The “City of Culture” Project in Question: Regenerating the City of Kwangju as an Asian Hub of Art and Culture for Human Rights and Democracy

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Abstract

The present study traces the recent rhetoric in cultural policy concerning “cities of culture” in South Korea. The paper is a case study of the city of Gwangju, as the birthplace of modern democracy in Korea. Currently, public input from below into the urban regeneration project for Gwangju has barely existed, while most urban planning programs have been implemented by an elitist approach of policymakers who enjoy exhibiting their performances through constructing a monstrous convention center or theme park from top, rather than encouraging the spiritual values of “soft” and “immaterial” heritage through cultural participation from below. The government’s policy of designating Gwangju as a niche of Asian cultural industry and tourism in the global economy is closely related to the government’s economic reductionism of culture. The study suggests instead the regeneration of Gwangju as the city of art and culture for human rights and democracy.
Introduction

The regeneration of cities in South Korea under the military regimes that ruled the country in the decades following the 1960s was exclusively based upon the totalitarian government’s mottos of economic development and growth policies oriented towards heavy industries and exports of original equipment manufacturer (OEM) products. Thanks to such interventionist, government-driven policies in urban development, Korea’s functional value since the launching of the civilian government in the mid-1990s, especially that of East Asia’s second-largest metropolitan area, the city of Seoul, has been transformed into an intermediary nodal point or hub for disseminating the global ideas of market hype within the developing Asian countries.

In addition to surveying the monolithic paradigm of economic expansion that has dominated policy discourses related to urban development, the present study traces the recent rhetoric in cultural policy concerning “cities of culture” in South Korea. Since 2004, the current South Korean government and its Ministry of Culture and Tourism have implemented a “cities of culture” policy plan through which they have actively attempted to renovate several mid-sized cities such as Gwangju, Kyongju, and Jeonju as “international cultural cities.” The government’s policy of designating Korea’s larger cities as niches of Asian cultural industry and tourism in the global economy is closely related to the government’s economic reductionism of culture. Heedless of the cultural diversity, social conditions, and local traditions in a given city, the Korean government has aimed at gaining a market share by transforming traditional culture into profitable show business ventures. The present paper is a case study of the city of Gwangju, which is viewed as the birthplace of democracy in Korea because of the massacre of striking workers, protesting students, and citizens that occurred there on May 18, 1980. The present study investigates how the historic city of Gwangju, once a democratic “commune” of local citizens resisting the military regime of the 80s, has lost its spirit, and how the Korean government has redesigned a city in an attempt to make it a powerhouse in the global economy.

Currently, the dominant market power of supranational economic institutions has entirely subordinated Korean IT and cultural policies to the global economic order. The regeneration of cities motivated by neo-liberal discourses about globalization, which are largely unlimited market hype, has displaced the local geographical, cultural, social, or environmental conditions in a city with the geometrical grid of economic reductionism. Instead of beneficial improvements in urban life, the rhetoric of development usually leads to gentrification, commercialization, and the reduction of the cultural and the local to the economic (McGuigan, 2004: 98). The incorporation of Korean IT and cultural policies into a new imperial mode of production, a knowledge-based economic system, is a far cry from the normative role of the state as a public mediator which guarantees the cultural rights of the citizen and
which thus should defend citizens’ common intellectual heritage against the losses caused by an overly restrictive view of business market. When the rapid privatization and commercialization of cultural resources and landscapes is the collaborative work of proprietary desire and government support, the role of the government in building the public commons for citizens is suspect. This study therefore explores how the current Korean policy drive to create “cities of culture” is being catalyzed by market initiatives. The study argues that if the government wants to address the historic pain of an oppressed region such as Gwangju, it should instead embark on a different urban project, such as designating it as an international sanctum of human rights resistance to authoritarian regimes.

**Neo-liberalism and Local Cities**

The huge step toward post-capitalist urbanization and the reconfiguration of cities has always included spatial vocabularies of power: there is an uneven geography of segregations, disparities, and exclusions between downtown and ghettos or slums, between urban and rural, between local and global, between center and periphery, and so on. For instance, “fortified” or “carceral” cities (Davis, 1990; Soja, 1996) became terms reflecting the new stage of urban space policing through the use of pervasive and ubiquitous technology in Korea. The “dual city” (Castells, 1999), the “de-industrialized city” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 151-153), or the “polarized city” (Short, 2004) became terms depicting uneven development of cities within the networks of global economies. The “other” would be those local cities which have been subordinated as intermediaries transfusing their material and immaterial assets into major global or metropolitan cities of economic dominance, or excluded and disconnected from the “control points for the reproduction of capitalist society in terms of labor power, exchange, and consumption patterns” (Soja, 1989: 95).

