. They currently do not play golf due to its high cost (42%), their tight schedule (35%), and the negative social perception of golf (22%), etc. (Sim 2002: 113-120).

Golf is an individual sport that is rarely associated with nationality or national identity.<sup>13</sup> Not only do the individual golfers not represent their nations, but only a few events are held in the form of competition between national teams. These international competitions include the PGA events such as the Ryder Cup (U.S. vs. Europe) and the Presidents Cup (U.S. vs. non-European International), the senior PGA event of the UBS Warburg Cup (U.S. vs. the Rest of the World), the LPGA event of the Solheim Cup (U.S. vs. Europe), the amateur event of the Walker Cup (the U.S. vs. the Great Britain) for male and female counterparts of the Curtis Cup, and the junior event of the Junior Ryder Cup (U.S. vs. Europe). It is noticeable that most of the events are not exactly national competitions but rather between individuals or teams that represent nations. There is also the World Golf Championships that consist of the Accenture Match Play Championship, the NEC Invitational, the American Express Championship, and the World Cup. The International Federation of PGA Tours, whose members include the European Tour, the Japan Golf Tour, the PGA Tour, the PGA Tour of Australia, Southern Africa Tour, and the Asian PGA, has sanctioned this championship series. The World Golf Championships were launched in 1999 to enhance the competitive structure of professional golf worldwide (<http://www.worldgolfchampionships.com>). The first two events are played individually and the other two are played in pairs while all players represent their nations. But they are far from World Cup soccer or the Olympics in the intensity of competition or height of interest as national events.

However, the situation in Korean society is quite different. The performance of Korean golfers in the U.S., especially in the LPGA Tour events, is the focus of mass media attention. You can read or hear about the golfers almost everyday because they participate in all LPGA Tour events and some of them get their names up on the leader boards. The Korean media often calls them the “Korean (women’s) corps” that tries to conquer the LPGA Tour stage. They are regarded as heightening the national prestige of Korea. The leader of the corps has been Pak Se Ri, followed by Grace Park and Kim Mi Hyun. The members of the corps also include Michelle Wie, Christina Kim, and Aree Song. Wie and Kim are U.S. citizens. Song was born of a Korean father and a Thai mother in Thailand. She maintained Thai nationality until she acquired Korean nationality early this year. But even when she was formally a Thai using her mother’s last

13. Scotland may be an exception in this regard, because golf is believed to have originated from Scotland.

name of Wongluekiet, she was treated as a Korean and called Song in the Korean media.

Lately, Michelle Wie has received most of the spotlight. That is, I think, chiefly because she is the hottest topic in the world of golf, not just in the U.S., but also in other countries. Most of the articles about her that appear in the Korean press are actually translations or summaries of articles from the foreign press such as Associated Press, ESPN, the New York Times, the LA Times, and Sports Illustrated, etc. Therefore, the contents are similar: The foci are on her long drive, her youth, her competition against female professional players as well as male players, her commercial value, and so on. The words that represent her in Korean media are many as mentioned before, and include “golf prodigy” and “girl Her Majesty.”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes such words as “Korean American” or “Korean descent” are added to emphasize that she is Korean.

Actually, the Korean media always reminds us of the fact that she is Korean by putting her Korean name side by side with her American name, i.e., either Michelle Wie (Korean name Wie Sung Mi) or Wie Sung Mi (American name Michelle Wie). When Korean reporters collect data by themselves, they are often interested in stuff like whether or not she can speak Korean and what kind of food she likes. For example, a Korean reporter told her, “You speak Korean well.” She replied, “I haven’t been to Korea since I was five. My parents let me learn Korean.” He asked her again, “What kind of food do you like?” She replied, “I’m not energized unless I eat rice with *kimchi* everyday. Americans won’t know that.”<sup>15</sup> An article written based on an interview with her when she visited Korea to play in the CJ Nine Bridges Classic of the LPGA Tour was titled, “I’d like to eat my fill of the steamed skates.”<sup>16</sup> It is apparent that the Korean mass media intends to portray her as a Korean.

