

오리온 초코파이 광고에
서의 한국성과 타자성:
국민정서와 차이의 정치

**Koreanness and Other-
ness in Orion Choco Pie
Advertisements: Nation-
al Sentiments and Poli-
tics of Difference**

Olga Fedorenko

서울대학교

Seoul National University

In this paper I explore the affective economy that has mediated the experience of globalization in South Korea, through the lens of *chŏng*, a purportedly unique Korean sentiment, which, has been thematized in advertisements for Orion Choco Pie, a chocolate covered biscuit and marshmallow snack. For three decades the Orion Choco Pie ads have illustrated *chŏng*, becoming its benchmark in popular imagination. The paper analyzes how Orion Choco Pie commercials have mobilized *chŏng* for articulating Koreanness and otherness. Many scholars have pointed out the contradictions of South Korea's globalization program, the so-called *seggyehwa*, declared by President Kim Young Sam in 1995 (Park and Abelman 2009; Baca n.d.; Cho 1998; Cho 2008; Joo 2012). While dressed in the image of progressive cosmopolitanism and opposed to illiberal nationalism of the earlier

dictatorship decades, *seggyehwa* did not cancel national allegiances but reformulated them for the era of neoliberal capitalism. For their country to survive in international economic competition, South Koreans had to transform themselves into global citizens and cultivate world-class competitiveness. This paper considers the affective economy of these nationalist and cosmopolitan allegiances, through the lens of *chŏng*, which, in Orion Choco Pie commercials, has been refashioned as an agent of globalization.

This paper adopt a constructivist stance that emotive experiences are not individual psychological states but cultural and social (Ahmed 2004; Tran 2015). *Chŏng*, too, is approached as such an affective-discursive construct. *Chŏng* conveys an affection that emerges from repeated everyday interactions. Many commentators posit it as a quintessential Korean sentiment, inaccessible to non-Koreans. Cultural psychologist Choi Sang-jin (2011) explains *chŏng* first by positing a dichotomy between “us” and “others,” which implies that “you” who is a part of “us” is perceived and treated as one with one-

self, whereas “other” is regarded “like cold leftover rice.” Choi sees the “pure form” of *chŏng* as existing among family.

Incidentally, it is the 1989 Choco Pie commercial, “Teacher and Student,” through which Choi chooses to illustrate *chŏng*.¹⁾ The commercial portrayed a young female teacher finding in her drawer an apology letter and a chocopie from a boy whom she is shown scolding earlier for misbehaving. That the teacher-student dynamic is of care and affection is underscored by the lyrics of the soundtrack, a sentimental ballad, “Even if you don’t say it, I know, just by your look, I know, just by grabbing your hand, [I know] what is in your heart.” The character for *chŏng* appears at the end to reinforce the message that mutual care is what binds the teacher and her student—and that it can be easily expressed without awkward words, with a chocopie. The series included a number of other sentimental ads which similarly centered on children shyly conveying their affection. Illustrating *chŏng*, these ads draw a rather narrow circle of “us”—family and the neighborhood—versus “them,” the world outside. The viewer belongs to the outside world, yet is invited to partake in the warm sentiments through emotional identification with ordinary people in ordinary situations. Read amidst social changes, which were transforming South Korean social fabric at the time, the ads assure that the everyday affects remain the same. In that regard, it is significant that ads focus on children, who are perceived as not yet affected by modern life. The circle of “us” is expanded to national public whose members “get” the Koreanness of those experiences.

In the 1990s, Orion Choco Pie becomes a poster child of *seggyehwa*, recording impressive sales in China, Russia, and Vietnam (Yi and Tam 1997). The 1996 domestic campaign educates South Koreans on Choco Pie’s international expansion and offers an affective axis for imaging a national self in the world—a South Korean vision of globalization.