Due to the economic growth policies of a series of authoritarian governments in South Korea, urban redesign of so-called *Mak-Gaebal* — which means the insane urban planning of the government ignoring the human condition such as the life cycle or ecological environment — and the ensuing spatial disparity and segregation of populations by the social classes have degraded the urban landscape to a state where it is detached from the basic conditions of the human life-world. Just as T. S. Eliot’s “unreal city” in *The Waste Land* (1922) described the gloomy and brutal aspect of the wage slave in the capitalist city (Drabble, 1991), so Korea’s government has engraved the dominant mode of production in its architectures and streets everywhere. Although a city like Gwangju in Korea was once named “a center of revolution against the established order” (Harvey, 1973: 203), it has been reborn “as a center of power and privilege (to be revolted against)” (204), along with its topological status as a semi-peripheral hub for promoting and connecting global and Asian trade and cultural industry. A neo-liberal world order thus has rapidly subverted insurgency, cultural diversity, preservation of heritage, and protection of the natural
environment from the urban landscape, replacing them with crude states of economic exploitation, cultural decay, impoverishment of urban ghettos, worsening of traffic congestion, urban ecologies destroyed by out-of-town developments, depriving the underprivileged people of cultural opportunities, and so forth.

The Korean government has not been exempt from the uneven rearrangement of urban spaces. The spatial redesign of the modern Korean city has been entirely conditioned by the unholy alliance between state interventionism and neo-liberal economic reductionism, along with the conscious desire to be incorporated under the umbrella of the globalized economy. Harvey’s (2003) concept of “accumulation by dispossession” well describes some of the results of the neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation, commercialization of immaterial labor and cultural forms, and financial liberalization, which have largely been accomplished by the symbiotic relations between the neo-liberal state and the well-established conglomerates. The state-driven urban developmental policies of east and south-east Asia, such as those of Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea, can be explained as examples of state interventionism and its success to some degree. Harvey (2005: 101-108) describes some of the political and territorial logics of power employed by these states, such as capturing regional dynamics as a source of their own power or augmenting their power by setting up havens for capital investment such as constructing new high-tech industrial districts, designating special districts for tourism, and granting the privileged loan to speculative capital on real estate. In Korea, the spatial appropriation by capital and the state is currently being revitalized by a new state-generated rhetoric directed toward persuading the people to give it legitimacy by cooperating with the “cities of culture” policy project.

**Economic Reductionism of Urban Regeneration**

In Korea, since 1973 when the government established the first master plan for cultural development, the current Ministry of Culture and Tourism has had its title changed several times, responding to the policy focus of each administration: from the Ministry of Culture and Information (73–89), to the Ministry of Culture (90–92), to the Ministry of Culture and Sports (93–97), to its current title, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (98–the present). The concept of “cultural welfare” which the government had officially supported since the 1970s was in the 1990s rapidly transformed into the neo-liberal policy agenda of promoting the domestic cultural industries, especially since 1998 when Dae-jung Kim, once was a prominent political activist, became president.

The IMF-driven financial crisis of 1997 in Korea meant that the Kim government which took office in 1998 inherited the heavy political burden of attempting to restructure the domestic market so as
to allow it to become vulnerable to the neo-liberal pressure of global conglomerates. While Kim had advocated a democratic reform of the old authoritarian regime, under these dominant conditions of increasing globalization his policy shifted to the radical adoption of neo-liberal economic policies and to promoting the information and culture industries over the labor-intensive heavy industries. Because of Kim’s success in enacting political reform, opposition to his government’s economic drive toward privatization and commercialization was muted (Cho, 2000: 422). Since that time, culture has been widely regarded both as a key dimension of globalization and as a creative industry for earning foreign US currency and creating a new job market.