While the Korean media emphasizes facts that can be considered as important features in granting her Korean nationality such as her race, favorite foods, and her ability to speak Korean, etc., they rarely mention her citizenship, the other important criterion in defining one’s nationality. In other words, the media mainly stick to the ethnic (or cultural) nationalist view that celebrates membership in a supposedly natural human association.

14. In the Korean mass media, “Her Majesty” is often used to represent Annika Sorenstam, while “queen” is the word for Pak Se Ri.

15. This conversation is from the article in the *Chosun Ilbo* (April 1, 2003).

16. This is from *The Dong A Ilbo* (October 27, 2003).

However, I find that many Koreans do not subscribe to this attitude. In reality, hot debates are going on concerning Michelle's nationality in Korean cyberspace.<sup>17</sup> Mixed with this are several issues, which include whether or not we should cheer for her, and how we can interpret the mass media's frenzy shown in both Korea and the U.S. First, there are people who say that Michelle Wie is a Korean because her parents are pure Koreans; she looks exactly like a Korean; she likes to eat Korean food; she can speak Korean. They do not care about her citizenship. Most of them do not see any problem with the media's coverage of Michelle in Korea or in the U.S. And they say that they would cheer for her along with other Korean golfers when they compete with each other. However, they are the minority among internet users.

Second, there are those who say that Michelle is an American because she is a citizen of the U.S. They also think that the multi-ethnicity of nation-states is increasing because migration across national boundaries is increasing and the world is globalizing; this means that people's identities are increasingly defined by citizenship. Furthermore, they say that while she may look like a Korean, she is an American because she grew up as an American; she has never said to the foreign press that Korea is her motherland or that she likes Korean food. Therefore, she is no different than other American players, they say, and she is proud of herself for being a member of the American national team. They think she receives such frantic attention in the U.S. because she is an American who will be able to regain American glory in the LPGA Tour that is currently dominated by foreign players. So they are fed up with the Korean mass media's excitement about her. They cannot find any reason to cheer for her. One of the reasons for their being so upset may be derived from their perception that Korean people and the media are in a one-sided love affair with her.<sup>18</sup> I suppose

17. I found this while searching for material about Michelle Wie on the web. I analyzed the viewpoints of internet users (the so-called "netizens") based on the messages posted on the internet bulletin boards of "Ilgan Sports," a newspaper that specializes in sports and entertainment, "Naver," a portal internet site, and another portal site of Michelle's internet fan café in "Daum, another portal site."
18. Their feelings correspond to the facts I found. There is, for example, an article about her visiting Jangheung, her father's hometown (for details, see footnote 20 below). Another article describes the situation where Korean people raised funds and organized support groups to financially back her when the news of the Wies suffering from their financial burden became generally known (*Hangyeore Sinmun*). People were making donations to the Wies, in spite of the fact that her father is a professor and her mother a real estate agent, conditions that are enough to put them in the middle class. It means that they would hardly need others' support

this hurts their pride.

Third, the majority of internet users examined regard Michelle as a Korean-American. They say that she is a citizen of the U.S. but of Korean descent. Their basic idea is that no matter what one says or does, no one can change the blood. Contrary to the second category of people, they also think that ethnic identity is becoming more important in this era of globalization, because people change their citizenship more easily and more frequently than before. Generally speaking, these people are somewhere between the first and the second category of people. They say that although the mass media in Korea tends to be overexcited about her and exaggerates her ethnic identity as a Korean, she deserves the spotlight for what she has achieved so far. And they also say that they are willing to cheer for her, but they will not support her if she plays as a representative of the U.S. against the Korean national team. They can be divided into two subcategories: One group is composed of those who think Michelle is a “**Korean**”-American; the other is composed of those who think she is a Korean-“**American**.” The former is closer to the first category of people and the latter to the second.