The campaign portrays Eskimo, Chinese, Russians, and Americans being affected by Choco Pie *chŏng*, however in different ways. Reflexive of the geopolitics of South Korea’s international engagement, the ads map the alterity of foreign others between, on the one hand, sentimentality, associated with *chŏng* and possibilities for identification, and, on the other hand, humor, which appears reserved for dealing with incommensurable difference. The “America” episode is similar to earlier “*Chŏng*” commercials with Korean protagonists. It focuses on a child who conveys his affection by giving a Choco Pie to an adult. However, the situa-

tion is peculiar: a Choco Pie is snuck in by a boy to his father, who, divorced from the boy's mother, gets to see his son only once a month, as the voiceover explains. Still, Americans are portrayed as warm people like Koreans themselves. Though the ad could be read as a warning against americanization and disintegration of traditional values. Sentimentality also animates the "China" episode, which portrays a general who recognizes his younger self in a boy in Tiananmen Square, breaks into a faint smile, and gives the boy a Choco Pie.

The "Russia" and "Eskimo" episodes, however, operate by contrasting Korean *chŏng* as embodied in Choco Pie and equated with warmth, to the perceived coldness of those places and people. While enjoying a Choco Pie, Russians and Eskimo eat it themselves rather than share it with others. The protagonist of the "Russia" edition is a mustached expressionless guard in the Red Square in a blizzard, yet his humanity is revealed when he pulls out a Choco Pie, takes a bite, and shows a hint of smile, while the voiceover announces, "South Korean 情 that thaws even Siberia." The "Eskimo" episode similarly asserts the power of "South Koreans' *chŏng*" to "melt permafrost." So the incommensurable others—Russians and Eskimo—are drawn into the warm circle of Choco Pie consumers, albeit their capacity for feeling *chŏng* toward others is denied.

Overall, the campaign frames Choco Pie as a *seguehwa* success story. Firmly established as a very South Korean product, because of its associations with *chŏng* and South Korean everydayness, Choco Pie nevertheless enjoys popularity outside of South Korea. This popularity is attributed not to its taste or cheap price, but to its affective component—*chŏng*, which, the viewer is told, is distinctly South Korean and so powerfully warm that it can melt Siberia and permafrost, connect one with the memories of youth, and repair divorce traumas. It is this warmth that makes non-Koreans seek Choco Pies. Its international success in other words, does not require a sacrifice of Koreanness, rather it is enabled by it.

The campaign directly asserts *chŏng* as a property of South Koreans (referring to it as *hanguginŭi chŏng*), while positing Orion Choco Pie as "our chocopie"—a national cookie. The South Korean viewer is to identify with *chŏng*, to take emotional and nationalist ownership in Choco Pie, to pride in its success—and to marvel at "foreigners" whose affective alterity is revealed through their encounter with a Choco Pie, the embodiment of Korean *chŏng*.

Orion advertising returns to the theme of national self and its others a decade and a half later, in 2011. Entitled "Pie Road," after the Silk Road, the campaign presents the Orion Choco Pie as

a “diplomat who is delivering Korean *chǒng* to the world.” As the official website explains, “This is a road for 1.94 billion people from about 60 countries, from Russia to China, Vietnam, Middle East and to the US, to meet the Republic of Korea.”²⁾ The campaign comprises three 30-second television commercials and a two-minute “adumentary.” The latter combined the three stories into a Orion Choco Pie’s biography, narrated in the first person, starting with “I was born in 1974 in the Republic of Korea.”

On the surface, the commercial portrays ordinary people sharing Choco Pie to share their affection in the tropes that are similar to those that introduced Orion Choco Pie in South Korea in 1989. The foreigners are portrayed with humanist warmth and their experience of *chǒng* is presented an expression of a universal humanity. Seemingly, the campaign includes non-Koreans in the community of “us” activated by flowing *chǒng*.

However, there are subtle differences. The South Korean viewer is to acknowledge the human affects of foreign others yet to identify with the I of the narrator, the Choco Pie. Those foreign consumers are shown living in remote, exotic places, accessing which requires braving bitter cold and treacherous cliffs. Their everyday is shown as devoid of modern technology, in a stark contrast to the everyday experienced by South Korean viewers. The poverty, however, is presented not as poverty but as their tradition and preference. Moreover, if in the original Korean ads it is children who give chocopies to adults or to each other to express their affection, in the “Pie Road” series, Choco Pie is a medium for adults to express their affection. This reversal from child to adult as a Choco Pie giver could be read as an infantilization of those adults, because, in the lens of earlier Choco Pie ads, sharing chocopies stands for child-like innocence, which adults value, but often struggle to summon amidst the alienations of modern life. These people are globalized—they are consumers of a South Korean product—yet their belonging in the globalized world is passive, reactive, and child-like—unlike Mr. Choco Pie, the plucky “diplomat,” who travels dangerous roads and navigates exotic customs.