Over the Kim’s civilian regime and that of the current president, Moo-hyun Noh, policy plans for the cultural or creative industry have been so driven by economic reductionism or determinism that citizens’ critical voices of cultural diversity are always buried under a vague rhetoric of “international competition” (Amin, 1998: 46). Bourdieu’s (2003) critique of “the policy of depoliticization” is quite apt for explaining current cultural policy in Korea. Bourdieu describes exactly the destructive aspect of the emergent neo-liberal policy, which aims to “grant economic determinisms a fatal stranglehold by ‘liberating’ them from all controls, and to obtain the submission of citizens and governments to the economic” (38).

Since the official establishment of a Committee for Planning the Cities of Culture by presidential order (No. 18279) in February 2004, Korea’s major cities, such as Gwangju, Busan, Incheon, Kyongju, and Jeonju, have been strategically designated by the government’s urban policy to promote the creative industries and the “cities of culture” project as a response to global market demands. Kyongju (the “city of history”) and Jeonju (the “city of tradition”) have been promoted for tourism as having an ancient historical tradition and cultural heritage, while larger cities such as Gwangju (the “city of culture”), Incheon (the “city of entertainment”) and Busan (the “city of visual media”) have been designated as “creative cities” under the direct supervision of the national government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The concept of “creative cities” means adjusting local urban spaces to make them function within a global framework (see Tay 2005), and these Korean cities are quite analogous to the “creative cities” that cultural geographers have described as being created through the cultural globalization promoted by local and central government policy initiatives. The Korean government’s “city of culture project” in Gwangju, however, involves more intervention from above than is used in other cities. It is interesting to investigate why the current Noh government is so deeply involved in the urban policy of Gwangju. Before it begins with the questionable policies of urban regeneration, this study needs to review the democratic history and living conditions of citizens of Gwangju.
Gwangju City as Exceptional

Gwangju, which means “village of light,” located in Cholla province, is the hub of the southwestern (Honam) region of the Korean Peninsula and is a first-tier metropolitan city with a population of about 1.41 million (Korean Bureau of National Statistics 2005). The Honam region has traditionally had the best fertile plains for harvesting crops. Ironically, the optimal condition for agriculture enabled feudal landlords to squeeze farmers’ labor in a miserable way for three centuries during the Chosun dynasty. Despite the impoverished nature of the people’s economic and social life, the region has been important in the development of art (Gwangju is the birthplace of namjonghwa, the southern school of Chinese painting) and music (it is also a center of seopyungae, a form of pansori, the traditional Korean epic music-drama). The popularity of art and music in Gwangju seems like cultural catharsis in the midst of so much exploitation by feudal overlords.

While the miserable conditions of the people’s life may have stimulated their artistic and cultural sensibilities, Gwangju’s citizens also have a long historical tradition of defending themselves against landlords who made the farmers suffer from abject poverty (it was the center of the 1894 Donghak rebellion) and against the Japanese colonial occupation (it was the location of the 1929 student revolt). Most importantly, the uprising of Gwangju’s citizens in May 1980 is remembered as marking a new era of democracy in modern Korean history. It is ironic, therefore, to see the historical memory of democracy and human rights become withered and sanitized by a top-down cultural policy decision of the national government.

The Gwangju Commune as an Unhealed Memory

In South Korea up through at least the early 1990s, the grid of military-authoritarian practices that threatened citizens’ public rights was pervasive: for instance, the national ID system identifying each Korean, the use of paramilitary violence to break worker unions, the use of closed-circuit TV’s for policing, and the widespread practice of government eavesdropping and of politically-motivated investigations of activist citizens. During the 1970s and 1980s, the regime in power employed a wide variety of means to compel most citizens to become docile subjects, imposing a curfew, forcibly shearing the hair of “hippies,” torturing political activists, searching citizens’ possessions on the street, silencing the voice of leftists in the public arena, and so forth. During the dark period of these repressive military regimes, Korean citizens were eager to have more political rights such as freedom of speech, expression, and assembly, among others.
General Doo-hwan Chun was a despot who suppressed people’s desire for democratization at that time. He came to power in the military coup of December 12, 1979, and declared nationwide martial law, which was directed at banning all political activity, crushing the labor movement, closing the universities, and arresting democratic politicians and activists, including Dae-jung Kim (Shelley 2001). The 1980 uprising in Gwangju happened during this time. The paratroopers’ violent response to a demonstration by citizens of Gwangju led to the massacre of as many as 2,000 people—striking workers, protesting students, and citizens—on May 18, 1980, on the heels of a series of politically reactionary events: the assassination of the first military dictator, Cheong-hee Park, in 1979, and the coup d’état of the next military dictator, Chun, who used the demonstrations in Gwangju as a pretext for his repressive policies in 1980. For the five days of the uprising, the citizens of Gwangju held the city: over 200,000 people participated in demonstrations and hundreds of civilians in the provincial capitol building (used as the headquarters for the citizens’ army) took up arms against the military regime. During this period, when Gwangju was completely blockaded by the military siege and cut off from contact with the outside world, a Citizens’ Council was spontaneously organized to defend the city, maintain public security, distribute food and water, and prepare for a counterattack by the armed resistance. However, the military regime brutally quelled the uprising, killed the civilians, and took control of Gwangju on May 22, 1980, after the US government granted permission for Korean troops to put down the uprising.