## Conclusion

Michelle Wie is, as the *New York Times* says, the world’s most talked-about female golfer. She is the focus of mass media attention, not just in the U.S. but also in many countries for the various reasons mentioned above. The mass media in Korea is not an exception—she certainly appears there frequently. The reasons may be very similar to those of the media in the U.S. bringing her into relief. Actually, the Korean press greatly depends on the American press in writing articles about Wie. The mass media in Korea, however, constantly reminds us explicitly or implicitly that she is a Korean. Through the analysis of articles on Wie in several newspapers, I found a strong nationalistic tone based on the primordial assumption—ethnic nationalism. In contrast to this tendency, Wie’s nationality is under scrutiny by internet users in cyberspace. Some of them strongly argue that Wie is an American based on her citizenship and her self-

in normal circumstances. It is rational to adjust Michelle’s playing schedule if the family feels that it is a big burden. Those who want to support Michelle are, I would say, too kind or sympathetic. Her family’s response is unknown.

identification.<sup>19</sup> And thus they criticize the Korean mass media because the media often reports her as a Korean and covers her too much. Furthermore, a few object to the Korean mass media overly covering professional Korean athletes abroad, regardless of their nationality. According to them, these athletes play just for themselves—it is unlikely that they would sacrifice themselves for their mother country, Korea, or that they play to enhance the prestige of Korea.

It is said that nationalism is very strong in Korean society. It is often predicated on the presumed homogeneity of the Korean people and their culture in ethnicity, language, and their long Korean history. Nationalism in Korean society has been maintained and reinforced throughout its modern history. On the one hand, nationalism functioned as a resistant ideology against Japanese imperialism that tried to liquidate Korean nationality during the occupation period, and it was also resistant to the regimes that attempted to secure the division of North and South Korea. On the other hand, Korean regimes utilized nationalism to ensure their legitimacy and to preserve their ruling systems (Im 1996).

Sporting nationalism has also been very strong in Korea.<sup>20</sup> There have been ups and downs: It reached a high point at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games and recently during the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup. And when Korean players or national teams compete with foreign players or teams, sporting nationalism is usually intense. Even when a Korean athlete plays as a member of a foreign professional team, people enthusiastically root for him, because they think he is a Korean. Cha Bum, a Korean soccer player who played in several professional soccer teams in Germany, represented such a player some twenty years ago. The trend of Korean athletes going abroad intensified in the 1990s, and Park Chan Ho and Pak Se Ri are the icons of this trend. Koreans have supported them whole-heartedly. Korean golfers in the LPGA Tour, Korean Major League players, and the football players in Europe belong to this category. They provide Korean people with a channel through which nationalism can be expressed.

Transnational labor migration in sport is popularized nowadays and accordingly, some research has been done concerning this phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> I could have

19. I have not found anything about self-identification of her nationality. However, for some critical netizens, the fact that she does not identify herself publicly as a Korean is enough for them to regard her as an American.

20. The research about sporting nationalism in Korea includes Lim and Shin 2000, Ahn et al. 2001, Gang 2002, and Lee 2002.

21. For example, research was conducted on Nomo (Hirai 2001), Hingis (Giardina 2001), Zamorano and Gretzky (Wong and Trumper 2002).

conducted research about Park Chan Ho or Pak Se Ri, but the situation surrounding them is too similar to the case of Nomo Hideo, about whom research has already been done. Park, Pak, and Nomo are all transnational celebrity athletes and businesspeople who are the product of the process of transnationalization of capital. They also have dual commitment to their respective places of origin and current places of residence. They are very much alike in that they keep their original nationalities and inspire national pride in their respective motherlands, Korea or Japan.

However, Michelle Wie is different. She was born in the U.S., which makes her a U.S. citizen, but between Korean parents, which ethnically makes her a Korean. She is a child of transnational migration and transnational popular cultural and information flows. She attracts the media and people's attention in both countries due partly to their nationalism. The mass media in Korea constantly emphasizes that she is Korean, or more accurately a Korean descendant, regardless of her citizenship or her own perception of nationality.<sup>22</sup> The media's attitude is mainly derived from ethnic nationalism. Koreans residing in the U.S., many of whom are probably U.S. citizens, may also feel nationalistic for their motherland.<sup>23</sup> They cheer for her the loudest among the huge gallery that follows her.<sup>24</sup> We can also sense the nationalistic atmosphere in the American media's excitement toward her: She is expected to become an "American" queen in the LPGA dominated by foreign-players and to win matches as a member of the "American" national team. This is certainly one of the reasons why she is so highly evaluated in the U.S. Civic nationalism seems to underlie such an atmosphere. In sum, she has both a Korean nationality and an American nationality at the same time. Strictly speaking, she is not a Korean because she does not have the legal nationality of Korea. However, in popular thinking and sentiment, she is a