This globalization project is not without contradictions though. Mr. Choco Pie the narrator might model an ideal Korean citizen and participant of globalization, yet his “cosmopolitan striving” (Park and Abelman 2009) has led him far from home and demanded many sacrifices, including a certain alienation from South Korea. That South Korea is not referred to as “our country” (*uri nara*), similar to how the earlier commercials called the Orion cookie “our Choco Pie” implies a distance. It is ambiguous whether for Mr.

Choco Pie “our” no longer unequivocally means South Korea and he is a South Korean cosmopolitan in the world. Or whether his cosmopolitan pursuits—his “forgetting the Republic of Korea”—have been so successful that South Korean viewers of the commercial no longer recognize him as belonging with “us” grounded in the national community. The Pie Road campaign thus expresses a tension in the competing loyalties that nationalist and cosmopolitan impulses of globalization require and hence its cultural significance.

To conclude, advertisements by one company—however long-lasting and popular they are—are a limited window on complex negotiations delineating the dynamics between selves and others emerging from globalization encounters. Nevertheless, with their ongoing elaborations on *chŏng*, a purportedly quintessential Korean sentiment which came to be defined in reference to those advertisements, Orion Choco Pie commercials are suggestive of the shifts in the affective economy that mediates nationalist and cosmopolitan commitments while connecting national self and its others in specific ways. Specifically, the ads register a shift in the affective conditions of othering: from presuming non-Koreans as aloof to *chŏng*, the uniquely Korean affect; to imagining some foreigners as susceptible to it with the mediation of the Korean cookie; to finally reformulating *chŏng* as a universally human sentiment. The otherness of the other is however preserved by foregrounding material disparities in lifestyles and linking them to local culture—and thus smuggling back in the essentializing ideas of cultural difference and national distinction. Unlike those locals stuck in their traditional ways, South Koreans, the Choco Pie ads suggest, have transformed from objects of globalization, holding on to national identity through sentiments amidst social upheaval, to its agents, bringing globalization upon others. Yet this harnessing of globalization also comes at a cost. Namely, there is a certain irony in how, in the 2011 ads, the experience of the cherished Korean sentiment has been delegated to “foreigners,” whose lives are shown as poor but saturated with *chŏng*, whereas South Koreans themselves are left to identify with an anthropomorphized cookie and its struggle to commodify Koreanness in the name of “cosmopolitan striving.”

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Baca, George. n.d. "Rituals of English Education and Myths of Globalization in South Korea: Naturalizing Economic Disparities of the 'New' Economy." Cho, Hae-Joang. 1998. "Constructing and Deconstructing 'Koreanness.'" In *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States*, edited by Dru C. Gladne, 73–91. Stanford University Press.
- Cho, Younghan. 2008. "The National Crisis and de/Reconstructing Nationalism in South Korea during the IMF Intervention." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9 (1): 82–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370701789666>.
- Choi, Sang Chin. 2011. *Han'guginŭi Simnihak* [Psychology of Koreans]. Hakjisa.
- Joo, Rachael Miyung. 2012. *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea*. Duke University Press.
- Park, So Jin, and Nancy Abelmann. 2004. "Class and Cosmopolitan Striving: Mothers' Management of English Education in South Korea." *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (4): 645–72.
- Tran, Allen L. 2015. "Rich Sentiments and the Cultural Politics of Emotion in Postreform Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam." *American Anthropologist* 117 (3): 480–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12291>.

NOTE

- 1) Choco Pie advertisements can be viewed at Orion website, http://www.chocopie.co.kr/choco/history_2_3.asp
- 2) http://www.chocopie.co.kr/choco/history_2_1.asp