The Gwangju uprising is seen as the most tragic event in the history of modern Korea. Gwangju is viewed as a shrine of democracy where Korea’s citizens remember both the painful history of violent repression by the military regime and the first example of democratization in modern history. Since 1993, when Korea’s first civilian government was democratically elected, Korean presidents have always regarded Gwangju as a nuisance, because their administrations still contain criminals who were part of the military regime that was in power at the time of the massacre, and Gwangju keeps alive the memory of their crimes. The civilian presidents since 1993 have made some superficial gestures to memorialize the dead, to pay compensation to the survivors of the uprising, and to heal the wounded history of the past in the city of Gwangju. However, the state-sponsored projects in Gwangju — such as the establishment of the 5/18 Foundation in 1994, a new memorial 5/18 Mangwol-dong Cemetery (1997) and other memorial sites, and a Gwangju Uprising Special Law (1997) — rather than promoting national unity as the government intended, have instead shown the deep divisions that remain between Gwangju and the central government. For instance, Yea’s (2002) field study of the 5/18 Cemetery demonstrated how the state-sponsored “memorial industry” — which arbitrarily relocated and renovated the old Mangwol-dong Cemetery into a new one and converted the old sites of a torture chamber and of a military court into a “5/18 Memorial Park” and a “Remembrance Park” — resulted in reburying and sanitizing the memories that the old sites had preserved. It is quite natural that these arbitrary state projects have no historical meaning for the citizens of Gwangju. Nevertheless, the government’s “surprise packages” for Gwangju
have continued up through the current administration of Moo-hyun Noh, repackaged now in the “cities of culture” project, which has several aims: integrating local cities into economic globalization; promoting the local economy, which has been lagging behind the rest of the country, by means of urban tourism and city marketing; and providing political compensation for the 5/18 uprising and its unhealed state.

Is Gwangju the “City of Culture”?

Unlike Young-sam Kim’s clever attempt at political resolution by memorializing the uprising, Moo-hyun Noh, the current president, announced the plan to promote Gwangju as “the capital of culture” in December 2002 during the presidential election campaign. Since April 2003 when Noh was elected, the city of culture project was actively implemented by his administration: first there was field research for establishing Gwangju as the “city of culture” (June through August 2003), then the official briefing announcing Gwangju as “the Capital City of Culture in Asia” (CCCA) with President in attendance (November 2003), the establishment of a Committee for Planning the City of Culture (March 2004), the announcement of an open bidding for research projects for regenerating Gwangju as the CCCA (August 2004), and the official invitation of Gwangju’s citizens and artists to a policy briefing for regenerating Gwangju as the CCCA (November 2004).

Influenced by the neo-liberal perspective of the government, a series of interventionist cultural policies in Gwangju has also been stipulated in “C-Korea 2010,” a white paper published in 2005 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The white paper describes the “C-Korea 2010” vision of a so-called “creative” or cultural national economy. It specifies encouraging foreign exports of Korean music, drama, and film, promoting Korean entertainers in the Asian entertainment market, and installing international trade fairs or film and leisure-sports festivals in major cities that are designated as international cities of culture or tourism. This white paper has the ambitious goal of placing South Korea in the first-tier of the global cultural/creative industry, along with the rapid incorporation of national and local development into the global economic system. To realize the state vision of “development” through the economization of culture, the C-Korea 2010 concretely suggests ten major policy goals and, among them, the “City of Culture” Project (Chapter 7), and the “Establishing of the Asian Cultural Capital of Gwangju” (pp. 62–63) is specified as a primary goal for realizing the ten cultural policy goals at the state level.