22. We do not know what Michelle thinks about her Korean genealogy, i.e., whether or not she thinks Korea is her motherland. I was not able to find words from her about this issue from newspapers or websites. When she visited Jangheung, her father's hometown where her grandfather still lives, she just said, "I'm so glad to come to my grandfather's home." On the other hand, her grandfather said, "Sung Mi is coming to Jangheung to trace her roots" as well as that he wanted to always remind her that she is a Korean.
23. Under the situation of transnationalism, membership in a nation and membership in a state can be bifurcated (Wong and Trumper 2002: 172), and Korean galleries reflect this phenomenon. Similar to this is the fact that many Korean-Americans who are citizens of the U.S. supported the Korean soccer team over the U.S. team in the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup match.
24. She said that it was pretty "funny." Judging from this remark, it is doubtful that she identifies herself as a Korean.

Korean because she has Korean blood, she loves to eat Korean food, and she can speak a bit of Korean. Therefore, discourses about her in both countries are similar in that nationalist sentiment is expressed, yet at the same time they are distinguished in that different kinds of nationalism are operating.

However, the response of internet users in Korea shows various views on the issue of Wie's nationality and the Korean media's dealings with her, which diverge from popular thinking and sentiment. A small minority sets forth an opinion that corresponds to popular thinking, namely that she is a Korean because of her genealogy and cultural background. The majority of the netizens, on the contrary, are very keen about her legal nationality. They condemn the Korean media for being overexcited about her. In other words, their view leans toward civic nationalism, different from popular thinking based on ethnic nationalism. Some of them strongly oppose the ethnic nationalist view, arguing that we do not have to pay special attention to all Korean professional athletes playing in foreign countries. To them, nationalism in popular thinking and in the mass media is too emotional and outdated. Therefore, we can conclude that there are conflicts in viewpoints and attitudes based on different types of nationalism among Korean people.

Are we witnessing changes in the tendency to express popular nationalist thinking and sentiment? The answer will be partly positive if we draw a conclusion based on the analysis of discourse among netizens. However, we have to be careful in order to reach that conclusion, because those who post messages on bulletin boards are not necessarily the everyday "Tom, Dick, and Harry" we come across on the street. Only a small portion of Koreans visits newspaper websites that specialize in sports and entertainment section or joins Michelle's fan site online. Even smaller a number actually post messages on the website bulletin boards.<sup>25</sup> Those who write about Wie's nationality must be a much smaller number of people. They may be people who are quite interested in her; or they may be very fed up with the Korean media's dealings with her; or they may be very critical of the strong (ethnic) nationalist atmosphere in Korean society. Actually, those I interviewed by and large did not much care about Wie's nationality, nor about the Korean mass media. I ask again, are we witnessing

25. The number of hits on the messages on *Ilgan Sports'* website ranges from several hundred to over twenty thousand. In the case of the Naver talk plaza, hits average several hundred. Members of Michelle's fan site are over six thousand. Therefore, the ten or so people who posted messages represent only a small minority of those concerned.

changes in the tendency to express popular nationalist thinking and sentiment? I would say that this can be interpreted as a sign of the movement farther away from the traditional, descent-based emotional nationalism. We will have to wait and see.

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**Yang Young-Kyun** is currently an assistant professor of anthropology at The Academy of Korean Studies. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the Department of Anthropology, Seoul National University, and his Ph.D. from the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh. His research interests include the state-society relationship in China, the post-socialist changes in China, the transnational movement of culture and people, globalization and socio-cultural changes, and generation in Korean society.

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