While the regeneration of Gwangju aims at reducing the geographical isolation of Cholla province from the country’s economic growth, the reductionism of culture into industry has dominated the decision-making of the government’s cultural policy: For urban regeneration in Gwangju, the government has launched enormous state projects such as establishment of the Cultural Hall of Asia (through the
investment of $2 billion—$1 billion from national expenditure, $50 million from local expenditure, and $50 million from private capital) and of a Multi-Complex for the Culture Industry ($53 million)—all to meet the government’s goal of Gwangju serving as the cradle for the culture industry. The state-sponsored policy about the economic dimension of culture and arts has been the main driver for the renewal of Gwangju. Gwangju’s local policy makers’ activities such as hosting the international arts biennales and culture festivals and promoting the tourism have supplemented the powerful drive of the central government toward the economic growth through the culture industry. The Korean government and the local government are busily calculating the synergistic effects of these efforts, such as creating new employment and increasing market profits from the huge investment in the city of culture project. In responding to the central government’s investment plan, the local government has also suggested their own vision, the so-called “Gwangju Vision 2010.” The local government’s “Five-year Plan for the Creation of a First-Class Gwangju” corresponds exactly to the central government’s investment plan. The city government’s first goal is “to create an affluent city by attaining an average per capita income of $14,000” through the “power of culture” (Planning & Management Office of Gwangju City 2005). Stimulated by the central government’s investment, the city government has poured frenzied effort into only two goals for the city: the industrialization of culture and tourism.

In a social climate dominated by the central and local government’s mythical logic of economic development and competition through the cultural industry in the global economy, the historical memory of the 1980 uprising in Gwangju has been left completely behind or turned into the “memorial industry.” In general, during the implementation period of the cultural policy from 1993 to the present, the establishment of a cultural identity in Korea has been evaluated by the economic value of the cultural industries (see Yim 2002). In fact, the original rhetoric of “the city of culture” was unclear from the beginning, when the government applied the concept derived from European experience, seeking economic expansion and the improvement of the international profile of the city.

**The Mirage of the “City of Culture” in Gwangju**

The state-generated rhetoric aimed at persuading the people of the advantages of the “city of culture” project is part of a larger effort throughout the last decade to accelerate the economic and cultural globalization of South Korea. The rhetoric of a “New Korea” began gradually increasing under the Young-sam Kim government (1993–1997). Kim was the first president to popularize “internationalization” and “globalization” discourses. The motto of “New Korea” was directed at persuading people to voluntarily adopt “a market liberalization policy that was required by the ‘globalization’ of capital in order to become a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation
Since becoming a member country of the OECD, the Korean government has been rapidly incorporated into a worldwide intellectual property (IP) system that aims to monopolize the new immaterial resources in the new paradigm of the knowledge or creative society by affiliating with international intellectual property institutions. South Korea became a party to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) in 1995, the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works in 1996, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty in March 2004. Since 1957, when the Copyright Act was first enacted in South Korea, it had been revised eleven times before 2004—three of them since the year 2000. The trajectory of the Act’s revisions can be summarized in a phrase: “the reinforcement of intellectual property rights” (Hong 2005). The wholesale subordination of the Korean government to the international IP system coincides with a shift in policy interest from industrialization to commercialization of cultural expression.

The rapid affiliation of Korean society with cultural globalization was simultaneous with the government’s active interventionist policy to redefine the development of local cities. Historically, the initiative for “the city of culture” policy in Korea was greatly affected by “the European cities of culture” program originated by the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercuri, in 1985. The European Commission’s motto is to promote cultural “imagination, innovation, and creativity” in European cities, and it designates a new “city of culture” every year with the goal of achieving a platform for European networks of artists and institutions (Wikipedia 2005a). However, the original motive of the program has gradually withered since it was renamed the “European Capital of Culture” in 1994. Since 2004, the European capital of culture program is no longer designated on an intergovernmental basis, and member states of the EU have taken turns holding the event during the year. It is quite natural that the shift of the cultural program from the local cities to each European state would diminish the original goal of cultivating diverse and distinct values and assets of culture within each European historical city. Moreover, stimulated by the European program of the city of culture, “the American Capital of Culture” program was established in 2000, and the so-called “American Capital of Culture Organization” has selected one American city annually to serve for a period of one year. However, the program aroused criticism from some cities selected for the award such as Toronto (2002), Austin (2004), and Regina (2005), because the organization requested cities to donate some money in order to receive the “honor” of being named American Capital of Culture (Wikipedia 2005b).

Instead of learning some lessons from the difficulties of the city of culture programs in Europe and America, the Korean government launched a similar program as part of its urban regeneration policy.
Through a revision of the Act for Urban Planning in 2001, the Minister of Construction and Transportation has come to designate some cities as “model cities” and to promote them for global tourism. The “model cities” policy in Korea has been dominated by the economic logic of development, similar to the “city of culture” project. The shift of policy terminology to “the city of culture” was made around 2004 when the concrete experiment of government investment in Gwangju was launched. Garnham (2005, p. 16) describes the “reinforcement of economic language and patterns” within recent policy rhetoric in England; similarly, in Korea the shift of the term into “the city of culture” implies the increased desire of the central and local governments to make more profits from the im-/material spirit and heritage of local culture and arts: a move from marketing and promoting cities of tourism in the “model cities” to the commercialization of cultural assets and identities in the “cities of culture.” In a Korean society which has the economic desire to accomplish in a compressed time-frame the creation of a modernity resembling that of wealthier Western societies, the element of indigenous cultural identity is always viewed within a business perspective of “development” and “competition.” The city of culture program in Gwangju is seen by the government as both a major advance in the economic reductionism of culture and a political panacea permitting the mass oblivion of the memory of the 5/18 uprising.

Regenerating Gwangju as the City of the Human Rights

If someone chances on the official website of the city government, a visitor can easily see the five catch-phrases of “the 21st Century Gwangju Vision”: the city as an international hub, the high-tech information city, the city of culture and art, the ecological city, and the city of humanism and democracy. However, image of the city that defended peace, humanism, and democracy has functioned as an ancillary ornament for the top-down policy goal of urban regeneration through the economic reductionism of culture rather than as “a vehicle for local representation and empowerment” (García 2004, p. 103). The problem is that the city of culture project in Gwangju was born as a political apology for the 5/18 uprising under the current Noh government (political factor), as an initiative to overcome regional separatism and economic unevenness (social factor), and as the relocation of culture and arts as economic motors within the international market (economic factor). These top-town and business-driven policy decisions have made it impossible to inject the real voices of current Gwangju citizens into the process (the logic of exclusion) and to sustain the historical memory of the 5/18 uprising in the face of the rhetorical upsurge of cultural globalization (the logic of oblivion). In the “Symposium on the 20th Anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising,” a critical thinker like Katsiaficas (2000a; 2000b) evaluated the significance of the 1980 uprising in Gwangju as comparable to that of the Paris Commune in French history and of the battleship Potemkin in Russian history. He summarizes Gwangju’s historical significance as having three dimensions: “the capacity of self-government,” “the organic solidarity of the citizens,” and “the
international significance of the uprising.” His historical evaluation of the 1980 uprising gives us some suggestions on how democratic heritage of Gwangju should be cultivated by the government’s urban policy. The present study therefore suggests the regeneration of Gwangju as the city of art and culture for human rights and democracy.

The first and second dimensions that Katsiaficas investigated in the uprising, the historical value of “self-government” and “solidarity,” should be reflected in the current cultural policy of the central and local governments. Currently, public input from below into the huge urban project has barely existed, while most programs have been implemented by an elitist approach of policymakers who enjoy exhibiting their performances through constructing a monstrous center or theme park from top (hardware priority), rather than encouraging the spiritual values of “soft” and “immaterial” heritage through cultural participation from below (software priority). Katsiaficas’ third dimension—“the international significance of the uprising”—is the most significant answer as to what the real international value of Gwangju is and what we should renew there in a global society. Rather than sanitizing the memory of the 5/18 uprising, the city of culture project should change its trajectory into remodeling the city as an Asian hub for human rights and democracy in order to regenerate the modern heritage of the uprising. A cultural policy design such as the “city of human rights” does not greatly conflict with the economic growth principle. If the government allows the active participation of the citizens in the decision-making process of cultural projects in the city and if its current activities such as sponsoring international festivals, conferences, and art biennales are held under the more democratic basis of encouraging the real sense of historical memory, Gwangju could rebuild its image as the tourism hub of Korea. Its image as a pro-democratic city could never be maintained merely by the number of cemeteries or buildings as sites of commemoration of the military terror that was perpetrated there.
References


